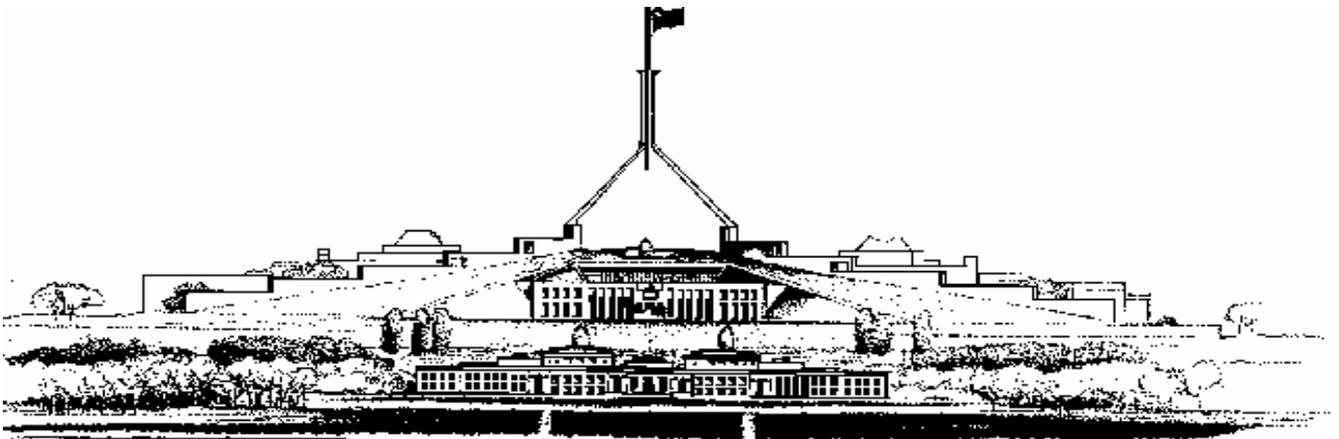




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 3, 2010

Monday, 25 October 2010

FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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SITTING DAYS—2010

Month	Date
February	2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24, 25
March	9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18
May	11, 12, 13, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31
June	1, 2, 3, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24
September	28, 29, 30
October	18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28
November	15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25

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**FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD**

Governor-General

Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Companion of the Order of Australia

House of Representatives Officeholders

Speaker—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP

Deputy Speaker—Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP

Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

Members of the Speaker's Panel—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mrs Yvette Maree D'Ath MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP, Mr John Paul Murphy MP, Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP, Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP

Leader of the House—Hon. Anthony Norman Albanese MP

Deputy Leader of the House—Hon. Stephen Francis Smith MP

Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Christopher Maurice Pyne MP

Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Party Leaders and Whips

Australian Labor Party

Leader—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Wayne Maxwell Swan MP

Chief Government Whip—Hon. Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon MP

Government Whips—Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP and Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP

Liberal Party of Australia

Leader—Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP

Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Warren George Entsch MP

Opposition Whips—Mr Patrick Damien Secker MP and Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

The Nationals

Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP

Chief Whip—Mr Mark Maclean Coulton MP

Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Abbott, Hon. Anthony John	Warringah, NSW	LP
Adams, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry	Lyons, TAS	ALP
Albanese, Hon. Anthony Norman	Grayndler, NSW	ALP
Alexander, John Gilbert	Bennelong, NSW	LP
Andrews, Hon. Kevin James	Menzies, VIC	LP
Andrews, Karen Lesley	McPherson, QLD	LP
Baldwin, Hon. Robert Charles	Paterson, NSW	LP
Bandt, Adam Paul	Melbourne, VIC	AG
Billson, Hon. Bruce Fredrick	Dunkley, VIC	LP
Bird, Sharon Leah	Cunningham, NSW	ALP
Bishop, Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen	Mackellar, NSW	LP
Bishop, Hon. Julie Isabel	Curtin, WA	LP
Bowen, Hon. Christopher Eyles	McMahon, NSW	ALP
Bradbury, Hon. David John	Lindsay, NSW	ALP
Briggs, Jamie Edward	Mayo, SA	LP
Broadbent, Russell Evan	McMillan, VIC	LP
Brodthmann, Gai Marie	Canberra, ACT	ALP
Buchholz, Scott Andrew	Wright, QLD	LP
Burke, Anna Elizabeth	Chisholm, VIC	ALP
Burke, Hon. Anthony Stephen	Watson, NSW	ALP
Butler, Hon. Mark Christopher	Port Adelaide, SA	ALP
Byrne, Hon. Anthony Michael	Holt, VIC	ALP
Champion, Nicholas David	Wakefield, SA	ALP
Cheeseman, Darren Leicester	Corangamite, VIC	ALP
Chester, Darren	Gippsland, VIC	Nats
Christensen, George Robert	Dawson, QLD	Nats
Ciobo, Steven Michele	Moncrieff, QLD	LP
Clare, Hon. Jason Dean	Blaxland, NSW	ALP
Cobb, Hon. John Kenneth	Calare, NSW	Nats
Collins, Hon. Julie Maree	Franklin, TAS	ALP
Combet, Hon. Greg Ivan, AM	Charlton, NSW	ALP
Coulton, Mark Maclean	Parkes, NSW	Nats
Crean, Hon. Simon Findlay	Hotham, VIC	ALP
Crook, Anthony John	O'Connor, WA	NWA
Danby, Michael David	Melbourne Ports, VIC	ALP
D'Ath, Yvette Maree	Petrie, QLD	ALP
Dreyfus, Hon. Mark Alfred, QC	Isaacs, VIC	ALP
Dutton, Hon. Peter Craig	Dickson, QLD	LP
Elliot, Hon. Maria Justine	Richmond, NSW	ALP
Ellis, Hon. Katherine Margaret	Adelaide, SA	ALP
Emerson, Hon. Craig Anthony	Rankin, QLD	ALP
Entsch, Warren George	Leichhardt, QLD	LP
Ferguson, Hon. Laurie Donald Thomas	Werriwa, NSW	ALP
Ferguson, Hon. Martin John, AM	Batman, VIC	ALP
Fitzgibbon, Hon. Joel Andrew	Hunter, NSW	ALP
Fletcher, Paul William	Bradfield, NSW	LP
Forrest, John Alexander	Mallee, VIC	Nats
Frydenberg, Joshua Anthony	Kooyong, VIC	LP

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Gambaro, Hon. Teresa	Brisbane, QLD	LP
Garrett, Hon. Peter Robert, AM	Kingsford Smith, NSW	ALP
Gash, Joanna	Gilmore, NSW	LP
Georganas, Steve	Hindmarsh, SA	ALP
Gibbons, Stephen William	Bendigo, VIC	ALP
Gillard, Hon. Julia Eileen	Lalor, VIC	ALP
Gray, Hon. Gary, AO	Brand, WA	ALP
Grierson, Sharon Joy	Newcastle, NSW	ALP
Griffin, Hon. Alan Peter	Bruce, VIC	ALP
Griggs, Natasha Louise	Solomon, NT	CLP
Haase, Barry Wayne	Durack, WA	LP
Hall, Jill	Shortland, NSW	ALP
Hartsuyker, Luke	Cowper, NSW	Nats
Hawke, Alexander George	Mitchell, NSW	LP
Hayes, Christopher Patrick	Fowler, NSW	ALP
Hockey, Hon. Joseph Benedict	North Sydney, NSW	LP
Hunt, Hon. Gregory Andrew	Flinders, VIC	LP
Husic, Edham Nurredin	Chifley, NSW	ALP
Irons, Stephen James	Swan, WA	LP
Jenkins, Harry Alfred	Scullin, VIC	ALP
Jensen, Dennis Geoffrey	Tangney, WA	LP
Jones, Stephen Patrick	Throsby, NSW	ALP
Jones, Ewen Thomas	Herbert, QLD	LP
Katter, Hon. Robert Carl	Kennedy, QLD	Ind
Keenan, Michael Fayat	Stirling, WA	LP
Kelly, Hon. Michael Joseph, AM	Eden-Monaro, NSW	ALP
Kelly, Craig	Hughes, NSW	LP
King, Hon. Catherine Fiona	Ballarat, VIC	ALP
Laming, Andrew Charles	Bowman, QLD	LP
Leigh, Andrew Keith	Fraser, ACT	ALP
Ley, Hon. Sussan Penelope	Farrer, NSW	LP
Livermore, Kirsten Fiona	Capricornia, QLD	ALP
Lyons, Geoffrey Raymond	Bass, TAS	ALP
McClelland, Hon. Robert Bruce	Barton, NSW	ALP
Macfarlane, Hon. Ian Elgin	Groom, QLD	LP
Macklin, Hon. Jennifer Louise	Jagajaga, VIC	ALP
Marino, Nola Bethwyn	Forrest, WA	LP
Markus, Louise Elizabeth	Macquarie, NSW	LP
Marles, Hon. Richard Donald	Corio, VIC	ALP
Matheson, Russell Glenn	Macarthur, NSW	LP
McCormack, Michael	Riverina, NSW	Nats
Melham, Daryl	Banks, NSW	ALP
Mirabella, Sophie	Indi, VIC	LP
Mitchell, Robert George	McEwen, VIC	ALP
Morrison, Scott John	Cook, NSW	LP
Moylan, Hon. Judith Eleanor	Pearce, WA	LP
Murphy, Hon. John Paul	Reid, NSW	ALP
Neumann, Shayne Kenneth	Blair, QLD	ALP
Neville, Paul Christopher	Hinkler, QLD	Nats

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Oakeshott, Robert James Murray	Lyne, NSW	Ind
O'Connor, Hon. Brendan Patrick	Gorton, VIC	ALP
O'Dowd, Kenneth Desmond	Flynn, QLD	Nats
O'Dwyer, Kelly Megan	Higgins, VIC	LP
O'Neill, Deborah Mary	Robertson, NSW	ALP
Owens, Julie Ann	Parramatta, NSW	ALP
Parke, Melissa	Fremantle, WA	ALP
Perrett, Graham Douglas	Moreton, QLD	ALP
Plibersek, Hon. Tanya Joan	Sydney, NSW	ALP
Prentice, Jane	Ryan, QLD	LP
Pyne, Hon. Christopher Maurice	Sturt, SA	LP
Ramsey, Rowan Eric	Grey, SA	LP
Randall, Don James	Canning, WA	LP
Ripoll, Bernard Fernand	Oxley, QLD	ALP
Rishworth, Amanda Louise	Kingston, SA	ALP
Robb, Hon. Andrew John, AO	Goldstein, VIC	LP
Robert, Stuart Rowland	Fadden, QLD	LP
Rowland, Michelle	Greenway, NSW	ALP
Roxon, Hon. Nicola Louise	Gellibrand, VIC	ALP
Roy, Wyatt Beau	Longman, QLD	LP
Rudd, Hon. Kevin Michael	Griffith, QLD	ALP
Ruddock, Hon. Philip Maxwell	Berowra, NSW	LP
Saffin, Janelle Anne	Page, NSW	ALP
Schultz, Albert John	Hume, NSW	LP
Scott, Hon. Bruce Craig	Maranoa, QLD	Nats
Secker, Patrick Damien	Barker, SA	LP
Shorten, Hon. William Richard	Maribyrnong, VIC	ALP
Sidebottom, Peter Sid	Braddon, TAS	ALP
Simpkins, Luke Xavier Linton	Cowan, WA	LP
Slipper, Hon. Peter Neil	Fisher, QLD	LP
Smith, Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn	Casey, VIC	LP
Smith, Hon. Stephen Francis	Perth, WA	ALP
Smyth, Laura Mary	La Trobe, VIC	ALP
Snowden, Hon. Warren Edward	Lingiari, NT	ALP
Somlyay, Hon. Alexander Michael	Fairfax, QLD	LP
Southcott, Andrew John	Boothby, SA	LP
Stone, Hon. Sharman Nancy	Murray, VIC	LP
Swan, Hon. Wayne Maxwell	Lilley, QLD	ALP
Symon, Michael Stuart	Deakin, VIC	ALP
Tehan, Daniel Thomas	Wannon, VIC	LP
Thomson, Craig Robert	Dobell, NSW	ALP
Thomson, Kelvin John	Wills, VIC	ALP
Truss, Hon. Warren Errol	Wide Bay, QLD	Nats
Tudge, Alan Edward	Aston, VIC	LP
Turnbull, Hon. Malcom Bligh	Wentworth, NSW	LP
Vamvakinou, Maria	Calwell, VIC	ALP
Van Manen, Albertus Johannes	Forde, QLD	LP
Vasta, Ross Xavier	Bonner, QLD	LP
Washer, Malcom James	Moore, WA	LP

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Wilkie, Andrew Damien	Denison, TAS	Ind
Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties	New England, NSW	Ind
Wyatt, Kenneth George	Hasluck, WA	LP
Zappia, Tony	Makin, SA	ALP

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; LNP—Liberal National Party;
CLP—Country Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals; NWA—The Nationals WA; Ind—Independent;
AG—Australian Greens

Heads of Parliamentary Departments

Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—A Thompson

GILLARD MINISTRY

Prime Minister	Hon. Julia Gillard MP
Deputy Prime Minister, Treasurer	Hon. Wayne Swan MP
Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government	Hon. Simon Crean MP
Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations and Leader of the Government in the Senate	Senator Hon. Chris Evans
Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth	Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate	Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Minister for Foreign Affairs	Hon. Kevin Rudd MP
Minister for Trade	Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP
Minister for Defence and Deputy Leader of the House	Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship	Hon. Chris Bowen MP
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Leader of the House	Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Minister for Health and Ageing	Hon. Nicola Roxon MP
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Hon. Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities	Hon. Tony Burke MP
Minister for Finance and Deregulation	Senator Hon. Penny Wong
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research	Senator Hon. Kim Carr
Attorney-General and Vice President of the Executive Council	Hon. Robert McClelland MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Manager of Government Business in the Senate	Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism	Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP
Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency	Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]

GILLARD MINISTRY—*continued*

Minister for the Arts	Hon. Simon Crean MP
Minister for Social Inclusion	Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information	Hon. Brendan O'Connor MP
Minister for Sport	Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity	Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
Assistant Minister to the Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation	Hon. Bill Shorten MP
Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare	Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development	Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Science and Personnel	Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Minister for Defence Materiel	Hon. Jason Clare MP
Minister for Indigenous Health	Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Minister for Mental Health and Ageing	Hon. Mark Butler MP
Minister for the Status of Women	Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness	Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Special Minister of State	Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
Minister for Small Business	Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Justice	Hon. Brendan O'Connor MP
Minister for Human Services	Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Cabinet Secretary	Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister	Senator Hon. Kate Lundy
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer	Hon. David Bradbury MP
Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations	Senator Hon. Jacinta Collins
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity	Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Parliamentary Secretary for Trade	Hon. Justine Elliot MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs	Hon. Richard Marles MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence	Senator Hon. David Feeney
Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship	Senator Hon. Kate Lundy
Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing	Hon. Catherine King MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers	Senator Hon. Jan McLucas
Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services	Hon. Julie Collins MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water	Senator Hon. Don Farrell
Minister Assisting on Deregulation	Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP
Minister Assisting the Minister for Tourism	Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency	Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP

SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition	Hon. Tony Abbott MP
Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Shadow Minister for Trade	Hon. Julie Bishop MP
Leader of the Nationals and Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport	Hon. Warren Truss MP
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations	Senator Hon. Eric Abetz
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for the Arts	Senator Hon. George Brandis SC
Shadow Treasurer	Hon. Joe Hockey MP
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and Manager of Opposition Business in the House	Hon. Christopher Pyne MP
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Deputy Leader of the Nationals	Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion
Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Water and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate	Senator Barnaby Joyce
Shadow Minister for Finance, Deregulation and Debt Reduction and Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee	Hon. Andrew Robb AO, MP
Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources	Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP
Shadow Minister for Defence	Senator Hon. David Johnston
Shadow Minister for Communications and Broadband	Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP
Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing	Hon. Peter Dutton MP
Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services	Hon. Kevin Andrews MP
Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage	Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Shadow Minister for Productivity and Population and Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship	Mr Scott Morrison MP
Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry and Science	Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP
Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food Security	Hon. John Cobb MP
Shadow Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs	Hon. Bruce Billson MP

[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]

SHADOW MINISTRY—*continued*

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation	Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Justice, Customs and Border Protection	Mr Michael Keenan MP
Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation	Senator Mathias Cormann
Shadow Minister for Childcare and Early Childhood Learning	Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Universities and Research	Senator Hon. Brett Mason
Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House	Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Development and Employment	Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Minister for Regional Development	Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Special Minister of State	Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for COAG	Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Minister for Tourism	Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Technology and Personnel	Mr Stuart Robert MP
Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs	Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson
Shadow Minister for Regional Communications	Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Ageing and Shadow Minister for Mental Health	Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
Shadow Minister for Seniors	Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate	Senator Mitch Fifield
Shadow Minister for Housing	Senator Marise Payne
Chairman, Scrutiny of Government Waste Committee	Mr Jamie Briggs MP
Shadow Cabinet Secretary	Hon. Philip Ruddock MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition	Senator Cory Bernardi
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance	Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport	Mr Darren Chester MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney-General	Senator Gary Humphries
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tax Reform and Deputy Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee	Hon. Tony Smith MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education	Senator Fiona Nash
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia	Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government	Mr Don Randall MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray-Darling Basin	Senator Simon Birmingham
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Materiel	Senator Gary Humphries
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Defence Force and Defence Support	Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare	Dr Andrew Southcott MP

SHADOW MINISTRY—*continued*

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services and Indigenous Health	Mr Andrew Laming MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Supporting Families	Senator Cory Bernardi
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women	Senator Michaelia Cash
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment	Senator Simon Birmingham
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship and Settlement	Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration	Senator Michaelia Cash
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation, Industry, and Science	Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Forestry	Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Fair Competition	Senator Scott Ryan

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Monday, 25 October 2010

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 10 am, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

MAIN COMMITTEE

Private Members' Motions

The SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 41(g) and the determinations of the Selection Committee I present copies of the terms of motions for which notice has been given by the members for Lyons, Wentworth, Bass, Parramatta, Dickson and Petrie. These matters will be considered in the Main Committee later today.

DELEGATION REPORTS

Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Ireland and Italy

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (10.01 am)—Mr Speaker, I present the report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Ireland and Italy from June to July 2010. Between 26 June and 10 July 2010 I was fortunate to be a member of a parliamentary delegation led by the President of the Senate, Senator John Hogg, to Ireland, Italy and the Holy See. The aims of the delegation included renewing and strengthening relationships with the parliaments of Ireland and Italy and providing opportunities for parliamentarians to compare approaches to public policy issues of mutual interest and concern.

At the outset I acknowledge my fellow delegates and the contributions they made. In addition to Senator Hogg, the delegation included deputy delegation leader, the former member for McPherson, Mrs Margaret May; Senator Steve Fielding, Senator for Victoria; and former member for Fowler, Mrs Julia Irwin. The delegation was also accompanied by Ms Julia Clifford, adviser to the President of the Senate, and Dr Shona Batge, the delegation secretary, from the Department of the

Senate. I acknowledge the support and service of both those personnel but particularly acknowledge the expertise of Dr Batge in preparation of the final report and her knowledge of the countries we visited.

Our two-week program took us to Dublin, Galway, Rome, Vatican City and Palermo for a comprehensive array of meetings designed to help the delegation meet its predetermined aims and objectives. The topics of our meetings were wide ranging and included the following. Delegates met with presiding officers of each parliament we visited and were able to discuss practical matters pertaining to the operation of parliamentary business and buildings. In Rome this included an opportunity to view major artworks displayed in the parliamentary buildings and discuss the conservation challenge. Delegates also met with a number of parliamentary committees from the Irish parliament and from the Italian parliament, providing an opportunity to discuss the operation of the committee systems as well as particular policy areas of interest. Because I have a particular interest in the potential to build a light rail public transport system in my own electorate in Newcastle, I made the most of opportunities to seek briefings on and examine the operation of the Luas light rail system in Dublin.

The impacts of the global financial crisis were of course being felt strongly in both Ireland and Italy. We watch with great interest, obviously, the discontent and difficulties that are being experienced. Unemployment levels continue to rise there, and the availability of credit has decreased. Many of the parliamentarians and others with whom we met were very interested in discussing Australia's successful implementation of economic stimulus measures in the face of the crisis.

The subject of illegal immigration, including policies on detention and processing of

claims for asylum, was also discussed in both Ireland and Italy, and of course we see the movement of people all around the world. In Italy we visited a centre in Trapani that houses asylum seekers, where we observed a language class, met with a young family and were able to speak to the individual detainees there.

I express sincere thanks to the Irish parliament and to the Italian parliament for hosting our visits. The hospitality that was extended to the delegation and the effort put into arranging and facilitating programs of work for us ensured that our visits were fruitful and enjoyable. I also thank all those who generously made themselves available to meet with the delegation and assist us in fulfilling the aims of our visit. We engaged in many frank and informative dialogues—as only parliamentarians, generally, can do! The amount of sharing that does take place is always amazing. We were able to gather much useful information.

I also thank the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, particularly their staff in Canberra, Dublin and Rome, for their high level of assistance. They provided both advance briefing material and on-the-ground support while we were travelling. We were also well served by the staff of the Parliamentary Relations Office and the Parliamentary Library.

I make special mention of the Ambassador to the Holy See, Mr Tim Fischer, who is well known here. It was a delight to enjoy his company and his enthusiasm for the challenge of organising events during Mary MacKillop's canonisation. I am very pleased, having met Sister Maria Casey there, that everything went so well for them in Rome. I also thank Tim Fischer for his enthusiasm for rail and for his discussions with me about the rail solutions needed in this country, including in my electorate.

Senator Hogg has issued personal invitations to the presiding officers of both the Irish and the Italian parliaments to undertake reciprocal visits to the Australian parliament in the near future. We look forward to welcoming delegations from these countries in due course.

**NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK
FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY
BILL 2010**

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Mr Turnbull**.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (10.07 am)—The purpose of the National Broadband Network Financial Transparency Bill 2010 is to require the publication of a 10-year business case for the NBN and, equally importantly, to refer the NBN project to the Productivity Commission for a thorough cost-benefit analysis. Let me stress at the outset that this is not intended to delay or hold back the NBN's rollout of test sites. Indeed, the passage of this bill would have no impact on that timing. It is simply an attempt to establish the facts to provide parliament with an appropriate level of financial understanding of this, the largest expenditure of taxpayers' funds on an infrastructure asset in our nation's history and to separately permit the Productivity Commission, an independent and expert source of advice on economic and regulatory issues, to make an assessment of this investment.

This bill should be seen as complementary to a separate motion that I intend to move which would create a joint select committee drawn from both houses to oversee the rollout of the NBN. The proposed committee would include four government, four opposition and two crossbench members and senators.

The first part of the bill requires NBN Co., the government owned company that is roll-

ing out the broadband network, to produce and publish a detailed 10-year business plan, including key financial and operational indicators. In addition to the normal financial information that one would expect to find in a business plan, it also requires the NBN Co. to make explicit its assumptions about how many premises it will pass each year, how many households and businesses it anticipates will purchase communication services carried over its networks and what average retail and wholesale prices it anticipates that they will pay. All of this is critical information for the parliament to understand given our role as custodians of taxpayers' money.

That such a massive project, without precedent in either this country or abroad, has been allowed to commence without parliament being provided with this sort of financial data is quite extraordinary. I remind honourable members that in the United States the federal government is spending \$7 billion to support broadband rollout in that country. This project, the NBN, involves federal government money in Australia 100 times more per capita than is being spent in the United States. This is a truly unprecedented expenditure anywhere in the world, as well as in our history.

I note that the bill seeks the publication of both forecasts and projections for the NBN Co. This wording recognises that there will necessarily be less certainty in the various financial and operational metrics sought where they are offered for periods further into the future. Nevertheless, this is a vast project that the government has stated will continue to be constructed for most of this decade. So it is entirely reasonable for the parliament to be provided with a 10-year business case rather than a business case over any shorter period.

I note that the government has stated that it intends to release much of the financial

information discussed in this bill in the near future. I welcome that. Nevertheless, I believe that it will give parliament much greater comfort if that transparency is a statutory requirement rather than simply a promise from the executive.

The second part of the bill requires the Productivity Commission to conduct a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of the NBN and report back to parliament by 31 May 2011. The Productivity Commission inquiry will include but not be limited to an analysis of the current availability of broadband across Australia, including the identification of suburbs and regions where services are of a lower standard or higher price than in the capital cities; consideration of the most cost-effective and speedy options by which fast broadband services can be made available to all Australians, particularly those in regional and remote areas and underserved areas in the cities, such as black spots where legacy network design choices or exchange capacity constraints mean that ADSL2 is not available to some households; consideration of the economic, productivity and social benefits likely to flow from enhanced broadband around Australia and the applications likely to be used over such networks; and a full and transparent economic and financial assessment of the proposed NBN by the commission.

It is difficult to think of an organisation better than the Productivity Commission to look at the NBN and these issues and to thoroughly examine both its direct and indirect implications for Australia's economy, economic productivity and society. The commission's chairman, Gary Banks, is a distinguished public servant who has been at the Productivity Commission and its predecessor, the Industry Commission, for the past 20 years. He has carved out its role as a source of rigorous and fearless advice on microeconomic issues. He has presided over

several important inquiries into our national competition laws. The deputy chair, Mike Woods, presided over Productivity Commission inquiries into the market for international telecommunications services in 1999 and into the regulation of competition in telecommunications in 2001. A third commissioner, Patricia Scott, was secretary of the department of communications from 2007 to August 2009, serving both coalition and Labor governments.

The commissioners are supported by a first-rate staff of economists with extensive experience in assessing not only the financial costs and benefits of policies and regulations but also their broader economic and social implications. We are not talking about an organisation that is new to this industry or these issues. The Productivity Commission's recent work in areas such as gambling and the provision of assistance to people with disabilities is evidence of its ability to look carefully at not just the dollars and cents but also the socioeconomic implications of various policy options.

The breadth of the terms of reference that I have proposed should satisfy those who, with some legitimacy, point out that the economic costs and benefits of the NBN will extend beyond the revenues, expenses and rate of return for the NBN Co. So, for example, the Productivity Commission will be able to explore the positive externalities such as productivity gains from faster broadband and negative externalities such as the economic losses and vastly diminished competitive environment in fixed line telecommunications that will result if the government is successful in preventing Telstra and Optus, for example, from offering broadband over their HFC pay television cables in the future. But it is also important for us to understand the core financial viability of the NBN Co., given that the government has grounded its support for this project in the claim that

while it will not generate a commercial return it will nonetheless produce a return in excess of the bond rate for taxpayers.

It is important to reflect on that for a moment. When the NBN Co was announced by the former Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, he said that it would be a thoroughly commercial project, that the private sector would invest up to half of the total amount—in other words, there would be shareholders in it—and that mums and dads would be wise to invest. Indeed, he had urged them to do so. The government has retreated from that position since then and is now saying it will produce a return slightly better than the Commonwealth's cost to funds. That is not an acceptable commercial return and it is not an acceptable basis for governments to be engaged in business ventures. But it is the basis upon which the government has made its claim that, because the expenditure in the construction of the NBN is being matched by an asset that is being created of equal value, it should not be included in the budget's expenditures and therefore add to the government's already very substantial deficit.

Seeking a cost-benefit analysis is simply holding the government to account. It is holding the government to account to its own standards. This is a government that established Infrastructure Australia for the express purpose of identifying, prioritising and analysing through a rigorous cost-benefit analysis major infrastructure projects of national importance. Yet the government has refused to allow Infrastructure Australia to look at this project. This is a government whose leading economic adviser, Dr Ken Henry, said:

Any major infrastructure project must be subject to a rigorous cost benefit analysis and if it does not pass a rigorous cost benefit analysis then it necessarily detracts from Australia's wellbeing.

So, in seeking that the government refer this matter to the Productivity Commission, there is no delay to the construction of the test sites for the NBN and there is no frustration of any policy objective of providing broadband across Australia. But there is certainty that we will get the very best financial and economic advice, and the social and economic cost benefits from the most expert body available to advise this parliament and the people of Australia whose taxes are about to be deployed in building this massive piece of infrastructure.

Bill read a first time.

The SPEAKER—Order! In accordance with standing order 41(d), the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

**EVIDENCE AMENDMENT
(JOURNALISTS' PRIVILEGE)
BILL 2010**

Debate resumed from 18 October.

Second Reading

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (10.17 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Whistleblowers have an important role to play. Obviously, they reveal misconduct and often they do that from privileged positions behind closed doors from where there is next to no hope that the normal processes of government and administration will spot and report on that misconduct. In other words, whistleblowers are an essential safeguard of the public interest, which needs to be recognised as such. Whistleblowers often act openly—for example Toni Hoffman, the Queensland nurse, who bravely lifted the lid on Dr Patel's deadly transgressions at Bundaberg Base Hospital. Dr Patel was the chief of surgery at Bundaberg Base Hospital, between 2003 and 2005 and was found guilty of the manslaughter of three patients and of

grievous bodily harm of a fourth patient. But, despite the seriousness of Toni Hoffman's allegations, and the fact that she was ultimately vindicated, Toni Hoffman was ridiculed and eventually forced to go outside the Queensland health system and raise her concerns with her local member of parliament, Mr Rob Messenger. Messenger, also facing ridicule over the matter, eventually had to rely on the *Courier Mail* newspaper to get the Queensland government to intervene in the Bundaberg Hospital tragedy.

Many of the costs of whistleblowing are illustrated by the Toni Hoffman case. Certainly, many whistleblowers lose their job, lose a profession and lose their family and many of their friends. Sometimes they find themselves subject to legal proceedings and, in Australia, under the Crimes Act a current and former federal public servant can be jailed for up to two years for revealing any information he or she finds in the course of his or her employment. And, unsurprisingly, the rate of suicide among whistleblowers is above the national average. So there is clearly a need for legislation to protect whistleblowers, and I applaud the Prime Minister for her commitment to progress such legislation in the term of this parliament.

Very importantly, not every witness to official misconduct is able or willing to speak publicly, as was Toni Hoffman. Sometimes whistleblowers choose to break ranks anonymously, which is unsurprising considering the punishment meted out publicly to those whistleblowers who do opt to out themselves. An extraordinary example is former Customs Officer Allan Kessing, who, in 2007, was convicted of leaking a secret report into security flaws at Sydney airport. The publication of the report forced the Howard government to spend \$200 million remedying the flaws. Despite that, Mr Kessing was convicted, under Section 70 of the Crimes Act, of making an unauthorised

disclosure of government information to *The Australian* newspaper. This episode has left Mr Kessing a broken and broke man. I would hope that this or future governments find it in themselves to revisit his case one day. After all, he was just trying to do the right thing.

An equally remarkable case occurred in 2004, when two senior political reporters for Melbourne's *Herald Sun* newspaper, Michael Harvey and Gerard McManus, wrote stories which exposed a decision by the Howard government to reject a \$500 million increase in war veterans' entitlements. During legal proceedings against the alleged source of the story the journalists refused to identify their source, thus putting them in contempt of the court and facing possible imprisonment. That was an extraordinary situation, not least because the actions of Harvey and McManus were entirely consistent with the Australian Journalists Association Code of Ethics, which provides that journalists should:

Aim to attribute information to its source. Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source's motives and any alternative attributable source. Where confidences are accepted, respect them in all circumstances.

As it turned out Harvey and McManus were convicted of contempt of court and fined \$7,000 each for refusing to reveal their source behind the stories they wrote, even though this was a clear example of when journalists would not have otherwise been able to report on the actions of the government without their source, who, had he or she been revealed, almost certainly would have suffered harm. I would add that these convictions are set to stay with these two men for life, a not insignificant burden for anyone, let alone for journalists who might seek to travel internationally as part of their work. The Harvey and McManus case, perhaps more than any other, highlights the need

for legislation to protect journalists who publicise information from anonymous sources. In other words there is a pressing need for the so-called 'shield law' outlined in Evidence Amendment (Journalists' Privilege) Bill 2010.

The Evidence Amendment (Journalists' Privilege) Bill 2010 amends the Evidence Act 1995 by strengthening the protection provided to journalists and their sources. It is intended to foster freedom of the press and better access to information for the Australian public. The bill provides that if a journalist has promised an informant not to disclose his or her identity, then neither the journalist nor his or her employer is compelled to answer any question, or produce any document, that would disclose the identity of the informant or enable their identity to be ascertained. The bill is based on the premise that every member of the community has the fundamental right to free speech, and that sometimes the exercise of that right needs to be undertaken anonymously, especially when it comes to people speaking out about official misconduct, as whistleblowers do.

Of course, safeguards are essential with legislation like this. Sometimes so-called whistleblowers are in fact disgruntled employees making vexatious claims. Sometimes a disclosure is arguably reckless or dangerous, as some people would regard the latest Wikileaks revelations about the Iraq war. So this bill does recognise that there may be circumstances where the public interest in the disclosure of the identity of the source is so strong that it should be provided to the court. In such cases it will be up to those parties who want to force a journalist to reveal their source to prove that the public interest is best served in disclosing the source, and that the public interest benefit of a disclosure genuinely outweighs the likely harm to the source. The legislation would only

apply to people for whom journalism is their main occupation. Occasional commentators, for example recreational bloggers, would not be covered.

This bill will replace the existing provisions in Division 1A of the Evidence Act. It will include a new provision that provides clear authority for a presumption that a journalist is not required to give evidence about the identity of the source of their information. This presumption can be rebutted in circumstances where the public interest outweighs any likely adverse effect for the person who provided the information to the journalist, as well as the public interest in communication of information to the public by the media. These amendments are based on similar provisions in the New Zealand Evidence Act 2006.

Central to Australia's democracy is freedom of both speech and the press. I believe that this bill goes some way, an important way, to protecting both. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Attorney-General for the government's commitment to this bill. I would also like to acknowledge the opposition's longstanding commitment to so-called 'shield' laws, as well as the significant public response to this bill in particular. I hope that this bill will be an early display of bilateral cooperation in this place. It would certainly be in the public interest for that to be the case. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Mr McClelland—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (10.26 am)—I am very pleased to speak in support of the Evidence Amendment (Journalists' Privilege) Bill 2010, brought into this place by the member for Denison. As members may know, there is a very similar bill in the Senate, which was introduced on behalf of the

coalition on 29 September. As has just been acknowledged by the member for Denison it is a testament to the coalition's commitment to open and accountable government and it delivers on our election commitment to press forward this important reform. I am happy to see that we are in close accord with the member for Denison in this respect.

This bill amends the Evidence Act 1995 to extend genuine protection to confidential communications between journalists and their sources. This bill has its immediate genesis in the Liberal members of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee in relation to government's flawed 2009 bill. That bill, disappointingly, made only piecemeal and incremental changes to the existing regime. The act currently provides that the court has discretion to direct that evidence that would disclose a confidential communication made to a journalist, or the identity of the source, may be excluded. Such a direction must be made if the court is satisfied that the source might be harmed if the evidence is adduced and that harm outweighs the benefit of the evidence being given.

The government's bill sought to extend the privilege by including possible harm to the journalist's interests, in addition to those of the source, as a basis of a claim and by making the illegality of the disclosure a factor relevant to the exercise of the discretion rather than an exclusionary factor. The existing privilege can therefore be described as a guided judicial discretion. Any claim to privilege is a matter to be determined by a judge by the weighing of the listed discretionary factors. This has been criticised as providing very little certainty as to whether a disclosure is protected, when it is most needed—that is, in advance.

The position in New Zealand and the United Kingdom presumes that the communication between journalist and source is not

subject to disclosure unless the party seeking disclosure can establish that that disclosure is necessary. For example, section 68 of the Evidence Act 2006 in New Zealand provides that the court may not order disclosure unless the party seeking disclosure can establish the disclosure is necessary. For example, section 68 of the Evidence Act 2006 in New Zealand provides that the court may not order disclosure unless it is satisfied that the public interest in the disclosure outweighs any adverse effect on the source, or any other person, and the public interest in communication of facts and opinion to the public by news media.

From a legal point of view there is much to recommend a position that offers a high degree of certainty in advance. This point was made to the Senate committee by the former Solicitor-General, Mr David Bennett QC. This is the position that this bill, and the coalition's bill, adopts.

There is, however, one important difference between this bill and the coalition's bill. The Commonwealth and New South Wales evidence acts have departed from uniformity in their treatment of professional confidential relationships. The Commonwealth act confines the definition of a 'protected confidence' to a communication made in confidence to a journalist. The New South Wales act defines the same term as arising in the course of a relationship in which the confidant was acting in a professional capacity under an obligation not to disclose the confidence.

The continued restriction of privilege claims is anomalous. The coalition's bill therefore adopts the formula in the New South Wales act. Not only would it restore uniformity but it would avoid arbitrarily confining the circumstances in which claims for privilege may be justifiably asserted. As well, it brings this area of the law more

closely into uniformity with equity courts' protection of confidential relationships. Accordingly, I foreshadow that the coalition will move amendments to this effect when the bill comes before the Senate.

Finally, the bill extends the application of these new privileges to all proceedings in any Australian court for any Commonwealth offences. Because the Commonwealth does not have a dedicated court of criminal jurisdiction, in nearly all cases the relevant proceedings are brought in state or territory courts.

I would again like to commend the work of the Liberal members on the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, and recognise the priority that the member for Denison has given this important issue. The coalition is proud to take a stand in defence of freedom of speech and the protection of communications made in confidence. I therefore commend this bill to the House.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (10.31 am)—The bill before the House today demonstrates the government's willingness to work constructively with other members of this parliament and reach agreement on significant issues. The Evidence Amendment (Journalists' Privilege) Bill 2010 is such an important bill and the protections it provides reflect the wishes of all sides of politics. The government is committed to open and accountable government. As part of this commitment the government has long supported the implementation of appropriate protections for journalists and their sources.

In the last term amendments were proposed to enhance existing provisions in the Commonwealth Evidence Act 1995 introduced by former Attorney-General Mr Ruddock. These reforms were recognised as improving the current protections in a manner that was largely consistent with the spirit of

the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General's decision, and that is a significant point because the drive for consistency of evidence law across Australia is an important consideration, as acknowledged by the previous speaker. However, those amendments were not passed before the parliament was prorogued. During the 2010 election campaign I indicated that the government would consider revisiting the issue of journalists' shield laws and I am pleased to report that in revisiting the issue the Gillard government has worked constructively with Mr Wilkie and also Senator Xenophon to address these concerns. I commend both of them on their work. As a result the government has given its support for this bill, which we believe appropriately balances the needs of all parties.

There is no doubt that journalists play an important role in our society by providing the community with access to information that is in the public interest and the press must be given freedom to perform that role effectively. That freedom may be undermined where journalists are not confident that they can protect the identity of their sources without being held in contempt of court. Accordingly, sufficient protection must be in place to ensure that journalists can maintain the confidentiality of their sources, thereby encouraging the full disclosure of information that is within the public interest. The protections in this bill we believe are not dissimilar to those that were introduced by the government last year. However, in supporting the bill the government has listened to stakeholders, who indicated that those protections could be improved by including a presumption in favour of confidentiality and that has been included in the bill proposed by the member for Denison. In particular I would like to acknowledge the contributions from journalist Chris Merritt and also Mr

John Hartigan and the Right to Know campaign.

The key element of this bill is the introduction of a rebuttable presumption in favour of journalists' privilege. Essentially the framework, as has been noted, is based on that which operates in New Zealand. This means that where a journalist has promised to keep the source confidential they will be entitled to refuse to answer questions or produce documents that would disclose the identity of the source or enable that identity to be discovered. However, as has been noted, the protection is not absolute, nor should it be. There will be circumstances where a court considers the public interest in disclosure is such that the information should be disclosed. But this bill does so in a way that guides the court's task on this important subject in exercising its discretion. The presumption will only be rebutted where a court is satisfied that the public interest in disclosure outweighs any likely adverse effect on the informant or any other person, the public interest in the communication of facts and opinion to the public by the press and finally the ability of the press to access sources of fact. Such circumstances could arise, for example, in relation to matters that pose a risk to Australia's foreign relations or law enforcement operations or where lives may be endangered. As the New Zealand High Court has stated, any case in this area will involve such a contest between, as they say, two important aspects of the public interest. The first is the public interest in the investigation and prosecution of crime and the second is the public interest in the free flow of information and the protection of journalists' sources.

The case law from the United Kingdom and New Zealand, where the laws are not dissimilar, highlights that there can be a range of factors that the courts will take into account to determine if the presumption

should remain. This includes other measures by which the evidence can be obtained, the seriousness of charges involved or harm caused if the source is not disclosed. As the authorities indicate on their facts, these are matters which will necessarily vary from case to case—for instance, the presumption may not be found to apply where the journalist or his or her source was clearly acting from a position of malice and nondisclosure would prevent a potentially defamed citizen from seeking appropriate redress.

In this context, as noted in the explanatory memorandum to the bill, it is important to note that this protection operates alongside the Australian Journalists Association code of ethics. Journalists are expected to let their sources know they are a journalist. As has been noted by the member for Denison, they are expected to:

Use fair, responsible and honest means to obtain material. Identify yourself and your employer before obtaining any interview for publication or broadcast. Never exploit a person's vulnerability ...

The code also makes it clear that journalists should not lightly depart from the principle of attribution and that, when anonymity is sought by the informant, a journalist should not agree without examining the person's motives. In that context, the code states that journalists should:

Aim to attribute information to its source—that is the starting point, but—

Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source's motives and any alternative attributable source.

This is a significant power that journalists have. An article in a newspaper can be as adverse to a person's reputation as any finding in a court of law, but of course a person suffering that adverse comment is not afforded the same procedural fairness that they would have in a court of law. So this is a

very significant privilege that journalists will obtain. When any significant privilege is given there is an equal responsibility to exercise that privilege in a responsible way, as the journalists code of ethics implores professional journalists to do.

The government is committed to the promotion of uniform evidence laws across Australia. I note the previous speaker also commented on this matter. The bill paves the way for the states and territories to introduce journalist shield laws based on the rebuttable presumption in favour of journalists' privilege. Victoria has indicated its intention to move similar amendments. I will be working with my state and territory counterparts to progress such a harmonised approach.

In conclusion, this bill will give journalists and their sources greater confidence and facilitate the responsible reporting of information to the public. I again commend the member for Denison. The bill will contribute to transparency and accountability in government and, in turn and in its own way, add something to the vibrancy of Australia's democracy.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (10.40 am)—The Australian Greens believe that a strong and independent press is an essential safeguard for a democratic society. Legislation that facilitates better access to information for the Australian public through the media should be commended, which is why I support the Evidence Amendment (Journalists' Privilege) Bill 2010.

At this point in time, Australia stands alone among democratic nations in not providing shield laws. The United Kingdom, New Zealand and even the United States have as their starting point the protection of the confidentiality of journalists' sources. The Senate inquiry report into the government's lapsed Evidence Amendment (Journalists' Privilege) Bill 2009 acknowledged

that most submissions favoured a rebuttable presumption of journalists' privilege, such as exists in other similar democratic countries. All of the media organisations who made submissions or gave evidence supported many of the amendments in that bill, but clearly stated that the bill had not fulfilled the government's stated intentions in the crucial matter of protection of confidentiality. We have an opportunity now to ensure that those original stated intentions are fulfilled.

As I listened to the various speakers today, it struck me that this bill is a good example of how all parties can collaborate on a worthwhile initiative in a way that would not have happened without the currently composed parliament. To facilitate its passage, the Greens will support the bill in its current form in the House, but I indicate now that we will seek minor amendments to it in the Senate. In particular, we believe that it should be made explicit that the bill covers bloggers, citizen journalists and documentary filmmakers, and that the privileges provided by the bill cover anyone engaged in the process of journalism, no matter who they are or in what medium they publish. I thank the member for Denison for introducing this important bill and, subject to our intention to seek some amendments, indicate the Greens' support.

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Minister for Mental Health and Ageing) (10.42 am)—It is with pleasure, and a little bit of surprise, that I rise to reiterate the government's support for the Evidence Amendment (Journalists' Privilege) Bill 2010. We welcome the additional comments made by the Greens member for Melbourne and commend the bill to the House.

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (10.44 am)—by leave—Without seeking to close the debate, I would add some further comments on this bill. I want to say that I think we have a tre-

mendous situation here in that the members of the government, the opposition and the crossbenches are all working cooperatively to progress a bill which is genuinely in the public interest. It signals what can be achieved in this place when legislation in the public interest comes in here. I would hope that this signals further cooperation in the future and I look forward to the Senate progressing this bill fairly soon with little in the way of amendment.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (10.45 am)—I rise to speak in support of the Evidence Amendment (Journalists' Privilege) Bill 2010. I commend the member for Denison for bringing this bill into the chamber. I thank him particularly for demonstrating the courage to tackle an issue that has for too long rested in the political too-hard basket. And I acknowledge that he has received support from both sides of the chamber for this bill which provides greater protection for journalists and their sources.

Journalists have long lived with the tension of balancing ideals of a free press and the public interest while upholding their professional code of ethics by protecting their sources that provide information on a confidential basis. In other professions, the boundaries of privacy and discretion are clear cut. In this House, we know that what we say—the arguments we put forward—are privileged. What I say in my other house, where I do not have quite so many rights, is also protected—by marital privilege. A patient knows their health records are confidential between them and their doctor. A client knows that what they share with their lawyer is protected. In fact, legal professional privilege is almost one of the cornerstones on which our justice system was built. Nonetheless, the law remains hazy around a journalist's right to protect the identity of a confidential source.

In this House we often encounter journalists. In my six years in politics I have met many journalists and I could even say that two of them are my friends—although I will not name them to protect myself and them. I also have many solid acquaintances who are journalists. A number of journalists have caused me some concern, but overall I respect their profession. A healthy democracy relies on the ability of journalists to hold a government and its institutions to account and sometimes, whilst it is painful for politicians particularly, this can only be done with the help of sources who, for whatever reason, choose to remain anonymous. If sources cannot speak to journalists with a confidence that their identity will be protected then whistleblowers will be significantly less likely to expose wrongdoing.

There are many examples we could look at throughout history. I would particularly mention the courageous Toni Hoffman, who acted in concert with the *Courier-Mail* journalist Hedley Thomas to expose some of the work done by Dr Jayant Patel. Their work paved the way for major health reform in Queensland. There have been other examples also. In Australia, journalists hold firmly to their code of ethics. The third clause in the Media Alliance Code of Ethics states that journalists should:

Aim to attribute information to its source. Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source's motives and any alternative attributable source. Where confidences are accepted, respect them in all circumstances.

I am sure there are many copies of that code of ethics in the media gallery upstairs.

During the last parliament, the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee had a close look at this issue. In their submission to that inquiry, Australia's Right to Know—a coalition of major Australian news organisations, including News Ltd, Fairfax,

ABC, AAP, Sky News and the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance—said:

Keeping a source confidential is fundamental to the ability of journalists to maintain trust with their sources and to encourage other sources to trust journalists and bring forward information of public concern.

Therefore, it is in the public interest for journalists to maintain a circle of trust and to ensure that sources who seek anonymity can be confident that they are protected.

During the last 20 years nine Australian journalists, in six separate cases, have been convicted or jailed for not revealing sources: Tony Barrass, from the *Sunday Times* in Perth, was imprisoned for ten days and fined \$10,000 in 1989 for refusing to disclose a confidential source; Gerard Budd, from the *Courier-Mail*, was imprisoned for 14 days; Deborah Cornwall, from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was given a suspended jail sentence; Chris Nicholls, from the ABC, received a prison sentence for his story relating to a conflict of interest of a South Australian government minister; and Belinda Tasker, Anne Lampe and Kate Askey from AAP and the *Sydney Morning Herald* refused to reveal their sources but avoided jail after the NRMA board dropped the case. Most recently, *Herald Sun* journalists Michael Harvey and Gerard McManus were convicted of contempt of court and fined \$7,000 each for refusing to reveal the source of a story.

Australia has fallen behind most western democracies on this issue. Journalists in New Zealand and the UK, for example, are protected by law from revealing their sources in almost all circumstances, the exception being cases of national security—and I know that the member for Denison has looked at the New Zealand legislation for a guide.

The bill before the House amends the Evidence Act 1995 to ensure privilege for journalists who receive information confi-

dentially in almost all circumstances. Significantly, it will require the court to give a presumption in favour of journalistic privilege. For the first time, journalists will be able to refuse to answer or produce evidence that would reveal the identity of a confidential source—a similar protection enjoyed by lawyers. However, there are safeguards in place by way of a public interest test. A journalist's protection will be waived where the court considers the public interest in disclosure outweighs any likely adverse effect on the informant, the public interest in the communication of facts and opinion to the public by the press, and the ability of the press to access sources of fact.

I do support this bill and I support shield laws which provide a presumption in favour of journalists privilege. However, I believe that this bill could be improved by providing an expanded definition for 'journalist' or 'reporter'. I will not be moving an amendment here but, as I have indicated to the member for Denison, I would hope that this amendment could be taken up with the Senate to improve the legislation. As an additional safeguard, this definition enshrined in legislation would ensure that rogues—who do not uphold the journalists' code of ethics—are not able to hide their shonky reporting behind shield laws. In terms of the modern day, it is easy to see people like Laurie Oakes and the others who sit up in the journalists gallery as journalists, but there is then quite a continuum down to the perhaps aggrieved blogger who puts out something every week. So I hope that the Senate will be able to amend this piece of legislation.

While this bill offers greater protection to journalists, the primary purpose of this legislation is to ensure greater accountability and transparency of government and public organisations. Consequently, I would suggest to the Senate that the definition of journalist include some additional words. If we go to

the 126G definition where journalist is defined, I would suggest that it also include 'a person who ascribes to the journalist code of ethics as published and codified by the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance'. This would be a narrower definition that would still cover the intent of the member for Denison's legislation.

There are very high expectations that journalists will report the news in the public interest—not the interests of the shareholders of the company or the media owners—and that they will do so honestly and ethically. However, we must ensure the courts do not have the power to bully journalists into disclosing confidential sources.

Finally, I hope this bill will pave the way for similar legislation across all states and territories to ensure that there is greater uniformity and certainty for journalist shield laws throughout Australia. I welcome the member for Denison's and the Attorney-General's commitment to work to that end. I commend the bill to the House.

The SPEAKER—No other member having risen to speak in the debate, the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Pink Ribbon Day

Ms HALL (Shortland) (10.54 am)—I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) Pink Ribbon day is 25 October;
 - (b) breast cancer is the most common cancer in Australian women, accounting for 28 per cent of cancer diagnoses in 2006;
 - (c) this year alone, 12,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, which is expected to increase by 22 per cent by 2015;
 - (d) one in nine women will be diagnosed with breast cancer by age 85;

- (e) breast cancer is the most common cancer in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women;
 - (f) the risk of developing breast cancer increases with age, with the average age of diagnosis recorded as 60 in 2006;
 - (g) mammograms are vital to early detection, with 75 per cent of deaths occurring in women who have never been screened; and
 - (h) there has been a 27 per cent decrease in mortality rates due to breast cancer since 1994; and
- (2) acknowledges the:
- (a) work of the National Breast Cancer Foundation;
 - (b) effectiveness of Pink Ribbon Day in raising awareness;
 - (c) work of the Jane McGrath Foundation;
 - (d) contribution of volunteers, staff and researchers; and
 - (e) importance of early detection.

Today is breast cancer awareness day or Pink Ribbon Day, and it is important that all Australian women are aware of the implications of this disease, the facts and figures surrounding it, diagnosis, prevention and the latest treatments available to women.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in Australian women, accounting for 28 per cent of cancers diagnosed in 2006. This year alone, 12,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, which is expected to increase by 22 per cent by 2015. One in nine women will be diagnosed with breast cancer by the age of 85. The risk of developing breast cancer increases with age, with the average age of diagnosis recorded as 60 in 2006. Mammograms are vital to early detection, with 75 per cent of deaths occurring in women who have never been screened. There has been a 27 per cent decrease in mortality rates due to breast cancer since 1994.

Breast cancer affects many people's lives. Every person knows someone who has been diagnosed with breast cancer. In fact, there are members of this parliament, past and present, who have been treated for breast cancer. The effects of breast cancer are not limited to the person diagnosed with the disease; it affects their social life, their working life and their family life. It places a financial and emotional strain on the person and their family.

What is breast cancer? Breast cancer is: one or more lumps or a thickening of your breast; nipple alterations, and that can be in shape, redness, crusting, ulcers, sores or an inversion; discharge from the nipple; skin puckering, dimpling, unusual redness or colour change; a change in the size of your breast; or unusual pain that does not go away. These are some but not all of the symptoms of breast cancer.

There are risk factors associated with it. Some people have greater risk factors than others. Some risk factors are: if you have a strong family history of breast cancer or ovarian cancer—and there is a link between the two cancers; if you have had a breast biopsy or a benign tumour diagnosed; breast tissue may be dense or fatty; if you use hormone replacement therapy; if you consume excessive amounts of alcohol; if you are overweight and physically inactive; or if you belong to a high-risk ethnic group. But these are not the only factors.

There are a number of things that women can do to prevent breast cancer. The most important of these is to have a mammogram every two years. Women between the age of 40 and 69 receive reminders to attend for a mammogram, whilst women 70 years and over do not. This does not mean that when a woman reaches the age of 70 she will not get breast cancer. It is equally important for these women to have regular mammograms.

So, if you are over 70, put it in your diary or note it on your calendar but ensure you continue to have breast screenings.

The facts I mentioned earlier show that the risk factors associated with breast cancer increase as you age. Fifty years ago, a woman diagnosed with breast cancer had little chance of survival. Since then, treatment and detection has improved. Originally the only treatment was a radical mastectomy. Whilst this treatment is still an option, many women need only a lumpectomy. The removal of the cancer is usually followed by chemotherapy, radiotherapy or, in some cases, both treatments. Recently, clinicians have started treating patients with chemotherapy prior to the removal of the cancer. This treatment enables the surgeon to determine the chemotherapy drug that will react with that particular cancer. If the cancer shrinks then that indicates that that is the appropriate drug. Drugs such as Herceptin and Tamoxifen are also used in the treatment of breast cancer.

It is research that is delivering these new treatments. At a breast cancer morning tea I hosted last Friday, Professor John Forbes, a world-renowned oncologist who received an award from the Clinical Oncological Society for his outstanding contribution to cancer care in the Australian New Zealand Breast Cancer Trials Group research—he is at a conference in New York today—stated that it could be possible to eliminate breast cancer by 2039.

Today the National Breast Cancer Foundation launched a new website, Register4, where volunteers can register for research. The address of the website is www.register4.org.au. Register4 is Australia's first online community for volunteer breast cancer research participants. By joining the register volunteers will help researchers find better treatments and a cure

for breast cancer. By volunteering as a research participant there are many different ways you will help the Register4 breast cancer research community. It is not about raising money; it is about you participating in research. Breast cancer is still the most common cancer affecting Australian women and its incidence is rising. Every person who joins the register takes research one step closer to finding a cure for breast cancer and fulfilling Professor Forbes's prediction for 2039. People over the age of 18 years age from all walks of life are encouraged to join the register.

Prior to coming in here to make this speech I signed up with Register4, and I encourage all members of this House to do the same. Research is about finding a cure and preventing breast cancer, and that is why it is important for Australians, particularly women, to sign up to Register4. There have been a number of prevention trials. Prevention trials test new approaches such as medicines and vitamins, minerals or other supplements. Prevention trials look at lifestyle changes that may lower the risk factors for getting cancer and look for the best way to prevent cancer in people who have never had it or to prevent second, new cancers in people cured of their first cancer.

Screening trials test the best way to find cancer, especially in its earliest stages. Examples include mammograms. Clinical trials are important. They are the best way to improve the treatment and care of people who have cancer. Clinical trials give us essential information about the effects of different treatments. They are how we discover if new treatments are more effective or have fewer side effects.

The results of clinical trials today will improve treatment for people who develop cancer in the future. A new treatment can only become standard treatment if it is proven to

be safe and effective in clinical trials. Many of the most effective treatments used today are the result of clinical trials done in the past 30 years. Clinical trials identify risks and side effects, which must be weighed up against the possible benefits of the new treatment.

Today is a very important day because it does raise awareness of breast cancer, its treatments and the ways in which we can work to prevent it. I would like to encourage members of this House and those people listening to the debate today to hold their own morning tea within their local community to raise awareness of breast cancer amongst people they associate with. As I mentioned, Professor Forbes was the keynote speaker at the morning tea that I held last Friday. Also in attendance was nurse counsellor Jenny Beldham, from the Hunter breast-screening unit, and Sharon Ferris, a breast cancer survivor. I have known Sharon for a long time. She underwent treatment earlier this year. Sharon is extremely fit and active, which shows that no matter what lifestyle you lead you can develop breast cancer. Breast cancer is a disease that we can work to prevent in our community, and there are some very important treatments available.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Is the motion seconded?

Ms LEY (Farrer) (11.04 am)—I second the motion. I am delighted to support this motion from the member for Shortland and I thank her most sincerely for bringing it before the House. It is the case that breast cancer is the most common cancer in Australian women, accounting for 28 per cent of cancer diagnoses in 2006. Pink Ribbon Day is today, 25 October, and this year alone, 12,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, and that figure is expected to increase by 22 per cent by 2015. So one in nine women will be diagnosed with breast cancer by the age

of 85. Breast cancer is the most common cancer in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The risk of developing breast cancer increases with age, with the average age of diagnosis recorded as 60 in 2006.

As we know, mammograms are vital to early detection, with 75 per cent of deaths occurring in women who have never been screened. Screening is absolutely vital. We have all seen the breast cancer vans which do mammograms travelling around our local area and we all know how much easier it is today to have access to this important diagnostic treatment.

There has been a 27 per cent decrease in mortality rates due to breast cancer since 1994. Today I join with the government and Independent members in acknowledging the work of the National Breast Cancer Foundation. Pink Ribbon Day has been very effective in raising awareness. I think the pink ribbon that I am wearing today is one of the most recognised lapel badges in Australia today. We also acknowledge the work of the McGrath Foundation and, most importantly, the contribution of the volunteers, staff and researchers—the dedicated medical and nursing community—as well as volunteers and breast cancer survivors who do so much to form that net of support and offer strength to women who have been diagnosed in what is a very frightening period of their life.

Early detection is of course the most important thing. My concern as a rural and regional member is always about how cancer and other serious diseases should be picked up, recognised and treated in rural and regional Australia in the same manner that they would be in our capital cities. Unfortunately that is not the case, with the death rates from cancer being much higher in rural areas. The only thing that that can really be attributed to is the fact that the diagnoses are not happen-

ing in a timely manner, and that is a real worry.

As the previous member said, breast cancer is not something that you are alerted to; it is often only picked up by a mammogram or a breast examination, and women should all have those carried out, whatever their age. I can still remember meeting a young woman at Conargo in the west of my electorate, who was what you would describe as a fitness freak. She ate well, exercised well and had a happy, balanced life and, out of the blue, was diagnosed with quite advanced breast cancer. So it can strike anywhere, anytime.

I want to pay tribute today to the support networks that exist in my home town of Albury and, of course, the town across the river and recognise the work of the support groups in our area. There are three groups in particular that I want to recognise. Brave Hearts Australia is part of Dragons Abreast Australia, which is a national organisation comprising breast cancer survivors and some of their very special supporters of various ages. They come from a great variety of backgrounds and have varying athletic abilities and interests. It is founded on the principles of participation and inclusiveness. Competitive outcome is secondary but, having said that, I note that our local chapter of Brave Hearts and Dragons Abreast Australia won gold and silver medals in Bendigo on the weekend in, I think, their third regatta in three years. Those girls are pretty competitive, but they are winners because they are there and they are able to paddle. Because of that, some members have achieved amazing things.

Dragons Abreast members provide a face to the breast cancer statistics, which are all too high, but they also spread the message of breast cancer awareness through participation in the wonderful and very strenuous sport of dragon boat racing. High on the list of priorities is having fun, trying new things,

meeting interesting people and being involved in a challenging physical activity while promoting breast cancer awareness. Our local support group meet once a month and there is also a meeting later in the evening for the younger members who are working during the day and cannot get to daytime meetings. They also have a group called Mayflies, which looks after women who have received that very difficult second diagnosis following a primary breast cancer diagnosis. We have a breast care nurse provided by the Jane McGrath Foundation. I talked to Jenny Black, who looked after our network. She has retired now and is living in New Zealand, but she is always ready to promote and advocate for better breast cancer services in our region. Jenny tells me that we do need at least another half a position for a breast care nurse. The work that those women do is absolutely fantastic. The fear and anxiety that one feels after a diagnosis, if you are a family member of someone with breast cancer as I have, really need to be addressed early on.

My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer a couple of years ago. She had a mastectomy and has recovered very well. I mention my mother because she is a little bit alternative and her view was that chemotherapy, radiotherapy and a lifetime of drugs probably was not for her. She was going to take an alternative path. My mother, Angela Braybrooks, has always been a keen follower, as I have said, of alternative therapies. She followed the Gawler Approach. I met Ian Gawler a couple of weeks ago and I was truly impressed by his view of how we can approach a diagnosis such as cancer in our lives. It would be very easy for me, as someone who has not been diagnosed with this disease, to say, 'Well, if you are diagnosed, this is what you should do,' but when my mother was diagnosed with cancer I had firsthand knowledge of someone taking that

approach. She decided that diet and meditation was the key, and that is the work of the Gawler Foundation. Ian Gawler, as members of the House will know, was diagnosed with almost inoperable secondary cancers some 30 years ago. He has lived a long and happy life since then. Doctors had completely given up on him and he took matters into his own hands and struggled through an awful period when he worked out that the way to go was through diet and meditation. He travelled overseas, he looked into the spiritual side of life and his experiences are recorded in his book *The Dragon's Blessing*, which I recommend. In fact, when friends of mine are diagnosed with cancer, as happens all too often, I give them a copy of the book.

My mother implemented the Gawler Approach. It is about organic food, it is about plant based food and it is a vegetarian diet, but the most important thing is the meditation. When I met Ian Gawler in Melbourne a couple of weeks—it was not planned; it was a social event—I asked him particularly about the meditation. I said, ‘We all have such busy lives; how difficult is it?’ He said that it was really difficult. He meets people all the time who say they can manage the diet part, because they just have to work it out and stick to it, but the meditation part is a lot more difficult. His advice was: ‘Practise it, try it, and even if you can only do it for 10 minutes at a time it will come to you. You will learn to do it. You will be so much better for it.’ He said to me, ‘Of course you should start early; you should not wait till you get diagnosed with a serious illness.’ The alternative approaches that do not rely on medication sit side by side with traditional Western medicine. That, I think, is the key thing that Ian Gawler says. Do not throw away Western medicine—it has an extremely valuable place—but look also at what you can do to support yourself in other ways.

It is important that the House recognise breast cancer for the serious disease that it is, but we should also take pride in our oncologists, breast care nurses, support workers and community members and all that they do every day. The reduction in deaths, to the extent that it is happening, is largely a result of their very important work. To meet these people is truly inspiring. So today, 25 October, I urge everybody to buy a badge, wear a badge and do what they can to support more research into breast cancer.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (11.14 am)—I commend the member for Shortland for her motion and I am very happy to speak in support of the motion and to be one of many people trying to help raise awareness about this terribly damaging disease on Pink Ribbon Day and World Breast Cancer Day.

In Australia, breast cancer afflicts tens of thousands of women and also a smaller number of men every year. It is the leading cause of cancer deaths for women and one in nine women will be diagnosed with breast cancer before age 85. It is a cancer that can occur spontaneously, but some people are genetically predisposed to this form of cancer. We know that for women and men with certain mutations to the human genes known as BRCA1 and BRCA2 the chance of suffering from breast cancer is much higher. These particular genes, present in all people, actually function to provide some kind of protection against cancer, but unfortunately there are inheritable genetic mutations that for some reason spoil that function. In people whose natural genetic safety mechanism has this flaw the susceptibility to breast cancer can run as high as 80 per cent.

Family history of breast cancer has always been recognised as a strong indicator of susceptibility to the disease, but for a long time medical science could not say exactly why. That all changed in 1990 when, after 16

years of dedicated publicly funded research and the goodwill of hundreds of women who provided DNA samples, a team headed by Professor Mary-Claire King at the University of California in San Francisco made the breakthrough discovery that linked hereditary breast cancer to the human gene BRCA1. It was found to be on human chromosome 17q.

Each of us carries a genome in every cell in our bodies, a complex code that makes us who and what we are. The genome contains 46 chromosomes, and the chromosomes in turn are the repository of some 25,000 protein-coding genes. It is these genes that constitute the blueprint of our inherited genetic information. At the beginning of the 21st century, in a time that is likely to be regarded as an era of great progress in our understanding and use of genetic information, those 46 chromosomes and the 25,000 protein-coding genes they contain are humanity's most precious common wealth. Our collective ownership of the genetic material we all share is surely one of the indisputable limits to the extent of what can be privately owned. I believe the vast majority of people would certainly think so.

In 1993, only three years after Professor King's discovery that human chromosome 17q was the location of the BRCA gene and that the gene was linked to hereditary breast cancer, scientists at Myriad Genetics made a further discovery. This US company, formed jointly by Dr Mark Skolnick, a research scientist at the University of Utah, and Mr Peter Meldrum, a venture capitalist, took Professor King's work a bit further and identified some of the genetic mutations that predisposed people to breast cancer. It is not hard to see how Myriad's discovery, however valuable, was really only the tip of Professor King's research iceberg. Myriad was formed in 1991 for the specific purpose of patenting the genetic mutations it hoped to identify as being

linked to breast cancer. Dr Skolnick was one of the many US genetic researchers who had become half-scientist and half-entrepreneur. These people were part of a new breed of gene hunters hoping to become rich by first discovering and then owning the genes they identified. This is where the patent system comes in. In Dr Skolnick's own words, the patent monopoly was 'the real fruit' in his company's research effort, because only with a patent could Myriad control both the information coded within the relevant gene and any medical technique or treatment extrapolated from that information. Myriad realised that the best way to maximise profits for its investors was to prevent any other company or organisation from providing BRCA gene testing in the United States, Europe, Australia, and elsewhere. Today, in the US, the cost of Myriad's BRCA test is US\$4,000. The problem is this: Myriad's scientific team did not invent the BRCA gene mutations which make people susceptible to breast cancer. They merely discovered them. And they were only able to do so within three years of their research program because of Professor King's 16 years of work, the results of which she disclosed to the world without any conditions or encumbrances.

That, however, is only part of the story because at the same time, in the UK, another research group was also working towards identifying the BRCA mutations. As so often happens in the course of human endeavour, Professor King's breakthrough—her eureka moment—had opened up a new branch of competitive scientific research. Unfortunately, from the time that Myriad achieved its patent over the BRCA gene, that research stopped dead. It is a great shame that Dr Skolnick and Myriad were not prepared to be as generous with their incremental insight into our genetic code as Professor King had been with her much more fundamental discovery, because today thousands of women

with a predisposition to breast cancer are denied cheaper and potentially better treatment as a result of the private ownership by Myriad of these women's own genetic information. That might sound like the plot of an evil science fiction film, but it is true.

The greatest cost and the greatest shame is not the price of Myriad's monopoly over the BRCA diagnostic test, although US\$4,000 is a very high price. The real cost is in the obstruction that the patent has represented in terms of further advances in medical science to identify and prevent breast cancer. We know that in Australia research scientists at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre had their work into breast cancer delayed by two years and their costs ballooned 300 per cent because of Myriad's Australia-held patents on the BRCA genes. Former Australian diplomat and expert on international intellectual property development Anna George has written that 'patents on human gene sequences that are awarded by IP Australia can at any time be traded as commodities on the global stock exchanges and the stock package can include rights to the samples of DNA harvested from Australian citizens'.

When one considers the affront to common sense that gene patents represent—and, what is more, the affront to the basic legal concept of what is patentable—it is, unfortunately, a poor reflection on our current system of regulating intellectual property in Australia. Both public health and the public purse demand that we reconsider the patent system in Australia and the role of the regulator, IP Australia. And it is for these reasons that I have spoken a number of times in this place recently about the moral and public health policy imperative of amending the Patents Act to make sure that genetic information cannot be monopolised for private gain. If our scientists are to be in a position to deliver the new and wonderful medicines, tests, treatments and cures which we know

are possible, then we need to give them free and uninhibited access to the human genome and other biological materials that exist or are derived from nature. If inventions are to be encouraged and technological innovation stimulated by the patent system, then it is essential that the distinction between invention and discovery be properly applied. Granting patents over discoveries of what exists in nature will only leave us in the genetic dark-age because it will inevitably thwart and hinder the progress of medical science and therefore the struggle to win the battle against diseases like breast cancer.

According to Anna George:

The patent bureaucracy and the patent industry, particularly the patent lawyers through a series of legally untested bureaucratic decisions managed to extrapolate from patent decisions made over 30 years ago (which allowed patenting of chemical substances) and to use this rationale to justify awarding patents on human gene sequences. It could be described as incremental 'patent creep'. A better description might be regulatory capture based on arguments similar to the 'too big to fail' arguments used by other industries who demand that governments provide unquestioning support for their operations ... This is about awarding monopoly power over the basic scientific tools for health research, it is about the costs of health services paid by the Australian public and it is about the efficiency and the ethical underpinnings of the Australian patent system and who it is supposed to serve.

This Labor government has shown its resolve to advance the fight against breast cancer. The 2009 budget committed a record \$2 billion to create a world-class cancer care system, and this included \$120 million to upgrade BreastScreen Australia services nationally with digital mammography technology and \$168 million to fund the Herceptin program for the treatment of metastatic or advanced breast cancer. The government's initiatives include support for the training of specialist breast care nurses, better services

for women with breast cancer in rural communities and the reimbursement of costs associated with breast prostheses. As part of that effort, it is important that we enable scientific and medical researchers in Australia to forge new and better tests and treatments for breast cancer and other diseases. This will require amending the legislative and regulatory framework that currently allows private companies to own and control, by patent, genetic information which should be incapable of private ownership. Such reform is strongly supported by the National Breast Cancer Foundation and the Cancer Council of Australia, among others. In the words of Ms Heather Drum from the Breast Cancer Network Australia, in her evidence to the Senate committee inquiry into gene patents last year:

If you discover a cure or a treatment, patent it but not the gene. Surely if the genes are available to everyone to research, they can all come up with some sort of treatment. The competition will still be there. Women are still being diagnosed with breast cancer every day. So let us have the competition about the research on how to find a cure then patent the cure.

... ..

Patent the cure, not the gene.

Dr STONE (Murray) (11.24 am)—Today, 25 October, is Pink Ribbon Day. It is recognition of breast cancer as one of the most common forms of cancer to affect women, although a very small number of men can also have this disease. It is a disease which takes the lives of women in their prime, who are young mothers, but on average the age of diagnosis is at 60. The risk of developing breast cancer does increase with age, and one in nine women will be diagnosed with breast cancer by the time they are 85. Great advances have been made in diagnosis and treatments and breast cancer is no longer inevitably a death sentence for women, as it once was. However, this year over 12,000

women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, and this is expected to increase by 22 per cent by 2015.

Much of the funding for the research that now leads to early diagnosis and better treatments has been raised by voluntary groups in the Australian community and internationally, but trusts like the Jane McGrath Foundation just cannot be overlooked as some of the most significant new entrants in the area of trying to increase consciousness of younger women needing breast screening. We acknowledge in particular the Jane McGrath Foundation for the support it gives to women with cancer in my part of northern Victoria, the electorate of Murray. I want to focus on my Goulburn Valley community in the seat of Murray, which has done more than its fair share of the heavy lifting in raising money for cancer research over the last nine years. That is in particular as a result of the annual Relay for Life. Of course, that relay was held just two weekends ago. I have been the patron of the Relay for Life in the Goulburn Valley over the period of its work—some nine years—and I have to say that despite the worst drought on record this embattled community has raised more than \$2 million for cancer research. We are, in our part of the world, unfortunately particularly prone to certain sorts of cancer.

I want to say, though, that this morning over 700 women attended a breakfast at the Goulburn Valley Hotel. This is the fourth year the event has been held, and it was the brainchild of the *Shepparton News* Classified Manager, Tracey Bell. She came up with the idea four years ago and it has gone from strength to strength. The breakfast is hoping to raise over \$30,000 this year. Just as the Relay for Life taps into the community, raising funds from local organisations, families and sporting clubs, the breakfast this morning had sponsors including the SN Weekly, Blizzards Fine Jewellers, Telstra Stores

Shepparton, Showcase Jewellers and Pandora, the Peter and Maria Copulos Foundation, GV Imaging Group, GV Hotel, Shepparton Private Hospital, Bunnings Warehouse and Solar City Office Equipment. This is a great community get-together to try and deal with cancer, because we are particularly affected in our part of the world, being rural and regional. It is harder for women, first of all, to have early diagnosis and then they often have to travel away from home for their treatments.

This morning was a particular tribute to Tracey Jackson, just 37, with a daughter, Rhiana, aged nine, and her husband, Scott. Tracey lost her battle with breast cancer just a few weeks ago. She came to my office back when she was first diagnosed in 2006. Her case was not and is not unusual, unfortunately, for rural women. She had noticed lumps in her breast 2½ years before. She had been to her doctor, who had told her not to worry—they were simply blocked milk ducts. And 2½ years later she was finally diagnosed by another doctor as having, tragically, third stage breast cancer. She was given the all clear for a while, but then it was found that the cancer had gone right through her body and finally into her brain. It is a tragic story of missed diagnosis, of an opportunity for a long life lost.

There has been a lot of research into the realities of an early diagnosis of breast cancer for many rural and regional women. There has been recent research published which followed on from reviews of a huge sample of women in South Australia and New South Wales. What it found was that the women typically had to be away from home for six or seven weeks at a time for their treatments. For a lot of them, that put enormous strain on their young families or their caring partners. Many of them had great financial distress and worries in relation to that time away from home. Very few could access

financial support, even when they were eligible, because of the difficulties, the criteria and the red tape involved. I think that is something that this government should look very seriously at. It is a great shame if there is a substantial difference, too, in early detection of something like breast cancer for women in rural and regional areas when there are such things as mobile breast screening clinics. I have to commend BreastScreen Australia, who have been doing a fantastic job.

I also commend the McGrath Foundation. They have made it possible for three breast care nurses to be funded in the Goulburn Valley. One of the problems for our women who are diagnosed with breast cancer is that they live on remote farms and it is difficult for them to get the right postoperative or posttreatment support. I will not forget being in the small town of Stanhope, when a woman came with her supporter, a dear friend, to the community centre so distressed that she had been diagnosed with breast cancer. She had received some treatment, but because she was literally a few kilometres over the border—in the Loddon Mallee health region—she was not eligible to get support from the breast care nurses who would have been available if she had been a few kilometres further east in the Hume region. There she was, in great need and great distress, needing a breast care nurse's support, but because of a few kilometres on a map she was unable to access that support. We were able to deal with that issue, but it is typical of the sorts of problems rural women often encounter when they are trying to access services that metropolitan populations often simply take for granted.

I also draw attention to the member for Pearce, who is beside me in the chamber today—the Hon. Judi Moylan. In 1994 she brought to the House a recommendation for a 'Beat breast cancer lobby for life' effort to

raise money and draw attention of the then Keating Labor government to the great needs of women with breast cancer. She was able to bring forward 100,000 signatures on a petition that did finally make a difference. The Keating government acknowledged, finally, the problem. At the time, the Minister for Human Services and Health was Carmen Lawrence. So some government funding was committed to this very serious problem. I commend that very early work of the member for Pearce and say that it has been a long haul for a lot of women in Australia to have this disease recognised as significant and to have access to the diagnostic services that are so important for early detection.

I also commend those younger women in Australia who have had the misfortune of a misdiagnosis—people like Tracey Jackson, who has lost her life. Before she died, she became an advocate for making sure people have early screening. She has left a young daughter, who is just nine years old, and a grieving husband. The loss of her life cannot be in vain if a lot of younger women around her no longer take their age as a reason for not seeking early detection. If there is the slightest indication, the slightest lump or the slightest change, that should give them some suspicion that they need to have something checked.

It is important to look at the difference in the survival rates and early detection rates of rural and regional versus metropolitan women. It should not be the case either that Indigenous women—particularly Torres Strait Islanders and Australian Aboriginal women—have a higher rate of incidence of breast cancer. We have to make sure that the differences that bring about those higher rates are better understood and that those women have better treatment and earlier diagnosis.

I commend the member who has brought forward this motion today, which is Pink Ribbon Day. Let us hope that the 12,000 women who will be diagnosed with breast cancer today do not have a death sentence but rather will be able to enjoy the treatments that have been discovered and the fundraising that has meant that more of that research is on the table. It has been a magnificent effort, often from communities that have had very little to spare over their years of drought and distress. There has often been a community response to this disease, and I certainly commend this motion to the House.

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (11.33 am)—I too begin by applauding the member for Shortland for this very, very important motion on breast cancer and join with the previous speakers in supporting such a wonderful initiative today, Pink Ribbon Day. You would probably be aware that I have spoken on breast cancer many, many times in this House over the years. Today is special. Pink Ribbon Day is an initiative which was founded by the National Breast Cancer Foundation to help raise funds for research into the prevention and cure of breast cancer. Today, thousands of Australians will host or take part in Pink Ribbon Day events, including some that have already taken place at breakfast time this morning as well as dinners and cocktail parties—and the list goes on. Although it is a fun way to raise money, it also raises very important awareness of such a very serious health issue.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in Australian women and, although uncommon, men can be diagnosed with breast cancer too, and we should not forget that. It is frightening to think that about 12,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year in Australia and that an estimated 3,000 women will die from breast cancer in a single year. These women are our mothers, our aunts, our daughters and our sisters, and I

know that many of us have been touched by the devastating reality of breast cancer in the loss of someone close to us.

Since the establishment of the National Breast Cancer Foundation, over \$67 million has been awarded to Australian based researchers for the benefit of those affected by breast cancer. Research programs funded by the NBCF have included work in genetics and in improving treatments and enhancing ways to support women and their families. In my electorate of Reid we are very fortunate to host one of the best breast cancer centres in the world, and I have spoken about this on a number of occasions. Under the leadership of Professor David Gillett, the Strathfield Breast Centre is a private centre that provides a multidisciplinary, integrated service to assess and manage patients with breast diseases. I have had the pleasure of knowing Professor Gillett and many of his staff and colleagues since my election as a federal member in 1998 and I have come to appreciate the amazing research and treatment of patients with breast cancer that has been undertaken by the Strathfield Breast Centre under the leadership of Professor Gillett.

One of the strongest messages from both the Strathfield Breast Clinic and other breast cancer research is that early prognosis dramatically increases the statistical probability of patient survival, especially for women. The time that it takes to have the examination is surely worth the peace of mind or, in the worst case scenario, early detection.

Breast cancer is an issue that I am very familiar with. For many years in opposition I remember campaigning vigorously with the help of my community to have the breast cancer treatment drug Herceptin listed under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. I well remember the then health minister, the Hon. Tony Abbott, receiving multiple questions on notice from me demanding to know why the

government would not approve the treatment under the PBS. I made many speeches in parliament raising the need to publicly fund the drug Herceptin. At the time, treatment was costing women approximately \$60,000 per year, which was clearly beyond the reach of most people. And despite record budget surpluses at the time, the life-saving drug was not made accessible or affordable for many women suffering breast cancer.

After a very strong and lengthy community campaign, which I was part of, with thousands of people signing the petitions that I initiated and the constant stream of questions to the minister that I referred to earlier, the coalition government finally supported the listing of Herceptin on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in October 2006. I am very pleased that our community campaign was successful for the thousands of women affected. I know how much that that was appreciated. I hope that we never again take so long to provide affordable and accessible treatments for the benefit of cancer sufferers. Herceptin is a wonderful drug for a particular type of breast cancer.

On a positive note, the National Breast Cancer Foundation report that survival prospects for breast cancer patients are better than ever, with over 96 per cent of women surviving at least one year after diagnosis and 88 per cent of women surviving five years or more. This represents a 15 per cent increase since the 1980s. This is wonderful news. Moreover, since 1994, deaths from breast cancer have decreased by something in the order of 27 per cent. These are very heartening figures and I am sure that the very good work that is being undertaken by researchers and surgeons like Professor David Gillett are greatly contributing to these improved results.

I want to briefly share some stories from the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

These stories tell quite a lot about the seriousness of this disease. I will start with Amanda's story. Amanda was diagnosed with invasive breast cancer in 2002 at age 44. Her mother and aunt also had breast cancer. She had four operations in six months, including a mastectomy of the right breast and removal of ovaries, causing instant menopause, in 2003. Amanda has had a close association with the National Breast Cancer Foundation, firstly on the volunteer committee for the 'Global Illumination: turning Australian icons pink' and raising funds for breast cancer research and then in the corporate area, expanding the employee giving program and in a corporate relations role. She worked on the Mt Franklin campaign launch of 'Think positive, drink positive' in 2008 and 2007, and was the face of Mt Franklin's full page print advertisement titled 'Lessons learnt from breast cancer', which ran in national major women's magazines. Amanda has shared her story as an NBCF Speakers Bureau ambassador since 2004, and now facilitates training workshops for new ambassadors before they embark on their public-speaking activities.

Then there is Margaret's story. Margaret was born in 1929. She is over 80 years of age. She said:

My mother died when I was fourteen, leaving a huge hole in my life. I attended Fort Street Girls' High where I became a prefect. I worked in a Macquarie Street Pathology Laboratory while studying at night to qualify as a medical technologist. This is where I met my husband, David. We had four children.

The common belief then was if you breast fed your babies for 9 months, you would never get breast cancer—how wrong they were! I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1998 at age 69. Then followed a mastectomy, another big emotional experience. Happily I have had no recurrence of cancer.

This experience has made me even more appreciative of my family whose love and support

helped me through the challenges that life sent me.

I will recount one final one, Gretel's story:

My name's Gretel. I'm 18 years old and am currently taking a gap year after graduating from school last year. I've deferred my degree of Communications in Journalism and International Studies at UTS to work half the year then travel to Europe. I'm passionate about drama, music and travel. I also love hanging out with my friends whether it be over a glass of wine or swimming around at the beach. I'm supporting the National Breast Cancer Foundation, because as a daughter and grand daughter of breast cancer survivors, I believe that investing money into quality research and educating young women about the illness is crucial, when so many families are affected by it.

I could not agree more. I stand proudly here today on Pink Ribbon Day with my pink ribbon supporting this very worthy motion. I commend the member who initiated it and all the speakers who contributed to the debate.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (11.43 am)—I appreciate the member for Shortland bringing this motion on breast cancer before the House on this occasion, Pink Ribbon Day. A year after I was elected to parliament, in 1993, I had the opportunity to speak to a motion on breast cancer brought to this House by the then member for Cowan, Richard Evans. In preparing to speak to that motion and in researching, I was truly shocked to see how little attention had been paid to breast cancer research and how little funding it attracted compared to other areas of research. Following that speech, I had such an overwhelming reaction from the public, when women, husbands and fathers phoned to say, 'We agree that there should be more funding for research and better support for women who are diagnosed with breast cancer.' They wanted to help and asked what they could do. It got me thinking about how we could progress this matter. I went back to my office and designed the 'Beat Breast Cancer: Lobby for Life!' kit. It included facts about breast

cancer—some of those facts we have already heard today—a letter from the then Leader of the Opposition, John Hewson; contact details of every member of parliament, state and federal; and a copy of the petition form. Many members and senators held signing sessions in their local shopping centres.

I want to acknowledge the great support in those days of many in this House and in the Senate—those who assisted to refine the kits and help get them out into the community. I particularly acknowledge then Senator Kay Patterson and then Senator Jocelyn Newman. I also acknowledge Mrs Gina Rinehart, who generously contributed to fighting breast cancer and supported the cost of getting those kits out into the community. Carolyn Hewson, then wife of John Hewson, travelled with John to many parts of the country to launch the kits and give them a much higher profile than they might otherwise have had. The action resulted in a petition, with 100,000 signatures, being delivered on the steps of Parliament House to then Prime Minister Paul Keating and then Minister for Human Services and Health, Carmen Lawrence. For me as a new chum it was a great lesson in the power of people and in how public engagement in an issue can mobilise governments. It also attracted criticism. Nevertheless, for the women who were diagnosed, it was wonderful to know that more would be done to support research and to establish the National Breast Cancer Foundation. During that time, women diagnosed with breast cancer and their families began sharing their stories on national television, in national papers and magazines. Some of those women were incredibly brave as they fought their own battle and as some of them, sadly, lost that battle. As a result, though, of this successful public campaign we saw more money go into research and we saw the establishment of the National Breast Cancer Foundation. The Breast Cancer Foundation

website tells us that, since it was established in 1994 to promote and support breast cancer research in all its forms, it has allocated \$55 million to over 230 breast cancer research projects. The good news is that we have seen the death rate from breast cancer fall. It has been very important in helping women ensure they have regular check-ups, ensuring early detection and the best possible treatment.

Having had breast cancer myself in 2007, I would like to say how much I appreciate the work that is being done. All over Australia, not just in Western Australia at the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital where I had my treatment, the doctors and the specialists working in the field are wonderful but, importantly, the nurses and the staff in these centres that have been established all over the country are absolutely wonderful, supportive, helpful and attentive.

I would also like to join with the member for Murray in expressing concern about the treatment of women in rural areas. There still seem to be some gaps there. I hope that, in the future, we may address those barriers for women living in rural areas, who find treatment and diagnosis much more difficult. It is great to have Pink Ribbon Day. It is great to be reminded that we need to encourage early detection and early treatment for women and men diagnosed with breast cancer.

The SPEAKER—Order! The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed from 21 October, on the proposed address-in-reply to the speech of Her Excellency the Governor-General—

May it please Your Excellency:

We, the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Australia, in Parliament assembled, express our loyalty to the Sovereign, and thank Your Excellency for the speech which you have been pleased to address to the Parliament—

on motion by **Ms O'Neill**:

That the Address be agreed to.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call the member for O'Connor, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech and I ask the House to extend to him the usual courtesies.

Mr CROOK (O'Connor) (11.50 am)—I thank the people of the electorate of O'Connor for the great honour they have given me. I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners, both past and present, of this great land that we now share. Indeed, it is a great honour to be standing before you today as the new member for O'Connor and, in doing so, I would like to formally acknowledge the contribution of the former member for O'Connor, the Hon. Wilson Tuckey. You do not spend 30 years in public life, being elected term after term, without doing something right. I wish him the very best for the future.

This 43rd parliament is, to say the least, an unusual one and it will be remembered for many reasons. I sincerely congratulate the member for Hasluck, Ken Wyatt, on being the first Indigenous Australian in this House; the member for Melbourne, Adam Bandt, on being the first Greens member here; and Ed Husic on being the first of Muslim faith in this place. I congratulate the Class of 2010 and all others elected to this place. For me, I am the first member of the Nationals from Western Australia in 34 years.

I was born and raised in Merredin, the heart of the central wheat belt of Western Australia. I am the youngest of three sons of Joan and Paddy Crook, nee Giles. The Crook and Giles families are well-known pioneer

farmers of the Merredin district and, more specifically, the now disappeared grain rail sidings of Nukarni and Nokaning. The first 10 years of my life were spent on a 1,500 hectare wheat and sheep property south of Merredin until my parents bought a farm closer to town where we lived in the township of Merredin.

I was educated at the North Merredin Primary School and Merredin Senior High School. My years 11 and 12 teachers will no doubt be scratching their heads about now, thinking that they must have missed something. My school reports always stated that 'Tony could do better, if he only put as much time into his studies as he spent on the golf course'. On completion of school, when my desire and possibly my ability to be a professional golfer had waned, I moved to Woolibar Station, a 140,000 hectare pastoral lease 50 kilometres south of Kalgoorlie. Dad's decision to buy a sheep station was a great move; although not knowing it at the time, the opportunities that come about from owning a sheep station in the middle of a major mining precinct can be numerous. There could have been no better environment to bring up our three daughters. I do not think the girls will ever forgive Karen and me for selling the place.

I cannot help but reflect on how I ended up in this place. I lay the blame squarely at the feet of three people—the first being my father, Paddy Crook. Dad's interest in agripolitics, and politics in general, is renowned and respected at home. Dad thinks that Foxtel is sensational, as he can watch parliament whenever he is not playing golf or up at the Merredin Golf Club working on the course. I know that Dad spends more time in this House via the television than many of us do. He loves question time—yes, I know that is very sad! Dad's wise counsel will always be welcome.

The second is in fact a former member of this House: Mick Cotter. Mick served as the federal member for Kalgoorlie between 1975 and 1980. In 1987, in his capacity as the President of the Eastern Goldfields Section Council of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, Mick approached me to join the council. I am sure that at the time neither of us would have ever thought it would have come to this. I will come back to the Royal Flying Doctor Service later in my speech.

The third is Wendy Duncan, the immediate past-president of the Nationals WA and now a member of the Western Australian Legislative Council. At the time, about 2006, I was having a fair bit to say about the poor treatment that I felt the state government was giving the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Wendy came out to my shearing shed and said to me: 'Why don't you do something about it?' I joined The Nationals WA. In 2007 I had a training run in the federal election as the lead candidate for the Nationals WA in the Senate. I came into the team again in the 2008 state election to run for the seat of Kalgoorlie and finished a very close second to my good friend, John Bowler. Now in 2010, Mr Speaker, I stand before you as the new Member for O'Connor.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service has been a major part of my life for the past 23 years. I served as Chairman of the RFDS Western Operations from 1999 to 2009 and was national president of the service from 1999 to 2002. This was a great challenge but most of all it was a privilege. Having been bestowed life membership in 2004, I feel very honoured and I will carry the legacy of my time with this great service forever. I know that the Royal Flying Doctor Service gave me far more than I gave it. In particular I would like to thank Peter Howe, Tim Shackleton, the late Gerry McDonald, Michael Long, Neville Bassett, Clive Kitchen and all the board members, councillors and staff who sup-

ported me over this time. Even more importantly I want to pay tribute to the wonderful staff of the Royal Flying Doctor Service who deliver this iconic medical service to those who live, work and travel in rural and remote Australia.

With the significant boundary changes that occurred in Western Australia at the last election we have seen the formation of the new electorate of Durack. The Durack name is legendary in Western Australian pioneer history and it is very appropriate that this new electorate be named after this iconic family. It does, however, remove Kalgoorlie as an electorate name, and that is disappointing to say the least, given the historic role that the Western Australian goldfields played in the formation of Federation all those years ago, back in 1901. So important was the Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie region to the colony in the late 1890s that there was a threat to establish a stand-alone state around the area if the government in Perth did not call for a vote on the Federation. A referendum was subsequently held in 1900 and the rest, as the saying goes, is history. If that vote were to be held today, in 2010, one can only ponder the outcome. My guess is that it would be vastly different.

That said, it is very appropriate that Kalgoorlie is incorporated into the seat of O'Connor. CY O'Connor was undoubtedly one of the great engineers. In 1892, the same year that gold was found in Coolgardie, O'Connor commenced construction of the Fremantle Harbour, and in 1897 the first ship docked at the port. During these five years people were flocking in their droves to Coolgardie, following the discovery of gold by Bailey and Ford, and by 1894 the population was estimated at 15,000. Water, as it is today, was the most significant and limiting factor. Many perished en route and water nearly became as valuable as the precious metal they yearned.

O'Connor, with the backing of the Premier John Forrest, devised a plan to build Mundaring Weir in the hills east of Perth and construct a 530-kilometre pipeline and a series of pumping stations to deliver water to Kalgoorlie. Commissioned in 1896, and under intense political and public criticism that the gold would dry up and the state would be left with a massive debt, O'Connor took his own life in March, 1902. Water flowed into Kalgoorlie in January, 1903. Our geologists and miners are still finding not only gold but many other precious metals to this day in the goldfields and the greater Goldfields region, and that pipeline remains one of the key factors in their quest. This nation is forever indebted to CY O'Connor.

The new electorate of O'Connor is a mere 909,000 square kilometres. The south-west corner near Manjimup to the north-east corner in the Gibson Desert is over 1,700 kilometres apart—a fair day's walk in any language! O'Connor is very diverse, with mining, fishing, agriculture, viticulture, forestry, to name but a few of the pursuits in this vast electorate.

The bulk of the wheat belt is currently in drought, and our wheat farmers and those industries and communities that support this sector are under enormous social and economic pressure. I applaud the federal and WA governments for their drought pilot program currently being trialled in Western Australia. Given time, this program could have enormous benefits for the long-term viability of our already innovative and resilient farmers. One thing is for certain in broad-acre agriculture in Australia: drought will and does happen. We need to look far broader in supporting this vital sector.

The Murray-Darling issue has been a hot topic in this place since resuming and rightly so. Not as topical but just as important is the salinity issue in Australia. Salinity continues

to encroach on valuable arable land like the cancer that it is. Proactive and innovative measures must be taken—and soon, to stop and hopefully reverse this peril.

Politics, as we have unquestionably found out since the 21 August, is about numbers. In 2006, Brendon Grylls, the Leader of the Nationals WA and the then President of the Nationals WA, Wendy Duncan, took a major decision in what many said was a massive political risk for the Nationals WA. The Nationals WA, proudly a political party representing regional Western Australia, stepped away from the coalition. They were to be decimated by this stance. It was to be political suicide. They would achieve nothing. They would be targets of ridicule. They would undo the 97 years of history that was started in 1913, the birth place of the National Party. Mr Speaker, I am here today to tell you that none of that happened. What in fact did happen was that the Nationals WA are now arguably the most successful political party in Australia.

The Nationals WA now have a power-sharing arrangement with the Liberal Party providing sound, stable government to Western Australia and delivering a regional funding program that has been embraced by regional Western Australia. This regional funding program, called Royalties for Regions, ensures that 25 per cent of all mining and petroleum royalties goes back into regional projects that they want. This year a total of \$860 million is available. Local government, regional development commissions and community groups across the state have applauded this initiative. The Nationals WA campaigned strongly on the platform to ask the federal government to match this program. We need to look at projects that will sustain us; we need to have a CY O'Connor view of the world. Water from the north should not be just a dream. The extension of the Dampier to Bunbury gas pipeline to Al-

bany needs to proceed. A transport hub in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, to take the pressure off the Perth transport network and save millions of dollars and significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, needs to happen.

Western Australia does not need a new mining tax but it does want a fairer share of what Western Australia delivers to the federal coffers. A mining tax will not just affect mining companies; it will seep through the economy at all levels.

When Australia was sold the GST we were told that all GST receipts would come back to the state of origin. We certainly now know that this is not the case. Western Australia only recently had a raise from 62c to 68c in the dollar, when other states receive a much higher return. I fully appreciate that Western Australia does not have the population of some other states but our needs, particularly in the area of infrastructure, are just as valid as those of the rest of the country. We all know that Western Australia is a resource-rich state and many of our needs focus around these resources and what helps deliver those resources for the benefit of all Australians.

We need to coax people back to the regions and encourage them to stay. People do not leave regional areas because the roads are no good; they leave because medical and education services are not what they should be. Many country shire councils in the electorate of O'Connor are doing a fantastic job finding doctors, providing houses and motor vehicles, supplying surgeries and supplementing their doctors' salaries when, quite simply, they should not be doing so. Don't get me wrong, I applaud these shires for wanting the very best for their communities. This is not the role of local government. Doctor and health services are the responsibility of this place and more needs to be done

to help these communities. I do not know of one city council that provides a doctor.

The plight of our first Australians should continue to be of concern to us all. Indigenous health, particularly in remote communities, is simply not delivering the results that we all expect. A well-known and highly respected Kalgoorlie paediatrician, Professor Christine Jeffries-Stokes, who is married to Aboriginal elder Geoffrey Stokes, once said to me, 'Tony, if we can get drugs and alcohol into these communities, surely we can get fresh fruit and vegetables.' More must be done. Aboriginal people must take ownership of these health programs and demand positive outcomes from within their own communities.

The recent launch of the Western Desert Kidney Health Project in Kalgoorlie is one such program. A joint venture between government and private sponsorship and delivered by Indigenous health workers, this program will hopefully go a long way to addressing not only kidney and diabetic conditions but also the general wellbeing of the communities it will service.

There are many people I need to thank for helping me achieve this office. Mia Davies MLC is the master of the hung parliament. As campaign director in both the last state election and this federal election, Mia has overseen campaigns that have delivered in spades to the Nationals WA. Thank you, Mia. Marty Aldridge, the State Director of the Parliamentary Nationals WA at the time of the election and in the gallery today and now working for me, has simply been sensational. To Colin Holt MLC, the President of the Nationals WA, thank you. To Brendon Grylls and the State Parliamentary National Party, thank you and I look forward to working closely with you all to deliver better outcomes for O'Connor and regional Western Australia.

To my respective teams across the electorate—Dave Grills and John Bowler in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Shayne Flanagan in Esperance, marathon man Sam Harma in Albany, Allan Marshal and Alan Holmes in Lake Grace, Sue Muntz in Bruce Rock, Mary and Stuart Graham, Darren Moir, and Jill Sounness in the Wheatbelt and Great Southern—I sincerely thank you. A special mention to Jacky Abbott, who came all the way from the east to support me. Thanks to Clare Creegan, who is in the gallery today, and Jacqui Boydell for their reassurance when things got tough. Mia, Clare and Jacqui, I do not thank you for sending me out to the media to look like a rabbit in the spotlight.

To Lisa van Oyen, Cale Hill and the state secretariat, thank you. To all those people who worked on the 150 polling booths across the vast electorate of O'Connor, I sincerely thank you. Your dedication, whether you were standing in the cold and rain on the south-west coast or getting burnt in the Goldfields sun, and your commitment to my campaign and the Nationals WA are greatly appreciated. To my personal campaign director, my 20-year-old daughter, Jemma, who is in the gallery today, thank you for what turned out to be a great ride. Jem and I spent the last three weeks of the campaign on the road together and that final eight-hour drive on election eve from Albany home to Kalgoorlie-Boulder seemed like an eternity, but we made it. To my elder brothers Max and Brett and their wives Thelma and Linda, thanks for your advice—and I probably won't be taking much of it! To my many friends and supporters watching and listening, I can only simply say thank you.

I would like to welcome to the House today my neighbours and friends for 30 years Brendon and Janie Jones. I sincerely thank them for making the effort to come all this way to listen to what I have to say. I think it is rather ironic that Brendon would want to

be here today, given that we have spent more than a thousand hours side-by-side in a light aircraft aerial mustering his sheep and goats and we thought we had solved the nation's and the world's problems 10 times over. I think we have got a job to do yet, Brendon. Brendon and Janie, their family and their massive extended family have had a tough year. They will always remember 2010 as the year that they lost Janie's brother, Craig Oliver, tragically killed, along with five of his mining colleagues, in the Sundance Resources aircraft crash in the Republic of Congo. I sincerely thank you for making the effort.

To my parents Joan and Paddy Crook, I can only say I love you and I thank you for everything. To Mum, who has just had a hip reconstruction in the last week: you have got a fortnight to get ready as I need you to caddie for me! To my wife Karen, whom I met on the first day of high school nearly 39 years ago, thank you is simply not enough. I have one last indulgence, Mr Speaker. This is a bit cryptic but this is from me to my three beautiful daughters. To Cassie, who is in London teaching, have I told you lately! To Jemma, campaign manager extraordinaire, World War I! And to Georgia at home and working as a vet nurse, nine million bicycles! Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Gray**) adjourned.

**AUSTRALIAN CIVILIAN CORPS
BILL 2010**

**AUTONOMOUS SANCTIONS
BILL 2010**

Referred to Main Committee

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (12.07 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the bills be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration.

Question agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Afghanistan

Debate resumed from 21 October, on motion by **Mr Stephen Smith**:

That the House take note of the document.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (12.09 pm)—In speaking to the motion before the House, I think that Afghanistan is not a country that you can look at without looking at its history. For those who like history, Alexander the Great was well into conquering what we now know as Pakistan and India and it is said in the history books that he took a look at Afghanistan and decided to go home to Macedonia. He put it in the too-hard basket. Some 1,000 years later Genghis Khan, another of the most famous conquerors in all of human history, took on the Afghans, was defeated and decided to take on Europe instead. He thought Europe was a softer target, which it proved to be. There is really not much record of him being defeated in Europe whereas he had been soundly defeated in Afghanistan.

If we move on another 600 or 700 years later the British Empire sent a full army of 55,000 men into Afghanistan and, basically, nobody returned. The mightiest empire the world has ever seen was soundly annihilated by Afghanistan. So Britain decided to leave Afghanistan alone. Some 300 or 400 years later the Russians decided that they were going to take on Afghanistan. For those, again, who like reading history books I think *Charlie Wilson's War* should be compulsory reading for everyone in this place, particularly if they are talking about Afghanistan.

Clearly the combination of the sort of people the Afghans are and the sort of terrain you are dealing with in Afghanistan resulted in the collapse of the communist empire. Russia collapsed as a result of her involvement in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a country which, for a raft of reasons, none of the great conquerors nor the great empires in

history have succeeded in being able to get to move in the direction they wanted it to move in. If you ask whether the occupation of Afghanistan is going to end up successfully, it has not yet in human history and one would wonder why it would end up so this time with the Americans being successful.

Brigadier Mansford was the most highly qualified and experienced soldier in the Australian Army and, I think, the most decorated soldier in the Australian Army and was a man who had 15 years as a private and was briefly a sergeant before the Army decided to put him up for promotion. He said that we have a commitment in Afghanistan which we now cannot ignore. He said that we have to train these people, their police, their military and their administrative regimes and then slowly edge ourselves out and hand over to the local authorities.

He adds that there should be a timetable which takes into account what the Army is capable of doing with or without support and that it ought to be reviewed on a yearly basis. There should be objective assessments and objective criteria for a yearly assessment of what is happening, particularly with the training of the Afghan army and its administrative adjuncts. He believes that that is the smart way to fight a war—that is, a limited commitment along the lines he has outlined here. I think that is the voice of great experience. He is a man who served his country in Vietnam; he may even have served in Korea, although I do not think so and maybe I am wrong there. Most certainly he is the most experienced soldier who held a very senior rank still alive today—in fact, if you are a brigadier you are in charge of our combat force in Australia. That was the position that he once held.

We are in our ninth year of commitment. There have been 21 Australian deaths and, sadly, among them was Benjamin Chuck,

who was from my home area of Far North Queensland. The operations have cost the Australian people \$6,000 million so far and the non-military financial assistance totals more than \$700 million. We are not Robinson Crusoe: some 47 countries and 120,000 personnel have been involved. Brigadier Mansford also pointed out that the situation in Pakistan is highly volatile, with the government trying to maintain democratic institutions in the face of a very strong but not very tolerant fundamentalist surge.

Having said all those things there has never been any doubt in my mind that, when the Americans go into, for example, Afghanistan and they request us to go in, we absolutely must go in. This is not a happy event for Australia. Are we to tag along as the tail on the donkey? Yes, that is absolutely correct. If Australia has virtually no defence force, and I do not wish in any way to reflect upon our armed forces but simply to lay that down. I know that it is changing and that there has been movement as far as the Air Force goes.

To put it in understandable language: people say, 'There's no imminent threat to Australia'. There was no imminent threat to Australia in 1962 when I was 18 years of age and finished school after Kennedy had backed down the Russians. There was no imminent threat anywhere at the time. We were in a very safe environment. By the time I was 18½ I was handed an SLR rifle and informed that I was on 24-hour call-up to go and fight in Indonesia, and I had to provide telephone numbers. We were in a war with Indonesia which was delightfully referred to as 'Konfrontasi'. I hope that they are our best friends. They are our neighbours and I believe that one should love one's neighbours and be loved by one's neighbours, but when we faced off against Indonesia we had 250,000 SLR rifles and we had a million semiautomatic rifles standing behind us. I

myself owned a very good rifle, an AK-47, and my brother owned an automatic shotgun which was a magnificent piece of machinery, and we were only two of many in Australia.

So we had best part of 300,000 good combat rifles, and there were a million other semiautomatic rifles standing behind them. We were not the sort of country that you would want to pick a fight with. We had arguably the sixth or seventh most formidable air force on earth. We had a significant navy. We had a few destroyers and bits and pieces; I think we had an aircraft carrier at the time and a number of frigates. Then, we had near enough to 300,000 rifles. Now, we have 50,000 rifles. We do not have 300,000 but 50,000. The million semiautomatics do not exist at all; they are gone completely. When I last looked at the Air Force—and admittedly change is coming—it is the same Air Force that existed then. It is 50 years old now, and there is a small problem. You can say, 'There are some very formidable pieces of machinery.' How would you like to set off across the Simpson Desert in Central Australia in a four-wheel drive that is 50 years old? This is infinitely more sophisticated machinery than a four-wheel drive. As far as the Navy goes, we have eight frigates. To be technical about it, there were five Exocet missiles in the Falklands War and they took out two destroyers, one of which had interception capacity. We can be very mathematical about it. If our opponents have 24 Exocet missiles—the fingers of both hands flicked up twice and then four added to that—then we will have no Australian Navy whatsoever and only 50,000 rifles with which to defend Australia. If we get into a stoush, what are we going to do? Are we going to throw rocks at them?

In 1939 there was not considered to be any great threat to Australia. Yes, there was a great threat in Europe from Adolf Hitler but there was no great threat to Australia. Japan

was up to its eyeballs in trouble in China but they were no threat to us. But by 1941 they were two weeks away from invading Australia. I will tell you how the government looked after us then. Again, for those who like reading books, I would recommend either of David Day's two books.

This war was substantially a war about aeroplanes. Britain could not be invaded because they had a better air force. They won the Battle of Britain. Germany could not invade without air cover. The Germans won every single battle whilst they had air cover and, arguably, they lost every single battle after they lost air cover. This was true with Britain and it was true with Germany's battle against the Russians. When the Japanese had air superiority during the war, they won every battle. I might also add that 13 out of 15 of the naval battles were won by Japan. Until she lost her air superiority, which was midway during the war, she had won every battle; however, after that, she lost every battle. The Second World War was about aeroplanes.

Our government had thought: 'We've got no threats; therefore, we're wasting money by spending it on defence. So we won't worry too much about that. If we get into trouble, Britain will come out to save us.' My own family, the Henleys, do not have any love for England, because two of the Henleys were swimming for their lives off Crete, another two were fighting their way across the Owen Stanley Ranges and another one was rotting in Changi prison. Where was Britain? Britain was supposed to come out here and save us. With all due respects to my forebears, the Henleys, I do not think you run a country that way. What are we, some sort of a lap-dog where we expect everyone else to look after us? Britain had their own battles to fight in defence of their own country, Great Britain, as well as Europe. They were not too worried about us.

Further, if you think the Americans are going to race out here and save us, you had better have a look at the history of that country. The Americans entered the First World War only when there was public outrage over the sinking of the *Lusitania*—that forced them into the war—and, at that stage, the war was almost over. Masses of people from the German side as well as, I might add, from the allied side were simply leaving the battlefields. The battle was almost over by the time the Americans came into that war. Of course, they steadfastly refused to become involved in the Second World War. The only thing that pushed them into the Second World War was the bombing of Pearl Harbour. If there had been no Pearl Harbour and Japan had simply kept moving down the south-east Asian mainland towards Australia, one wonders what position the Americans would have taken. If you were a mother in America and you said, 'Am I going to risk my— (*Time expired*)

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (12.24 pm)—The attacks on the World Trade Centre, the Pentagon and the fields of Pennsylvania on 11 September 2001 were a defining moment in the history of the 21st century. These events, of course, were followed by terrorist attacks in Bali, London, Madrid and Jakarta, and together these events brought home to the international community the seriousness of the threat to democratic freedom posed by a small group of fanatics whose purpose is to destroy the basic human rights that define a civil society. Those rights and freedoms, including the freedom of speech, the freedom of association and the freedom of religious affiliation, have all been hard won. They have been defended in two world wars and they are being defended now in Afghanistan. It is important to remember the speed and the intensity of the international reaction to 9-11. The tragedy and the

terror of it took our collective breath away. The leaders of the Western democracies named the attacks for what they were—terror attacks on our fundamental values. To his credit, former Prime Minister John Howard, supported by Labor, was quick to associate the Australian government with the international community's support for the United States. It is also important to remember that the United Nations moved quickly to condemn the terrorist attacks and al-Qaeda. The legitimacy of our presence in Afghanistan is expressed in Security Council resolution 1378 of 14 November 2001 to which I will return.

The Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence have canvassed in some detail the reasons that Australia is part of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. I will not retrace that ground but I would like to speak further about tackling international terrorism, because it is at the core of our mission in Afghanistan. The former Minister for Defence, Senator Faulkner, delivered a ministerial statement on Afghanistan on 23 June this year, in which he reminded the parliament of the reasons for which Australia remains committed to eradicating terrorism and restoring stability in Afghanistan. He said:

Our fundamental objective in Afghanistan is to combat a clear threat from international terrorism to both international security and our own national security. Australia cannot afford ... to let Afghanistan again become a safe haven and training ground for terrorist organisations.

This reasoning for Australia's involvement in Afghanistan has not changed. It is as valid now as it was in 2001. I personally support this reasoning because I am resolutely committed to democratic freedoms and recognise that they are threatened by the terrorism that we confront. The fact that terrorist training and organisation has developed in other countries since 2001 does not constitute a

basis for withdrawal from Afghanistan as has been argued or suggested by some. It means, however, that we must remain resolute in Afghanistan and also work in an appropriate way with our allies to meet the terrorist challenge wherever it does arise.

International terrorism seeks to destroy the foundations of our democratic way of life because it seeks to impose absolutist values on peoples and nations where mutual respect, tolerance and a basic belief in a fair go for everyone underpin the fundamental civil freedoms. Because international terrorism is by its nature a direct attack on us, we have no option but to tackle it head-on and defeat it wherever it appears. Terrorists employ clandestine methods. They secrete themselves within the body politic, exploiting its freedoms and tolerance in order to destroy them. They rely on assassinations and bombings to achieve their objectives. Improvised explosive devices remain a weapon of choice, for example, in Afghanistan, killing soldiers and civilians alike. To counter terrorism we need to remind ourselves of the underlying factors on which Australia's approach to our involvement in Afghanistan is based. They are the strategic necessity for the conflict and the legitimacy of the conflict. Strategic necessity is driven by the need for a nation to defend itself against attack, and there is no doubt that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were attacks on the territory of the United States. As a strong ally of the US, there were clear implications for our own country, not simply because of our mutual obligations under the ANZUS treaty.

Traditionally, attacks on a nation's territory and population by another state have been the symbols of a more basic attack on the political and social fabric that gives a nation in its identity. This is something that Churchill grasped implicitly at the outbreak of the Second World War when he described Hitler's attack on Britain as a repudiation of

what is most sacred to humankind—that is, individual liberty. Terrorism seeks to destroy us as a nation and that is why we have no option but to act in concert with like-minded nations to confront and destroy those who would seek to destroy us. There is no room for appeasement and accommodation with this threat, rather strategic necessity demands strength and determination.

In that strategic context, the coalition's operations in Afghanistan are supported by a suite of Security Council resolutions that confer clear international legitimacy on what are our acts of self-defence. Resolution 1368, adopted on the day following the 9/11 attacks, together with resolutions 1373, 1378, 1383 and 1386, provide a clear mandate for international cooperation in the use of armed force to destroy terrorist groups in Afghanistan. But there is another dimension here as well. The people of Afghanistan need to see the deployment of foreign forces to their country as being in their interests, as being legitimate at the local level.

Australia's contribution to reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and to the training of the Afghan National Army are, therefore, central components of our strategy in Afghanistan. In this task the ADF is well equipped to undertake those responsibilities and continues to operate successfully in Oruzgan province in particular. Its mission includes the following: disrupting insurgent networks and restricting their mobility and supply routes; training the 4th Brigade of the Afghan National Army; protecting the civilian aid workers who are delivering the reconstruction projects; and working with the Afghan National Army to implement the ISAF strategy of securing key population areas, food production areas and key transport routes. As Senator Faulkner has said previously, all of that translates into safer villages, a better food supply and more economic activity, which are crucial if we are to

build local legitimacy. The ADF is achieving these objectives within the force levels recommended by the Chief of the Defence Force and as committed to our ISAF partners.

Implicit in a number of public comments made in recent times is both an attempt to politicise some aspects of the Australian effort in Afghanistan and also a challenge to the judgment and advice of the Chief of the Defence Force. We have heard, for example, some commentary to the effect that troop numbers may be inadequate, that equipment is insufficient or inappropriate, and that the military justice system itself is deficient. This is regrettable and very ill-advised commentary. As members know, the CDF is the government's principal adviser on operational deployments by the ADF. Those who, with little operational knowledge or insight, make those comments pay insufficient regard to the professionalism and competence of the CDF and his senior leadership team. As a former minister in the defence portfolio I can attest to the outstanding quality of the ADF leadership and especially that of the CDF, for whom I have the highest regard. As the head of the Defence Force, the CDF has frequently expressed his deep and continuing concern for the safety of our defence personnel. This was a key reason for the government's substantial increase to the ADF's organic force protection.

That concern has been front and centre of the government's approach to force protection for our troops in Afghanistan. As Senator Faulkner announced on 1 June this year, the government has allocated \$1.67 billion for force protection capabilities for the ADF. This investment takes into account the evolving nature of the risks from roadside bombs. It includes measures for better intelligence on those who make the IEDs, greater protection and firepower for ADF vehicles and upgraded body armour for our troops. It also

provides for the acquisition of a counter-rocket artillery and mortar capability to warn of incoming rocket attacks.

It is also disappointing to observe some of the confusion that has arisen in some quarters about the military justice system as it applies to possible disciplinary action against those who may be subject to allegations that they acted illegally or inappropriately in the conduct of operations. This is a matter on which there has been longstanding bipartisan agreement. It was Prime Minister Howard's government, with Labor's support, which created the independent position of Director of Military Prosecutions and it is important and vital that the Director of Military Prosecutions remains completely free from external influence and direction. It is even more important that some of the populist sentiment that we have heard should not be permitted to colour the decisions of the Director of Military Prosecutions.

There has been considerable commentary on an exit strategy. It is evident that the job facing the international community in Afghanistan is very difficult and complicated. The best protection we have against terrorism is a strong civil society with strong institutions, which is the key focus of the ADF and our international partners in Afghanistan. For us to be successful in this endeavour it is important that the parliament is squarely behind our troops as they help deliver the stability and reconstruction in Afghanistan that is essential if we are to have a secure world.

In recent days a number of commentators have declared the war in Afghanistan perhaps unwinnable and, for that reason, have recommended that Australia should withdraw. A much more sober assessment was offered by the former CDF General Peter Gration, who noted that an exit strategy depends on knowing when the key goals have been achieved. The government's view con-

cerning the duration of our commitment in Afghanistan has been clearly articulated by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has said our forces will be part of this vital work through the coming decade. The international community is working with the government of Afghanistan to improve the quality and integrity of its governance and accountability. Far from it being a reason to withdraw, as some have suggested, it is critical that we continue with this work in progress.

In asymmetric contests such as we face in Afghanistan, victory is defined not by the conventional concept of total destruction of the enemy's capacity to fight but by the practical denial of training opportunities and logistics support. These goals are measured by the success of reconstruction, the creation of an Afghan National Army that is able to deliver domestic security, the building of viable institutions and the establishment of a functioning civil society. As the US general in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, has noted, the International Security Assistance Force is making progress to achieve these goals. If this can stay on track, it is to be expected that Australia will be able to wind back, ultimately, its contribution. In the meantime, we must do all that we can to support the members of the ADF.

Again, as a former portfolio minister I had the privilege of meeting many ADF members and their families. We all grieve at the loss of life and care for those struggling with physical and mental wounds. I extend my sincere gratitude to all who serve for our country. I know that they serve with the knowledge that they defend our democratic values and freedoms, and I share with all Australians a deep respect and admiration for their endeavours on our behalf.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (12.38 pm)—I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this important debate today on the motion

to take note of the Prime Minister's statement on Australia's commitment to Afghanistan. I will not say it is a pleasure, because, to be frank, any discussion of war can never be a pleasure. Nevertheless, it is entirely appropriate that we, as representatives of the people of Australia, reflect on the situation in Afghanistan and the critical role our soldiers are playing in trying to bring stability to that troubled nation as well as the wider consequences for the fight against terrorism and the support of international security.

Nine years after this war began, it is sometimes easy to overlook the magnitude of the events that gave rise to it. However, we must not ever forget the horrors of September 11, 2001. The barbaric and murderous acts of terror carried out that day were not merely an attack on a few buildings or one particular nation; they were an attack on our way of life, on democratic freedoms, on individual freedoms, on individual liberty, on free economies, on all that we hold dear. There were a great many disturbing and indeed sickening images to emerge on that day. These things are indelibly burned into our memories—the collapse of the twin towers, the burning Pentagon, the scenes of panic as New Yorkers ran to safety, the flag-draped stretchers bearing the bodies of those emergency workers who died whilst saving others and, as emerged later, the harrowing and emotional recordings of calls made by those who in their last moments of life took the opportunity to phone those closest to them and tell them that they loved them one final time.

Yet perhaps the most disturbing images to emerge from those days were not the images captured in the United States; rather they were the scenes of jubilation witnessed in some parts of the world as radical Islamic fundamentalists cheered, danced, held rallies and otherwise celebrated the murders of thousands of innocent people. I am prepared

to accept that cultural factors may have had a bearing on some behaviours, but there can be no factor—cultural, religious or otherwise—that can ever excuse the images we saw emerging from some parts of the world in those days immediately following September 11. Any person who doubts that pure evil lies at the core of al-Qaeda's being need only be shown the footage I have just described.

In September 2001 the world resolved to confront the evil of al-Qaeda and vowed never to let anything akin to these attacks happen again. Yet even as the struggle in Afghanistan was in what we now know were its early days, Australia again suffered the trauma of terrorist violence as 88 of our country's men and women died as a result of terrorist bombings in Bali in October 2002. This brought the horrifying reality of terrorism right into Australia's backyard, as we saw our fellow Australians being slain by Islamic fundamentalists for doing what we all like to do—relaxing and spending time with friends and family. If there had been any doubt that the terrorists' goal was to destroy our way of life and attack our freedoms, the Bali bombings surely ended it. In the years to follow, we would again be reminded of the terrorists' determination to wreak havoc wherever possible as we witnessed further attacks in Indonesia, in Spain and in London—all of them places frequented by Australians.

The war in Afghanistan and the broader war against terrorism are not like previous conflicts. The enemy does not respect geographic boundaries and measures its success not in terms of territory gained but in terms of numbers killed. This is the brutal reality we are forced to confront. We are dealing with an enemy which does not adhere to any facet of basic human decency. What can one say of people who think nothing of using civilians as human shields as they engage in gunfire with our soldiers? What can be said

of a regime that brutally suppresses women, that restricts access to education and that executes people on a whim? There is no epithet that is vile enough to describe the mindset of these murderous people.

There are some who feel that this conflict can be resolved through dialogue, through negotiation, through trying to understand the other side's viewpoint. I do not agree. That view is based on a tragically misguided assumption—namely, that we are dealing with rational people. Quite plainly we are not. An enemy that actively seeks to prevent learning is hardly going to be inclined to engage in reasoned discussion with its opponents. There is no such thing as a moderate fundamentalist or a rational radical. Despite the claims of al-Qaeda's apologists—and, unbelievably, there are some dotted throughout the Western world—these terrorists are not misunderstood. They are not victims. They are not misguided, oppressed, dispossessed, disenfranchised or any of the other various adjectives employed by those that seek to defend the indefensible. They are irrational, hate-fuelled killers who will stop at nothing in the pursuit of their twisted and barbaric objectives.

If the Taliban and their al-Qaeda partners are not stopped in Afghanistan, they will move further into Pakistan. They will keep pushing, taking violence to the Western world again and again. We have already seen them do it in the USA, in the UK, in Spain and in Indonesia. We cannot afford to let it happen here in Australia. Accordingly, it is right that our soldiers continue to fight in Afghanistan along with our coalition allies. This is not a war of conquest. The task may not be simple, but the goal is. We seek nothing more than a free society—where thought is not a crime, dissent can be a virtue and religion is a choice that reflects the innate goodness of the human heart. As I say, this task is not a simple one, but then establishing

a free country never is. Australia is one of the few free nations on earth that was not birthed through violent revolution, though that is not to suggest its birth was easy or free of suffering, because plainly it was not.

Australian soldiers are undertaking vitally important work in Afghanistan, mentoring, training and supporting the Afghan army's 4th brigade. Progress is being made and, yes, progress is slow—slower than I would like and slower than most Australians would like. It is true that our soldiers are operating in one of Afghanistan's more dangerous regions, Oruzgan province, and this is reflected in the tragedy of the increased number of Australian casualties in recent months. I spoke last week in the parliament of the tremendous and ultimate sacrifice these young men made to secure the safety of the Afghan people and to protect the security of Australians here at home.

We have lost 21 of our finest in this struggle against the Taliban. There can be no more confronting reminder of the cost of this war than the sight of grieving families farewelling their loved ones, particularly distraught children attending their dad's funeral. I know all of us were especially moved by the funeral of Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney, when news emerged later that day that in the hours following the funeral Jared MacKinney's wife, Beckie, had given birth to their second child—a son, Noah Jared.

I have said before and I say again that war has a terrible human cost. Having served for a long period in the Army, I understand the challenges our soldiers face. Yet when you read the statements from the families of fallen soldiers, many of the same themes emerge—that they believed in serving their country, how highly they valued the friendship and support of their fellow soldiers and that they supported the mission and believed in the cause they died supporting.

I believe that to abandon this mission now would fail to honour the sacrifice made by these 21 brave and dedicated soldiers and family men. Having begun this difficult task nine years ago, we have to see it through. Australia owes that much to Afghanistan, to our allies and ultimately to ourselves and the families of the 21 soldiers we have lost.

I am not arguing for an open-ended commitment. Australia has certain tasks to complete in mentoring the Afghan army and making sure that it is able to provide protection and security for its own citizens. We must also provide the support that is needed to Afghanistan's central government, to make sure it is able to suppress the Taliban threat on a permanent basis. This will not be quick or easy; however, I maintain that a few difficult years now is infinitely preferable to an even more protracted struggle down the road, as would undoubtedly occur were the Taliban to infest other nations in the region, including Pakistan, with its hideous ideology.

To leave now would almost certainly guarantee the re-emergence of a Taliban-led government in Afghanistan. What progress has been made in terms of democratic elections, improved rights for women and better educational opportunities for the Afghan people would be wiped out. With a secure base in Afghanistan, the Taliban and its al-Qaeda allies would once more turn their murderous intentions toward Pakistan, to the rest of the subcontinent, to the Middle East and perhaps to Central Asia. That would have devastating implications for Australia and for Australians, both in national security and in economic terms.

Having committed to this mission, we must ensure that our soldiers have the equipment and resources they need to undertake their very difficult task. I support the words used by the Leader of the Opposition

during his very effective contribution to this debate:

It is not our role to second-guess the advice of commanders on the ground in terms of troop numbers or equipment.

I trust the government will continue to monitor the situation carefully and provide timely information to this parliament as appropriate. I welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to an annual statement in this House about the progress being made—and I hope that on each occasion in the years immediately ahead whoever is Prime Minister will be able to inform the House that greater progress is being made as Afghanistan moves towards a more independent national security framework.

I know that this is not a position all members of the House will share, nor is it a position that all Australians will share. In the lead-up to this debate, I have been contacted by numerous constituents in Cowan. I am sure many members of this place have had a similar experience. War, by its very nature, is an issue that evokes a wide range of passionate opinions. Those of my constituents with whom I have spoken have represented a full range of opinions. I thank the constituents who have taken the time to let me know their views on the war in Afghanistan. This has happened in recent days, but also I thank the many people who have raised issues with me over the whole three years I have been the member for Cowan. Many of my constituents have drawn upon their own experiences in Vietnam and other wars or operations and I value their perspectives. Others have provided me with their moral and ideological viewpoints. All are valid. What has been clear is that in Cowan the majority of people who have contacted me do not like war and they do not like our soldiers dying in Afghanistan, but they do appreciate that the Taliban and al-Qaeda cannot be allowed to

win and that our soldiers should not die in vain.

One of those who took the time to contact me ahead of my contribution today was Mr Patrick Shinnick, himself a CMF veteran. Mr Shinnick holds some strong views on the Afghanistan conflict and the level of support being afforded to our soldiers. Whilst I and the many other people I have spoken to about the war in the last three years do not agree with every issue he raised in his correspondence to me, I would certainly echo the sentiment he expressed—I understand this is not an original quote—that, ‘They only deserve freedom who are prepared to defend it.’ I would also note two more views of Mr Shinnick which are widely held in Cowan. Although I have not covered them today, I have mentioned them before in parliament. The first point is the concern that so many of those who come by boat illegally from Afghanistan choose to come here and not to fight for the freedom of their own country. Mr Shinnick and one other constituent of mine suggested that we should arm and train the young men who come here illegally by boat and send them back to fight in their own country. I would advocate great caution in arming these people, as I believe they could then constitute a security threat for Australia.

The second point Mr Shinnick raises, which I particularly agree with, is the matter of compensation and support for the families of the soldiers killed or wounded. This is a matter that represents an obligation of the nation to those who have given so much in the national interest. I hope that this debate serves to remind all members of the important cause our soldiers are fighting for in Afghanistan. As I have remarked before, I often think that when we enter the House of Representatives each day we should have to walk past a board showing the names of the soldiers who have died in this current war, to remind us that our deliberations and our de-

isions have serious consequences. This discussion must never be couched solely in language concerning financial cost or foreign policy outcomes. Regrettably, soldiers will be lost and families will be devastated.

In our determination to see our mission through, let us not forget the names of those 21 who have given their lives to help bring stability to a troubled region. Let us not forget the families they leave behind, particularly young children. Let us not forget those who have suffered and died at the hands of the Taliban, al-Qaeda and other Islamic fundamentalist and terrorist groups who will stop at nothing in the pursuit of their perverted ideological ends. Let us not forget those Australians who have died at the hands of terrorists around the world—the innocent victims of barbaric murderers who measure success not in terms of votes won or minds changed but merely in terms of numbers killed.

I am sure the thoughts of all members of the House of Representatives are with our soldiers in Afghanistan. We should all be proud of the job they are doing, of the way they represent our country in some of the most inhospitable places on earth. We wish them well as they continue their difficult work and hope that further progress is made, that the pace of success increases and that they return to their homes and families safely.

Mr CREAN (Hotham—Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts) (12.52 pm)—I rise to support our government’s position in Afghanistan. There is considerable bipartisan support in this parliament for our commitment to the war in Afghanistan, a commitment entered into under the previous government and supported by us when in opposition. Australia was there at the beginning because Afghanistan was

home to al-Qaeda and there was widespread support for action against the Taliban, both domestic support here and international support through the backing of the United Nations. We are in Afghanistan under a UN mandate and at the invitation of the Afghan government and we are there in support of the ANZUS alliance. The United States is our most important friend and ally and the decision to stand alongside the US to prosecute the war on terror in Afghanistan was and remains firmly anchored in Australia's national interest.

As an alliance partner, article 4 of the treaty required Australia to join the United States in response to the al-Qaeda attack on US soil—the September 11 attacks that also took Australian lives. The Taliban's support for that al-Qaeda attack on US soil positioned Afghanistan as a legitimate target for military action by the US and its alliance partners. Labor is a strong and committed supporter of international efforts and we have never wavered in our commitment to the mission in Afghanistan.

Our mission there today has three key objectives: stabilisation, denying sanctuary to terrorists and training the Afghan national security forces in the Oruzgan province. We are there with 46 other troop-contributing nations as part of an international strategy which, whilst slow, is working. The mission takes many forms, all of which reflect great credit on the personal and professional attributes of the Australian men and women serving in Afghanistan. Our defence, police and civilian personnel are training and mentoring the Afghan National Army and the National Police. They are conducting high-risk counterinsurgency operations in the Oruzgan province. They are building important community infrastructure such as schools and health clinics and working with provincial authorities to deliver improved governance for the Afghan people. These are

vital contributions to the counterinsurgency strategy of the International Security Assistance Force, namely, to shape, clear, hold and build in support of the Karzai government.

Difficult as it is, solid progress continues to be made. Afghanistan is no longer a safe haven for al-Qaeda and the momentum of the Taliban insurgency has been blunted. We are seeing tangible improvements in the quality of health, education and infrastructure outcomes enjoyed by the Afghan people. There are more and more Afghan kids enrolled in schools. Access to health services has been extended from 10 per cent to almost 85 per cent of the population and there has been a remarkable improvement in roads and community infrastructure across Afghanistan. Australia's presence is making a difference, and we will continue to stand firm alongside the Afghan people and the international community until the mission is complete.

It pays to have a memory in this place and it is timely to remind ourselves of the important history which led to Australia's military presence in Afghanistan. Labor has never shirked from its obligation to protect and defend the nation's security interests; nor has it wavered in support for our men and women in uniform. A decision to commit our troops to armed conflict is one that must never be taken lightly. They are grave decisions for a government to make. The decision to place our men and women in harm's way is the ultimate test—indeed, the ultimate burden—of national leadership.

In 1991, the Hawke government committed Australian forces to the first Gulf War—our participation enjoyed by partisan support on the basis of an international coalition led by the United States but with the specific authorisation of the United Nations. In relation to the second Gulf war in 2003, however—and I was leader of the Labor Party at the time—we could not extend bipartisan

support to the Howard government's decision to commit Australian troops to the war in Iraq. There was a critical distinction between 1991 and 2003. The first Gulf War was authorised by a specific UN resolution and was at the invitation of the host nation. Neither of these conditions applied to the second Gulf war. As Leader of the Opposition, I opposed John Howard's decision to join the US-led coalition of the willing to effect regime change in Iraq based on what proved to be the fiction of 'weapons of mass destruction'. Labor argued that the UN chief weapons inspector, Hans Blix, should be allowed to complete the search for weapons of mass destruction and that Australia should not commit troops in the absence of a UN resolution. We counselled patience and proper processes under the auspices of the UN and, although we were ignored by the Howard government, the subsequent unfolding of events in Iraq has certainly vindicated Labor's position.

These were difficult days for Labor. We were accused of failing to support our troops, we were labelled as appeasers and apologists for Saddam Hussein and we were accused of abandoning our commitment to the US alliance. The critics were wrong on all counts. On the first point, in my speech of farewell to the crew of HMAS *Kanimbla* in 2003, I was absolutely clear on Labor's position: Labor opposed the decision to enter into armed conflict without the authorisation of the United Nations but, whilst opposed to the war, we were unwavering in our support for the men and women of the ADF who had been asked by the Australian government to place themselves in harm's way. They had no choice—that was their duty as members of the Australian defence forces. Our argument was with the government of the day, not with the troops who had no choice but to go.

John Howard, I hear, has expressed contempt for Labor's position in his recent book

and has described his sleepless nights in the lead-up to Gulf War II. Let me simply say this: I sleep well at night, comfortable in the knowledge that Labor stuck true to a principled position which has stood the test of time. Unlike Afghanistan, no-one ever argued that our support in Iraq was required because of the US alliance. Let me remind the House, in this context, of my words to President Bush here in this chamber on 23 October 2003—the words that I uttered as leader of the party. Those words were as true then as they are today:

... Australia looks to itself; to the self-reliance of a proud, a free, a strong and an independent people ... Our commitment to the alliance remains unshakable, as does our commitment to the war on terror. But friends must be honest with each other.

And I said:

Of course, on occasions, friends do disagree—as we did, on this side, with you on the war in Iraq.

Beyond the alliance issue, Labor consistently argued that al-Qaeda's centre of gravity was Afghanistan, not Iraq. Australia allowed itself to be diverted into Iraq—the wrong war and the wrong decision for the wrong reasons. It was Afghanistan that needed to be the focus of the war on terror, not Iraq.

Despite compelling evidence that the real threat to Australia's national security interests lay with al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Howard government shifted its focus to Iraq. In pursuing the goal of forming the coalition of the willing, we downgraded our presence in Afghanistan to a solitary lieutenant colonel. We paid a price in Afghanistan, not just in terms of lost time but in terms of the resurgence of the Taliban, and we have been playing catch-up ever since.

When the Howard government realised its folly and decided to deploy special forces to Afghanistan in September 2005, Labor extended bipartisan support to that deployment.

It was not before time that Australia returned its focus to Afghanistan and to the rebuilding of a fragile nation. We also welcomed the decision to replace the Special Forces Task Force with the Reconstruction Task Force in September 2008 and, again, we supported the subsequent redeployment of the Special Operations Task Group to Oruzgan province in 2007.

Neither the Australian people nor the people of Afghanistan should be in any doubt that Australia will see this mission through. We will not turn our backs on Afghanistan. We will continue to fight against the Taliban and their message of false hope for the Afghan people. We will continue to rebuild Afghanistan and continue our efforts to improve the quality of life for Afghans. Australia has compelling national interests in Afghanistan. We must deny sanctuary to terrorists who have threatened and killed Australian citizens, we must prepare the Afghan people to take control of their destiny and of course we must honour our commitment to the United States and our international partners in the Afghan mission.

We are not blind to the awful price to be paid for our mission in Afghanistan. No mother or father should have to tend the grave of their son or daughter. We know that 21 young Australians have lost their lives in Afghanistan and we know that, sadly, the toll of young lives is still likely to grow. Like many in this place I could not help but be moved by the tears shed by Andrew Wilkie in his emotional tribute to the fallen in Afghanistan. We cannot presume to measure the grief of those who have lost their sons in the service of our country, but we can and will honour their sacrifice.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (1.05 pm)—I was impressed by the speeches of both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Rather than repeating their

words I am seeking today to add to the debate. The men and women of the RSL declare in their motto that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. These men and women, who have risked their lives for our country, have themselves defined the regrettable justification for war. The liberty that the RSL talks of is not limited to freedom within Australia. It extends beyond our borders and to those beyond our community.

In Oruzgan province in Southern Afghanistan our presence is helping to protect and encourage the liberty of the Afghan people. We are helping to build a nation that can control its streets, feed its people, educate its community and deliver liberty to the oppressed. We are helping good people to live beyond the moment and to lay the foundations for a better quality of life—for both men and women.

Afghanistan is a heavily tribalised country and so building a sense of patriotism among Afghans has never been an easy task. Like the people of many areas of Central Asia and the Middle East, many Afghans do not see their first loyalty as being to the central government, particularly if they live in a remote village and only occasionally hear news from Kabul. For many Afghans, most notably in areas in the south and on the border with Pakistan, their first loyalty is to their tribe, their second is to their family, their third is to their religion and somewhere after that they occasionally may have some degree of loyalty to their country. This is where the Taliban gains its power and influence. By asserting control at the local level it has been able to delegitimise nation building and further undermine the tenuous control of the central government. This has led renowned Australian counterinsurgency strategist and confidant of General Petraeus, David Kilcullen, to comment:

The Afghan government is not being out-fought, they are being out-governed.

By asserting a system of control, albeit an authoritarian one, the Taliban has leveraged off the power of tribal communities—tribal communities that are traditionally aligned not with the Taliban but with whomever can best protect their communities. Kilcullen observes further:

Ninety percent of the people you call ‘Taliban’ are actually tribals. They’re fighting for loyalty or Pashtun honor, and to profit their tribe. They’re not extremists. But they’re terrorized by the other 10 percent: religious fanatics, terrorists, people allied to the Taliban leadership shura in Quetta—the equivalent of a Taliban parliament but not quite—

They’re afraid that if they try to reconcile, the crazies will kill them. To win them over, first you have to protect their people, prove that the extremists can’t hurt them if they come over to your side.

The solution therefore has to involve creating a situation where Afghans feel as if they have a stable civil environment in which to operate. As we found out during the surge in Iraq, this can only be done with a strong military presence that defends the civilian population and builds relationships with everyone from local religious leaders to the young people most vulnerable to Taliban recruitment. An environment needs to be created where the new generation of young Afghan leaders can step up to the plate, democratically assume control and start governing themselves. This goes to the heart of Australia’s modest and sustainable military commitment to Afghanistan.

I am, in part, a member of this place to provide opportunities to my children and grandchildren. For young people in Afghanistan, particularly teenagers, the opportunities we take for granted are non-existent. For a 15-year-old growing up in a remote village, who has never had the chance to go to school, to read or write either his native language or Arabic, the opportunity to pick up a

Kalashnikov, strap it to his back and shoot at both Afghan and foreign soldiers is immense. For all their failings, the Taliban are providing opportunities where the Afghan government is not—opportunities that will enshrine extremist and totalitarian beliefs among the next generation. Young Afghans are asking themselves ‘What is the central government doing for me?’ and coming up with nothing.

Young people are not motivated to join groups because of ideology; it is out of fear and a lack of opportunity in their own lives. Many have similarly been indoctrinated by local religious leaders whose knowledge of Arabic, the language of their holy text, is often spurious. Not having the education or self-confidence to challenge these views means the doctrine of their tribal leader prevails without question. A stable Afghanistan can provide an environment where schools can be built, business can start to function and social services can be provided. Ignorance can be challenged through education, and malevolence can be undermined with opportunity. Once education and public order are present in communities right around Afghanistan, joining groups like the Taliban or a local militia looks less attractive and less appealing.

Hillary Clinton recently spoke of the three Ds of foreign policy—democracy, development and defence—so any contribution Australia makes militarily must be matched by an efficient and effective aid program. Australia’s aid program to Afghanistan has quadrupled since 2001, from \$26.5 million in 2001-02 to \$106 million in 2010-11. I was proud to be part of a coalition government that oversaw this substantial increase in aid. However, in recent years the Rudd-Gillard government has preferred to ignore our own region and strategic interests and to focus on Africa in hot pursuit of a non-permanent United Nations Security Council seat. It has

given up stability in our region for its own political goals.

This has hampered our aid program in Afghanistan and our supplementing of the work being undertaken by our military in Oruzgan province. The district is trailing most of Afghanistan's 38 provinces in crucial areas of development such as literacy, public health care and education. We can and we should do more with our aid program in Afghanistan, particularly in Oruzgan province, instead of in areas outside of our immediate strategic interests.

That Afghanistan is well within the area of Australia's strategic interests is obvious. The current makeup of the region means it is a violent incubator of terrorism—and such a threat could well harm Australia and our neighbours in the near future. Australia cannot afford Afghanistan being a hotbed of terror; more than 100 Australian civilians and military personnel have already lost their lives to terrorism in attacks by groups that—at very least—have a strong association with Afghanistan. Hambali, the former military leader of Jemaah Islamiah, was trained in and received support from Afghanistan for the Bali nightclub attacks in 2002. Afghanistan knowingly harboured al-Qaeda before 2001, under the Taliban, and they would do this again if given the chance.

Australia also has a role to play in developing new solutions to the problems of Afghanistan. All good friends offer advice—and Australians are leading the world in strategic thinking on nation building and strengthening civil society. Australia in Oruzgan province is an exemplar of the transition from an occupying force to a nation-building force. Through the provision of the First Mentoring Task Force, set with the goals of mentoring and supporting the Afghan national army in addition to providing training in essential industries, the contribu-

tion that is made by Australian soldiers will remain long after the troops leave. The unit conducts fixed steel and concreting, plumbing and basic construction skills courses and includes a mobile training school offering courses to local nationals in specific vocational areas. In a country where there is a lack of basic skills in construction and secondary industries, this kind of program is sorely needed.

The Afghan government has been disappointing in not creating the conditions where a viable stable democracy can be found. My faith in the Karzai regime, and indeed my faith in our presence in Afghanistan, was sorely tested by President Karzai's affirmation of the Shia family law that amounted to legitimising marital rape among Afghanistan's considerable Shiite community. It sadly reinforced unfair cultural stereotypes of the Islamic faith that so many millions of Muslims, from Afghanistan to Indonesia, have aimed to dispel. Thankfully, he declared the approval a mistake. However, my desire to see an Afghanistan where this kind of law is not proposed or passed outweighs my initial disgust.

The presence of Australian troops in Afghanistan should not be determined by Karzai's leadership, as it is my hope that all future governments, at all levels, will be more reflective of the Afghan population as a whole and give the people more reason to believe and trust their government. The Afghan government has been let down time and time again by the offensive actions of Hamid Karzai and his corrupt and incompetent administration.

Karzai's reaction to domestic and international criticism has been truly heinous and is in direct contradiction of the values that our troops in Afghanistan are aiming to instil; however, that underscores the importance of the job we are doing and the need to stay in

rather than leave Afghanistan. We need to play our part in creating the next generation of politicians, diplomats and teachers so Afghanistan can be governed centrally, transparently and with a level of public accountability similar to that which we expect here in Australia.

Transparency International ranks Afghanistan as one of the most corrupt nations in the world, scoring it 1.3 out of a possible 10 and ranking it 179 out of 180 in its annual corruption perceptions index. This corruption needs to be rooted out of Afghanistan from the top. President Karzai has had his fair share of allegations levelled against him about his own behaviour, but the inability of his government to tackle corruption is of more concern. A United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime survey released earlier this year revealed that an overwhelming 59 per cent of Afghans view public dishonesty as a bigger concern than insecurity and unemployment. This concern has largely been ignored by the central government in Kabul. As suggested by Gretchen Peters, a recognised authority on Afghanistan and the opium trade, the problem of poppy trade corruption is worse within the Afghan government than within the Taliban.

Afghanistan's greatest asset is its people. While military metrics may not be achieved at a speedy rate, the optimism of the people, especially the young population, is admirable. This is a testament to the increased troop numbers, a greater global focus and a healthy degree of scepticism and debate about the conflict, both in Afghanistan and abroad. Earlier this year, 70 per cent of Afghans surveyed by the Afghan Centre for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research said that they thought Afghanistan was generally heading in the right direction—that is up 30 per cent on the same poll done the previous year. The economy, poverty and jobs took over as the biggest problems facing Afghani-

stan this year, and access to basic services such as electricity and medical care is getting better, although there is still room for improvement. Fifty-two per cent of Afghans said that they had good access to medical care—a seven per cent increase on the previous year.

The commitment of successive American governments to protect not just their own liberty but also the liberty of others is unparalleled. If the Americans can show their mission in Afghanistan is necessary and productive, as I believe they have, we have a duty to stay the course and to help our mate. The relationship between Australia and the United States is more than just an agreement or a treaty; it is a friendship forged in the blood of our young. More than 100,000 young Americans are buried in the sand between here and Japan. They fought and died for our freedom as much as they did for their own. Similarly, when 340 Australians died in Korea, when 521 Australians died in Vietnam and when two Australians died in Iraq, we fought with our American mates when so many others had abandoned them or chosen not to fight.

We in Australia need a strong America that shares our values, our aspirations and our security needs. America was instrumental in helping us in East Timor, and on a daily basis we shared intelligence and technology that helped ensure our security in a big and at times unpredictable region. The synergy of vision and values between Australia and the US is undeniable. We share a common view that opportunity is the key to individual success, that democracy is the best way to achieve an active society and that no one—no matter their sex, race, religion or colour—can be denied basic human rights such as education, the right to vote and free speech. Australia must be there until the job is done. It is painful, it is difficult, it is try-

ing, but liberty and security have no time limits. They require eternal vigilance.

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (1.21 pm)—I noticed that the member for North Sydney made a comment towards the end of his speech that Australia must stay in Afghanistan until the job is done. One of the difficulties of this debate has been to define what that job is. A number of people in my electorate—I do not know if it is a majority or not—have questioned some of the words that have been used in this building over the last week, such as what ‘staying the course’ means and what the job is that apparently needs to be done. I am sure the member for North Sydney has a view of what that means, but it probably would be useful if the parliament, when we attempt to explain our presence in Afghanistan, explain what the job is and when we believe it will be completed. Many people in this place are presenting fairly open-ended arguments at the moment about the course and the job. As politicians, we create open-ended arguments from time to time so that, when we do make a political decision to adjust our policy positions, we can fabricate a design around a job or a course that has been completed.

Many of us would attach some significance to some of the utterances coming out of Afghanistan and out of Australia, the US and other parts of the world that discussions may well take place between the Taliban and traditional enemies the Afghan government and the Americans—and the Australians, I presume—to see if there is a way of solving this particular dilemma that the Russians spent so many years trying to solve and to see if talk rather than bullets can actually solve the problem. In that case, ‘staying the course’ may well be a political course rather than a combative course, and one would hope that it does have some legs. Personally, I am a bit sceptical about that. Dealing with some of the people whom we are dealing

with over there, and looking at the terrain they are in and the tribal backgrounds that many people have mentioned, is going to make it very, very difficult to superimpose some sort of American or Australian democracy over a nation where tribal backgrounds, hatreds and various positions go back hundreds and hundreds of years. Nonetheless, we are attempting to resolve some of the issues there.

One of the saddest things I have had to do as a member of parliament was to attend a ceremony in Sydney which was a memorial service to recognise the death of a constituent, Michael Fussell. I also attended his funeral in Armidale, which was a very sad experience. I got to see the camaraderie between the people he served with and the way they regarded his parents, his family and the man himself. In a sense, even though it was a tragic death and obviously everyone was very upset about it, it was a celebration of his life and something I will always remember. Michael Fussell died in Afghanistan. He is one of 21 Australians now who have died there. He died supporting his mates, defending what he believed was the right thing to do. He served where his nation asked him to serve.

I would like to pay honour and my great respect to his parents, Ken and Madeline—and I am sure on behalf of all the people in the electorate who still feel for them—on the loss of their son. I would also like to compliment the former Prime Minister and the former Leader of the Opposition—Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull—for the way in which they conducted themselves, particularly when they met Michael’s parents and some of his comrades. The general public tends to be critical of our leaders from time to time—and occasionally they probably need it—and critical of politicians, and we probably all deserve it from time to time too. But those people conducted themselves in a

very sincere way in recognising the tragic loss of a young person who had served this nation, and I compliment both of them for the way in which they acted on that occasion. I am sure that the current Prime Minister and the current opposition leader have conducted themselves in the same fashion at the various funerals that they have had to attend.

I am pleased that there is a debate on this war, because I was one of those who felt that the Australian public should have had a greater engagement in the declaration of the last war, the Iraq conflict. As you would remember, Mr Deputy Speaker, Australia declared war in Iraq prior to the debate about whether we should participate in the Iraq war had even taken place. I think that debate was just starting when we declared war and a lot of people resented that a declaration had taken place before the people's representatives had had anything to say on the issue. The former Prime Minister, John Howard, used as a precedent the fact that Bob Hawke had not consulted the parliament over the first Iraq conflict. That is all very well. Though I do not agree with that process, it is as it may be. But I think it is appropriate that we have a debate. I have listened to a lot of the contributions in this debate because it is important that the Australian people have their representatives voice their views in the parliament about this particular conflict.

The issue in my electorate revolves around whether people believe we should stay the course in Afghanistan or not. As the representative of the people of New England—and I have not had an enormous amount of mail on this particular issue—I would have to say that the majority of people who have actually taken the time to communicate with me or my office believe that we should not be in Afghanistan for some great period, and some believe that we should be removing our troops from Afghanistan as quickly as possible. Staying the course may

well mean that we do have an early exit in some shape or other, particularly if political negotiations actually do start to make some progress. I may well get more communication from people within my electorate after having just made that comment, but by far the majority of people in the electorate who have taken the time to comment on this issue, who have great regard, as I think we all should, for the troops who have served and are currently serving there, believe—and some quite strongly—that, on balance, we are better out of Afghanistan and should not remain there for some great period.

So, in some ways I disagree with the Prime Minister's comments that put a decade time line on participation, with not a lot of substance to how that time line was arrived at. I know that a number of speakers have spoken about the non-military side of assistance in Afghanistan. As someone who has farmed in dry areas and has given a little bit of technical assistance to some very dry parts of the world in the past, I think there are a number of things we can do. A number of speakers have spoken about health care. Showing that we actually do care for the people is a good thing, but we can assist with their agriculture—particularly in Afghanistan, a very harsh and rugged environment. Obviously a lot of the historical conflict has involved various warlords and tribal leaders and access to various products and markets that make some wealthy and others poor. In a lot of cases the traditional farmer, in some parts of Afghanistan, if not all, has been at the lower end of the wealth spectrum and has been terrorised to a certain degree by certain warlords from time to time.

So I would support agricultural assistance and other forms of assistance into the future. However, I would argue that if there is a way to avoid a convoluted conflict that drags on and on and on, as has occurred in other parts of the world in recent memory, we as a na-

tion will have to really explain, in a much better way, why we persist in being involved in this conflict.

I will conclude my remarks—and I know there are a number of people who want to speak before question time—by saying that if anybody in the electorate is interested in this topic, I would be very interested in receiving their messages. But by far the majority of people who have contacted me would argue that the quicker we are out of Afghanistan the better.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (1.34 pm)—I am pleased to be here today to make a contribution to this debate on our involvement in Afghanistan. I welcome the debate, but I will begin by saying that our Australian troops are heroes. They not only are heroes at home but are respected by allied forces across the globe as the best in the business. They work hard, they act compassionately and professionally and they represent our country with both pride and distinction. Australian troops have put their lives at risk in this conflict. Those fallen are not forgotten, and the 21 soldiers who have paid the highest price in being killed in action in Afghanistan certainly have not been forgotten by this grateful nation. Another 151 have been wounded, predominantly by IEDs. Wearing an armed services uniform is the most honourable and the toughest way to serve your nation. Our troops in Afghanistan have done admirably.

The real question in this debate is: should we be there? I will answer that question with two reasons we should be there. First of all is the ANZUS alliance. Australia is a member of the ANZUS alliance, and proudly so. The alliance has served us well since the Second World War. We have heard other speakers say that the role of the United States in conflict in other areas of the world is not one that they necessarily agree with, but this alliance has served Australia well. In this thea-

tre, in the Southern Hemisphere, the United States is our greatest strategic friend. But we cannot be a friend who turns on and off our affection or, in this case, turns on and off our support to our coalition or alliance partner. As one who has been into the Middle Eastern zone on a military deployment—dare I say with yourself, Mr Deputy Speaker Slipper—I will say that we noticed the Americans in action. They do the heavy lifting in these areas.

There is a coalition in Afghanistan. A lot of people in the electorate quite mistakenly think that there are just a few nations involved in this UN force that has been invited to Afghanistan by the Afghan government and sanctioned by the UN. It is not just the United States, it is not just Britain and it is not just Canada and Australia. There are more than 46 nations involved.

I will list some of the countries whose participation might possibly surprise people listening, even those from my electorate. There are about 740 Turkish troops; Georgia contributes 925; Denmark contributes 730; Belgium contributes 575; Bulgaria, a former Eastern bloc country, contributes 540; and the Czech Republic in the same vein contributes 500. I could go on. More than 40 nations contribute to this action. Australia has responsibility in Oruzgan province and we are doing the job exceptionally well.

I was very pleased to note that the Prime Minister, in her contribution to this debate, committed her government to staying the course. Without going to the exact words, she said something to the effect that it could take a decade. Yes, it may well take a decade to achieve the goals of this operation. We are pleased that this debate has fleshed out the real feeling of the Australian government and its representatives about our commitment to this operation.

I know that there are different points of view. On our side of the House, there are different points of view. We have also heard the high profile points of view of the member for Denison and the member for Melbourne on this. I find the Greens policy on this issue very concerning. For example, the Greens believe that we should not be involved in any conflict but should have good faith negotiations instead of a military solution. Can you imagine? The terrorists would laugh their heads off at the idea of us sitting down and having a good faith negotiation with them—them with a Kalashnikov in hand and us with an olive branch. It just does not happen that way. There is a saying that goes, ‘Evil prospers when good men do nothing.’ They rely on us being a soft touch. The Greens policy on this just does not hold up. As part of their policy, the Greens also want us to withdraw from the ANZUS alliance, which would have dangerous implications and ramifications for Australia.

Should we be there? Yes. We are a member of the ANZUS alliance and it is our duty, with the other alliance members, to do our job. The second reason why we should be there is because we need to make sure that Afghanistan does not become a failed state. It was heading towards becoming a failed state when al-Qaeda started using it after the Russians had left due to essentially being defeated. Al-Qaeda decided that it was a good terrorist training ground. That was becoming a concern. We know that 9-11 precipitated strong views on the role of al-Qaeda in terrorist actions all around the world. These sorts of failed states, which were being used as terrorist training grounds, required strong action.

If you think that it does not affect Australia, while Afghanistan is a long way away, the long arm of al-Qaeda reached as close to home as Indonesia in the attacks in Bali in which 88 Australians were killed and in the

bombing of our embassies. Last week, our security experts confirmed in a briefing that they are continually monitoring terrorist threats to Australia. Let us not think that because we have not had a terrorist attack on Australian soil that their intentions are not those of ill will.

We are there to help this nation by both training their forces and providing security. Our soldiers are doing a fantastic job in training both the civil police and the military and enabling them to eventually reach self-determination. One of the greatest thing that has happened in Afghanistan—and this is true even though we do not like the fact that there appears to be a good deal of corruption in the leadership and appeared to be corruption in the recent elections—is that they are now trying to head towards a democratic solution rather than a military one or a solution in which the terrorists and the militants take over.

Australia has about 1,550 personnel based in Afghanistan. There are about another 800 deployed within the Middle East. This contribution is one that we are very proud of as a member of a team of 40-plus other nations. Progress in this region is very tenuous. Pakistan has their own security issues with terrorist groups. Somalia is an area of concern for the rest of the world. We have good knowledge of the marshalling of terrorist groups in Yemen. Australia must stand firm by its commitment.

In a recent battle—one that was highlighted because of the emails sent afterwards—a force of about 40 Australian and Afghan troops took on a force of about 80 to 100 Taliban. It was not one of our best victories; it certainly was not a Long Tan type victory, where a small group held off a large group. As the emails have pointed out, our resourcing was not the best that it could have been. We need to address that. There are

concerns. I know that there has been much debate on this, so I will not go into it explicitly. One of the things that we cannot rely on is omnipresent American and other air support. We need our own hardware—helicopters et cetera—to make sure that we have the necessary support.

Australian troops are in Oruzgan in both a training and a security role. The only way that we are going to win this war is by winning the hearts and minds of the locals. The hearts and minds of the locals will only be won if we provide them with another way—a better way—of living their lives and operating their communities. We are helping to provide education and health infrastructure. We are helping them with alternative crops to poppies—the poppy seems to be the cash crop of the nation. We are moving them to real agriculture, providing irrigation et cetera so that they can move to alternatives. These are real ways to indicate to the locals that we want to help them move Afghanistan away from being a violent environment.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour. The honourable member for Canning will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

(Quorum formed)

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Electorate of Forrest: Bushfires

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (1.47 pm)—I rise to bring to the attention of the House the issue of extreme bushfire risk in my electorate of Forrest, in the south-west of Western Australia. This is the headline in our local paper: ‘Disaster Looms: extreme conditions spark fears of horror fire season’. That is very true in my south-west. We have had a very dry winter and, in fact, our irrigation farmers in the south-west will be receiving only 34 per cent of their water allocation. According to

the Western Australian Fire and Emergency Service, the current summer presents serious risks of fire. FESA has said in local media:

“Each year we look at a number of indicators to help predict the outlook for the coming season and this year the conditions are the worst we could expect ...

The season is ahead by six weeks and we have already seen some burn offs get quickly out of control because it is so dry out there.

The widespread drought in the west means both soil and vegetation moisture levels are low, making fire both more likely to start and spread faster. The risk has been made immediately apparent by a recent fire in Nannup, which was in fact a controlled burn by state authorities which jumped containment lines. A combination of strong winds, dry conditions and heavy fuel loads saw these fires burn out of control for some time. These conditions will be prevalent throughout the south-west land division this summer. I urge all of my constituents to be prepared.

Electorate of Fremantle: Baha’i Community

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (1.49 pm)—I wish to speak today about an issue that is of immense concern to the Baha’i community in Australia and in my own electorate of Fremantle—that is, the ongoing plight of the seven Baha’i community leaders who have been imprisoned in Iran since early 2008. These Baha’i leaders were held in temporary detention without charge for 20 months until their trial began on 12 January 2010 on charges, including espionage and propaganda activities, against the Islamic order. The charges were categorically denied. However, in August this year, all seven were sentenced to 20 years in prison, which sentence was subsequently reduced to 10 years, in September, without explanation.

Baha’is living in Iran have experienced a pattern of systematic, government sponsored

persecution since 1979, including discrimination, extreme acts of violence and sometimes death. Baha'is have been persecuted simply for the faith they follow, notwithstanding that freedom of religion is part of the Iranian constitution. The former member for Denison, the Hon. Duncan Kerr, and I raised this and other human rights issues with the Iranian Ambassador to Australia. Iran can be assured that the international community is watching intently the cases involving the seven Baha'i leaders and that of Sakineh Ashtiani, who is still facing the death penalty. I will continue to pursue these matters closely on behalf of my many Baha'i constituents living in East Fremantle, Fremantle, Cockburn and Melville and on behalf of people everywhere who believe in justice and human rights.

**Electorate of Cowan: Hawker Park
Primary School**

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (1.50 pm)—On Saturday night, 23 October, I attended the Hawker Park Primary School quiz night. It was a fun and enjoyable evening and around \$3,600 was raised for P&C priorities, such as air-conditioning and priorities of teachers within the school. As we know, quiz nights are great fundraisers, but to organise the prizes and deliver that fun, enjoyable evening can be very challenging. It was achieved very well on the night. I congratulate the committee, which included Fiona Kiely, Donna Odom-Moss, Amanda Ottey, Rachel Anastas, Lee Barnard, Mandy Barnard, Donna Hirst, MC Justin Kiely and question master Paul Anastas. It was a fun event. There were 20 tables; the place was completely packed. The school community and the wider community within my home suburb of Warwick rose to the occasion and everyone enjoyed the evening and, in the end, the best team won!

Housing Industry Association

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (1.51 pm)—On Saturday night I attended the Housing Industry Association-CSR Housing Awards for the ACT and Southern New South Wales. I would like to thank the association for including me in the event at the National Convention Centre. Canberra is suffering from a skills shortage in nearly every area, but particularly in the trades. These awards celebrate the achievements of the housing industry and, most importantly, apprentices and their host trainers.

These awards acknowledge the great work done by our architects, builders and interior designers in building quality, sustainable housing and renovations from \$15,000 to over \$900,000. Congratulations to the apprentices of the year: to Brendan O'Toole, for winning the Outstanding Apprentice of the Year; to Ruari Taylor, for winning the Most Improved Apprentice for the third and fourth years; to Jackson Nugent, for winning the Most Improved Apprentice for the first and second years; and to Chris MacKenzie for winning the Apprentice of the Year for the first and second years.

I would also like to extend my congratulations to the Host Trainer of the Year, Michael Patt. Time is money in business. I commend you for investing your time and expertise into training and mentoring young Canberrans. You are making a significant contribution to the future of the building industry in Canberra and to Australia's future, so thank you. I hope the awards encourage more young Canberrans to become apprentices and more businesses to become host trainers.

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (1.52 pm)—I rise today to support the farmers in the debate on Murray-Darling water management. I rise to speak about the farmers who have been the fall guys for bad state government

decisions in the past and who do not want to be for bad federal government decisions in the future. Everyone, especially the farmers, knows that state governments have over-allocated water resources; however, in the Living Murray debate in 2003, three options were put on the table to save our river system. The science-recommended 1,500 giga-litre reduction was the highest option and was considered the optimum for the environment. Just seven years on the Murray-Darling Basin Authority has recommended that 7,000 giga-litres, or five times that recommendation, is required. How can our rural communities put any faith in the science? The confidence of the community in the Labor government is shattered. Is it any wonder that the banks are looking to change their banking practices in these communities? They have been hung out to dry by the Labor-Greens alliance. That Labor-Greens alliance is driving the debate far beyond anything that was ever envisaged when the Murray-Darling Basin Authority was first mooted, when it was ever given the task of dealing with our river system.

Greenway Electorate: Wentworthville Pool

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (1.54 pm)—With summer fast approaching I rise to draw to the attention of the House a proposal of Holroyd City Council, which covers parts of my electorate, to build a new swimming pool on the outskirts of Greystanes, which will be funded by closing three existing pools, including Wentworthville Pool.

Over the past few weeks many residents have contacted my office to complain about that council's plan to close Wentworthville Pool. I share these concerns and I am taking up the fight to reverse this terrible action. Wentworthville Pool is a great place to spend the summer months. It would be a terrible shame to lose such a great community facil-

ity. As a former councillor and Deputy Mayor of Blacktown City Council, I am astounded by the short-sightedness of Holroyd Council. Many residents use the pool on a daily basis during summer. They are outraged at the prospect of losing their pool. They rightly feel that a pool on the outskirts of Greystanes is too far out of the way. Residents in Pendle Hill, Toongabbie and Girraween will be terribly disadvantaged.

One swimming centre to replace three would also cause problems for booking times for schools that need to use the pool and hold learn-to-swim classes for our young people, who will now be competing for resources at the busiest times of the year. With the support of Wentworth Leagues Club president, Peter Bain, and Holroyd city councillor Vasee Rajadurai, I have launched a petition to keep Wentworthville Pool open. Residents in my electorate who use the pool can be assured I will work with them and fight keep our local pool open.

Riverina Electorate: Floods

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (1.56 pm)—Beef cattle producer Walter Paton, at 85 years of age, has lived all of his life at Tooma, in the Tumbarumba Shire, in the Riverina electorate. In all of those years he has never experienced a flood quite as devastating as the one that swept through the district on Friday, 15 October. Brought about by continual, steady rain it was far worse than any previous flood in Walter's lifetime, with far more disastrous effects than those of 1934, 1956 or 1974. Things were not helped by the breaching of the Mannus Dam and the resultant wall of water which gushed through the valley, taking with it hundreds of huge basket willow logs and branches which were, inexplicably, left lying on the ground. These trees, up to 30-metres long, had been felled, as I understand it, by Catchment Management Authority contractors in the past 12

months or so, and, as is the practice these days, left where they fell. This is said to enhance the natural environment and to enable frogs to spawn. But these tree limbs surged down the valley and smashed into the Tooma bridges, taking out the abutments and leaving communities isolated and the local council counting the cost. This was just one of many districts to be hit hard by this flood event.

I wrote seeking funding assistance to the federal government last week, and have written again to the appropriate minister today, calling for a one-off payment of \$1,000 per adult and \$400 per child to help affected families. The floods in the Riverina and Farrer electorates have taken their toll, particularly at Adelong, Culcairn, Lockhart, Tarcutta, The Rock, Uranquinty and Wagga Wagga, and I believe the government should seriously consider providing payments similar to those given after the 2009 Ingham and Coffs Harbour floods. (*Time expired*)

Newcastle Electorate: Korean Language School

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (1.57 pm)—I wish to place on the record my congratulations for the Newcastle Korean Language School, whose tenth anniversary dinner I attended a week ago. The school showcased the cultural and educational legacy that they have bestowed on the people of my electorate, performing among other things traditional songs and games, a parade of traditional costumes and a fascinating Korean drum dance.

Since the introduction of multiculturalism by the Whitlam Labor government in 1973, we on this side of the House have worked hard to develop multiculturalism into a national strategy for social inclusion and partnership based on tolerance and respect for diversity. The Newcastle Korean Language School is a tribute to these values. I note that, in recognition of the importance of our 60

years of formal relations between Korea and Australia, we have designated next year as a year of friendship between our two governments.

I commend to the House the excellent work of the Newcastle Korean Language School, particularly their chairwoman Se Ok Ohr, and all of her organising committee, and encourage them to continue to demonstrate to all Australians the wonderful social benefits of a truly multicultural Australia.

Gillard Government

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (1.58 pm)—We have seen a new economic principle opened up by the Gillard government, and that is economic comatose. We heard the previous Labor government claim to be economic conservatives, and we found that not to be true. But a new paradigm has emerged, and it is economic comatose. We see example after example where the government needs to act, and I commend my friend and colleague the shadow Treasurer's speech to the Australian Industry Group, identifying deficiencies in section 45 as it deals with collusive behaviour. I do not know what it is about Labor. They have heard over and over again from the ACCC that those collusive powers that help to ensure a competitive economy have not been up to the mark. Graeme Samuel, the head of the ACCC, has made that point over and over again. His focus may well have been on petrol pricing, and the impact of price signalling to the disadvantage of consumers, but the opposition Treasury spokesperson has made it clear that this also has relevance in the banking industry. We look further and we see areas such as the consumer law, about to be introduced on 1 January, yet no-one knows what that the regulations will ultimately look like. How is the Australian economy, particularly small business, expected to get a go when these guys just don't care?

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 pm, in accordance with standing order 43 the time for members' statements has concluded.

PINK RIBBON DAY

The SPEAKER—The Minister for Health and Ageing, on indulgence.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (2.00 pm)—I want to make a very brief statement about it being Pink Ribbon Day today. I would like to make that statement on behalf of the government but I imagine on behalf of the whole House, that we would encourage the efforts of fundraising organisations which are fighting to find a cure for cancer. Breast cancer alone affects 12,000 women every year and this year will be no different: 12,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. The work of the Cancer Council, the Breast Cancer Foundation, the Breast Cancer Network and many others helps us raise money to fight this very serious disease. I want to encourage all Australians to get behind this and other worthy causes to reduce the burden of such cancers and diseases. Many members are wearing the pink ribbon today. Everyone who does so is raising funds for this vital cause.

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson, on indulgence.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (2.01 pm)—I join with the health minister and associate the opposition with those remarks. Some \$5 million will be raised right around the country, which is an incredible effort. All of us in one way or another have been impacted by somebody that we know that has breast cancer, and it is a huge problem in Indigenous communities as well, particularly in terms of diagnosis, and that is something that we need to improve on as a country. I would also like to say to all those people around the country who are fundraising, putting events together, that it is a very worthy cause. To all of the officials who are involved in the coordina-

tion of the fundraising efforts, it is a great credit to you. A bright note is that the treatment is much improved in recent years and the survival rates post-diagnosis have improved. That is a great credit to our country but with so much more work to be done.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Asylum Seekers

Mr ABBOTT (2.02 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind the Prime Minister that the Canadian government has just introduced five-year temporary protection visas to deal with an influx of some 500 asylum seekers. Given that 5,500 illegal boat people have arrived this year, including four boat in just four days, why won't the Prime Minister reintroduce temporary protection visas? The policy worked before and it can work again.

Ms GILLARD—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I am aware of the changes being contemplated by the Canadian government. In fact, they sought some advice from our very own immigration officials as they put together this suite of changes. If the Leader of the Opposition were to be honest and accurate and detailed with this parliament and went through it change by change, what he would recognise is that the Canadian government have gone for a different mix of measures. For example, in some areas they have taken a different approach. In this country we have mandatory detention, we deal with people's processing to finality, whereas my understanding of the Canadian approach is that they are going to put a one-year time limit on such detention. So there are differences. But we here in Australia need to make the decisions that we believe are in our nation's interest, that are the most effective range of policies, and we need of course to implement solutions for the long term, which is why as a government we are working on the regional protection frame-

work and regional processing centre. It is why we have announced our long-term strategy for detention. It is why we have announced some new arrangements for children.

I am yet to understand with any precision or clarity where the opposition stands on those changes. If the Leader of the Opposition was being honest about this, rather than making simplistic comparisons with only one aspect of the new Canadian proposals, what he would actually be saying to the Australian people is that this is a complex problem, there is no one policy measure that provides the solution and there is certainly no three-word slogan that does.

Health Services

Mr CHEESEMAN (2.05 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. How and why is the government reforming our health and hospital system to deliver better quality, more accessible health services?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Corangamite for his question. I know that he is deeply interested in health services for his local community and I have had the opportunity in the past to visit with him the GP superclinic that serves his community. For members of the parliament who are interested in meeting the healthcare needs of their local communities, and I do hope that that is all of us, I want at this stage to draw the parliament's attention to the fact that this week parliament will have the opportunity to deal with a piece of legislation which is the foundation stone of our historic health reforms.

When we came to government in 2007, we inherited a situation where Australia was short of doctors, it was short of nurses, and the federal government's share of hospital funding had fallen from 45 per cent in 1996 to 38 per cent in 2007. That meant when you look across our health system we were basically short of everything that is needed to run

a health system: doctors, nurses and money. A step at a time we have worked to address that situation. We entered into new health-care agreements which increased by 50 per cent the funding flowing from the federal government to state governments. We have implemented measures to train more doctors, to make sure we are seeing more nurses and health care professionals generally available for our health system. Indeed, this morning I had the opportunity with the Minister for Health and Ageing to visit some young professionals getting clinical experience at the University of Canberra, and it was terrific to see them doing that work and getting that experience.

But to ensure that our healthcare system can provide the kind of quality and services that Australians expect for the long term we need to do more. We need to reform health care. We know our society is ageing; we know the burden of chronic disease is becoming increasingly heavy. If we are to meet those future burdens on the healthcare system, we need to have healthcare reform, which is why the legislation coming before the parliament this week is so important. It is pivotal to putting in place a situation where, for the long term, the federal government steps up to being the majority funder of hospitals—meeting 60 per cent of the efficient price of hospital services—and steps up to a similar role in respect of capital. The new legislation is pivotal to achieving a situation where the federal government steps up to 100 per cent of primary care. It is pivotal to achieving a situation where there is transparency about healthcare funding, both what flows from the federal government and from state governments, so we are no longer in a situation where people fear that an increase from the federal government is met with a matching decrease from state government funds. When the Leader of the Opposition was Minister of Health and Ageing, he used

to sometimes muse on health reform and say that he was attracted to the Commonwealth taking a bigger share and ensuring transparent standards for Australian hospitals. He never got anything done, but he has the opportunity to do something now and that is not to stand in the way of this piece of legislation.

Asylum Seekers

Ms JULIE BISHOP (2.08 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the statement by the Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship in Senate estimates that it is the government's intention to draw asylum seekers into her proposed regional processing centre in East Timor from 'beyond the region'. How many of the 18 million people, defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as a population of concern beyond the Asia-Pacific, will be eligible to be transferred to the Prime Minister's regional processing centre?

Ms GILLARD—I hope I get the opportunity now to explain to the House what I would have thought was a fairly simple concept. People around the globe get on the move for all sorts of reasons. Some of them come from source countries that are within our region; some do not. They transit through our region and people are aware of the common stopping-off points as they move through our region seeking forward transit and ultimately transit to Australia. The aim of the regional processing centre is to take away the incentive to engage in that forward transit to Australia. It is to take away from people smugglers the very product that they sell. It is to take away from people an incentive to keep moving, and it is certainly there to take away an incentive for people to undertake a difficult and dangerous journey at sea. For the opposition to try and create some nonsense campaign that somehow this is

about creating a processing centre for everyone who is on the move around the world is obviously laughable and absurd.

Anybody who has engaged even in the most cursory examination of this issue would know that people move in an irregular fashion around our globe. They go to Europe; obviously they go to Canada—we have just talked about that; some engage in transit in our region; and a far smaller number engage in forward transit to Australia. The aim of the regional processing centre is to take away the incentive for that continued forward transit and to take away from people smugglers the very product that they sell. I understand that this area of policy is complex and it requires determination, but what I can definitely say to this House is that it will never be solved by a three-word slogan. It will never be solved by the Leader of the Opposition's boat-phone idea, and I doubt it will ever be solved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who stood next to the foreign minister of Nauru, talked about the Nauru detention centre and then said the people of Vanuatu had been very generous in assisting the Australian people. From lessons in geography, let me tell you that Nauru is not a subset of Vanuatu. I would suggest to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition she gets out a map of the region and has a good look.

Ms JULIE BISHOP—Mr Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. I refer to the Prime Minister's answer. Will the Prime Minister confirm whether Pakistan and Iran will be eligible to send asylum seekers to her regional processing centre in East Timor?

Ms GILLARD—Countries do not send asylum seekers. Either the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has just revealed a complete misunderstanding of this area of policy or she is deliberately trying to confuse Australians about why people get on the move. People get on the move for a variety of rea-

sons—some of them fleeing war, some of them fleeing poverty, some of them fleeing persecution and some of them engaging in forward movement because they believe they will get better opportunity and prosperity for their families. People move for all sorts of reasons, but their countries do not send them; they get on the move. There is only a limited number who are entitled to be considered refugees under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and they are people who are fleeing persecution. To those people, as a result of our signatory of the refugee convention, we owe some special care and obligations. That signatory of the refugee convention has been bipartisan politics in this country since it was entered into.

Ms Julie Bishop—Mr Speaker, on a point of order, I specifically asked about asylum seekers in Pakistan and Iran. Are they eligible to be transferred to her processing centre in East Timor?

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister is responding.

Ms GILLARD—That is a reformulation of the question. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition talks about asylum seekers sent by Iran and other places. I am responding to that, the question originally asked rather than it reformulated in view of the error made. So the issue here of course for Australia is we do not want to see people get on boats, we do not want to see people risk their lives at sea and we do not want to see a circumstance where people smugglers have a product to sell. So the idea of the regional protection framework, the regional processing centre, the policy suite and setting here, which we are pursuing in dialogue—and of course the minister for immigration was recently visiting countries in our region, including East Timor, doing just that—is to create a circumstance where there is not an incentive for that forward transit. The government will con-

tinue to pursue these policies. We will continue to work through what is complex and requires an integrated policy response. What we will not ever do is succumb to the three-word slogans. What we will not ever do is pretend that a politician sitting in Sydney or Canberra somehow has a better insight into operational decisions than a commander on a patrol boat. With those words I will table an analysis of the deputy leader's geography in a doorstep on 27 July 2010—talking about Nauru and somehow she thinks it is Vanuatu.

Mr Pyne—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I would ask you to draw to the Prime Minister's attention that she should refer to members by their title.

The SPEAKER—Order! All members should refer to members by their parliamentary titles.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.16 pm)—Order! I advise the House that we have in the gallery this afternoon the Hon. Phil Goff, New Zealand's Leader of the Opposition, and the Hon. Darren Hughes, New Zealand's Chief Opposition Whip. On behalf of members I welcome them warmly.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Hospitals

Ms ROWLAND (2.17 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. What action is the government taking to implement new financing arrangements for hospitals? How have these proposals been received and what is the government's response?

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for Greenway for her question. She is a very passionate advocate for services in her electorate, including Blacktown Hospital, for which she has been campaigning for a very long time. For her community, as for many

others, the health reforms being proposed by this government give an answer for a long-held problem, which is: how do we get enough funds into our hospitals where they are needed? The bill that the Treasurer will introduce later this week into the House, to reform the federal financial relations of our health system and the way we fund them, will have a fundamental impact on communities across the country so that we are able to say for the first time that the Commonwealth is stepping up to shoulder a 60 per cent share of funding for our hospitals and that we will be paying for services directly to our hospitals without any capacity for states potentially to keep some of that money, without any handing over of block funding and no accountability for where that money will go.

The member for Greenway asked how had this proposal been received and what had the response been. Of course we have the agreement from seven states and territories to these proposed changes. We have very high-level support from the AMA, from the nurses, from professionals across the country. We actually have very high-level support from previous health ministers, even including the Leader of the Opposition. When he was the health minister, he used to argue that states should be required to publish detailed information about the specific performance of hospitals. He used to actively argue that in the medium term we needed to see a move towards activity based funding. But there has been an interesting thing since the member opposite, who is now the Leader of the Opposition, has stopped being the health minister: he has been silent on these reforms and whether the Liberal Party will support these reforms in the House. He has been absolutely silent about whether he supports a 60 per cent funding of our hospitals, whether he supports activity based funding and whether he supports doctors and nurses in local areas

having more say about how their hospital services are run and, as always, he seems to be adopting the same approach, which is to studiously ignore that this is a vital issue for the community and that the Liberal Party and the opposition will have to come to a view on whether or not they will support these changes. So I wondered whether it was because we had not put this in a way that the Leader of the Opposition found attractive, because I can tell him communities across the country want this changed; they want more support for doctors and nurses; they want their hospital services properly funded. I thought perhaps the Leader of the Opposition might be inclined to support our changes if I put it like this: Leader of the Opposition, we can stop the waste, we can pay more money to our hospitals, we can stop the need for big, new state taxes and we can open more beds, and we hope you will support us.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.16 pm)—Order! I indicate to the House that we have in the gallery this afternoon the Hon. Christian Porter, the Attorney-General of Western Australia. On behalf of members I warmly welcome him.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Asylum Seekers

Mr KEENAN (2.21 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Given that the government's regional processing centre in East Timor will only receive and process asylum seekers who enter our region, which the Prime Minister can still not define, why is the Prime Minister refusing to listen to the warning of the Indonesian government and the Indonesian director of immigration, who has described the proposal as an asylum magnet in our region?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question, and there was a certain elegance in a Western Australian asking a question after acknowledgment of the Western Australian Attorney-General, who is in the gallery. Can I say, in answer to his question, that firstly I suspect he should read the full quote of the relevant Indonesian minister, who, as it is my understanding, then goes on to talk about the major reason why people get on the move, being circumstances in their own country; that is, he is referring to the push factors.

On the regional processing centre, I understand that there are going to be a variety of views in our region, in this parliament and in the broader community as we work our way through these issues. That is to be expected on something that is complicated and something that requires a sophisticated public policy response. But the government has made its decision that it will pursue dialogue about the regional protection framework and regional processing centre. On the question of the definition of the region, can I refer the member asking the question to my *Hansard* from last week where I was asked that question and answered it.

Mental Health

Mrs D'ATH (2.23 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing. What is the government doing to improve the mental health of Australians?

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Sturt will withdraw.

Mr Pyne—I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

Mr BUTLER—I thank the honourable member for her question. While the Prime Minister has said that there is more that we need to do as a national government in mental health—and with the greatest respect, of course, she is right about that—there is much

that we are already doing. The current forward estimates include around \$1.2 billion of specific funding for mental health initiatives additional to the MBS and the PBS, which is more than double the investment made in mental health during the last four years of the Howard government.

This significant increase includes a range of new programs such as the perinatal depression plan, which recognises the critical importance for a person's long-term mental health, their lifetime mental health, of their earliest years of life. We are also rolling out the first 10 of up to 30 new Headspace sites. I have recently written to my state colleagues formally seeking their interest in partnering with the Commonwealth to develop early psychosis prevention and intervention centres in their jurisdictions. This is the first ever Commonwealth investment in the EPPIC model that has been around since the early 1990s. We also expect significant numbers of the 1,300 subacute beds committed at COAG earlier this year to be directed towards mental health. Already, we have heard from the South Australian government that around 80 per cent of their allocation will be used for step-up, step-down mental health facilities.

Labor's \$277 million suicide prevention plan announced by the Prime Minister in the election campaign will boost frontline services like Lifeline, which will be able to take tens of thousands of additional life-saving telephone calls, as well as connecting mobile phones for the first time toll free. The government will fund infrastructure to prevent suicide at notorious hot spots. Already I have met with the Woollahra local council to talk to them about fast tracking funding and getting work underway as soon as possible to fund infrastructure at the most notorious suicide hot spot in the country, The Gap at Watsons Bay in Sydney. Other elements of the plan will focus on: building resilience in our

young children through a huge expansion of the successful KidsMatter program; expanding beyondblue's very successful programs that target men, who still account for three-quarters of the nation's suicides; funding initiatives in hard-to-reach, high-risk communities like Indigenous Australia; and much, much more.

After literally decades of underinvestment and vastly different state systems, mental health reform is not easy. It requires action across a range of fronts—building resilience in our young children, supporting young Australians with emerging mental health disorders including psychosis, case managing adults who have severe and persistent mental illness and tackling the tragedy of suicide. It is a reform process that will rely heavily on the government's broader health reform agenda such as things like building a 21st century e-health system and building a much stronger primary healthcare network.

The opposition brings to this debate a hollow promise built on the dodgiest election costings in decades of election history, funded with Monopoly money and a willingness to trash some of the most fundamental primary healthcare reforms included in the health reform agenda. Labor, dare I say, brings real action.

Asylum Seekers

Mr MORRISON (2.27 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister confirm whether asylum seekers and refugees already in the region, such as, say, the Burmese in Thailand, will be eligible to be transferred to her regional processing centre in East Timor for processing and resettlement?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship was just pointing out the lack of continuity with the questions that have gone before. Can I say to the shadow

minister, who has responsibility for this matter for the opposition, we are going to work through on the regional protection framework and regional processing centre.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—I understand that the shadow minister is embarrassed to sell a three-word slogan, is still trying to recover from the humiliation of boat phone during the campaign, is wanting to do everything in this parliament to try—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will resume her seat. The interjections will cease. They prevent the chair from listening to the answer. The Prime Minister will ignore the interjections and the Prime Minister will respond to the question.

Ms GILLARD—The shadow minister is trying to do everything in this parliament to cover up their lack of a policy.

The SPEAKER—Order! I suggest that the member for Sturt take his place. I indicated to the Prime Minister that she was to respond to the question. She is two or three words in. She may have digressed, but if you want to blow your point of order now you can blow your point of order. You can be a risk-taker. I attended an opening at a certain denominational school where I indicated that I would try to show the right presence of mind to the member for Sturt. He has had it now, all right?

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—No. I would prefer to find another word somewhere down the track. The Prime Minister has the call and she will be heard in silence.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I am not sure I want to interrupt your dialogue with the member for Sturt but thank you for the call.

The SPEAKER—No, I would not go there.

Ms GILLARD—I say to the shadow minister that, obviously, we will work through all elements of the regional protection framework and the regional processing centre. But it seems to me that what is sought to be achieved here is a matter of common sense. At the moment, people believe that it is worth their while to engage in forward transit. Through creating a regional processing centre—

Mr Morrison—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order about relevance. The question was: ‘Are asylum seekers in the region eligible to be transferred to the processing centre?’

The SPEAKER—Order, the member for Cook will resume his seat.

Mr Morrison—The secretary to the department can answer—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Cook will resume his seat, and he is warned that the point of order is not an opportunity for him to debate the question or to add further information.

Ms GILLARD—On the question of the regional framework and the regional processing centre I believe the aim is obvious and clear—that is, to send a message to people who are engaged in irregular migration that there is no incentive to engage in forward transit because they will end up being processed in the same place by the same rules. From their interjections the opposition seem either to not understand this or to be engaged in grand scepticism about it. Can I suggest to them that, if they are so sceptical about this approach, they choose to seek some guidance from a former Liberal prime minister, Malcolm Fraser, who can tell them a bit about irregular people movements, a regional framework and regional processing. I suggest they make that call on the phone.

Economy

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (2.33 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the outcomes of the G20 finance ministers meeting?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member Dobell for his very important question. This morning I returned from Korea, where we have been having finance ministers meetings to prepare for the G20 leaders summit in three weeks time in Seoul. This meeting has come at a critical stage for the global economy. It was very important that the finance ministers showed a unity of purpose and achieved results, and I do believe that the meeting has achieved results. This is an important time because the global economic recovery is fragile and patchy. Because of that it is important that Australia does engage in these discussions as fully as we have been engaged in them over the last couple of years, so the G20 leaders summit meeting in three weeks time will be particularly important. Australia is not immune from what is going on in the international economy. When you have a patchy and uneven global economy, that does have implications for the Australian economy, so it was important that there was a degree of certainty and an outcome from these finance ministers meetings over the weekend.

I can tell the House that the finance ministers did agree on some fundamental reforms. In particular, we agreed on a fundamental reform of the International Monetary Fund which will be the biggest reform in the history of the International Monetary Fund. It is particularly required as we move through a period where there is a degree of uncertainty. Australia can be proud of the role that we have played over the past 18 months in seeking such fundamental reform in the IMF, along with our partners South Africa. We have played a very significant role in the

reforms that are coming forward to make sure that the IMF reflects the weight of power in the global economy and that emerging economies and other economies are more represented in the global decision-making bodies, in particular in the IMF. So greater weight has been given to developed and underrepresented economies in the IMF.

The IMF has also been given some more fiscal power to deal with crises before they occur, rather than trying to mop up the mess later on. Also, countries around the table agreed to put in place a framework for strong and balanced growth. In particular, we agreed that we should be moving towards more market determined exchange rates, and that is a very important outcome for Australia. We do not want to see the competitive devaluation of currencies that we have seen in recent months. We endorsed some fundamental reforms that have come through the work of the Financial Stability Board and the Basel committee. These are very important to financial regulation of the global banking system and they do have implications for Australia. Australia has worked very hard to ensure that the decisions taken at finance ministers level, and which will be taken at leaders level in three weeks time, reflect the unique circumstances of a country like Australia, which did not suffer from the banking collapses that occurred in many other developed economies. So these are important meetings. It is important that Australia stays engaged in this way. For the first time in our history we have had a seat at the decision-making table when it comes to global economic affairs. When all of these reforms are further signed off by the G20 leaders in three weeks time, let us hope that they will continue to ensure that the global economy remains prosperous.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.37 pm)—Before I give the call to the member for Mayo, so overwhelmed was I before by giving charity to the member for Sturt that I overlooked recognising another distinguished visitor in the gallery today. I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon, Dame Margaret Guilfoyle, a member of the other place and also an Australian government minister. She is warmly welcomed to the House today.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Asylum Seekers

Mr BRIGGS (2.37 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Last Sunday week, the Prime Minister attended a function in the Adelaide Hills in my electorate but gave no indication to the local residents that she would build a detention centre in the area. The next day, 1,300 kilometres away in Canberra, the Prime Minister announced a detention centre to be built at Inverbrackie. Why wasn't the Prime Minister upfront with Adelaide Hills residents when she was there, and why did no Labor representative attend the community protest meeting last Thursday night?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. I did visit his electorate for an important event for emergency services, and particularly some funding that we made available to them from the NBN regional initiative to enable them to have online training of volunteers—something that will be absolutely turbocharged by the NBN. Given that, I would have thought the member might be thinking about his attitudes to the NBN and the attitudes of the opposition to the NBN.

On the question of the announcement about the detention centre, that announce-

ment was made the same day the decision was made. The decision was made by cabinet that morning and then announced, obviously in accordance with a proper system of cabinet government. Cabinet made the decision and it was announced. On consultation processes, the consultation processes the government is using are the same consultation processes that have been used for a very long period of time when they relate to the use of Commonwealth land and Commonwealth facilities, which is what is under discussion here—Commonwealth land and Commonwealth facilities. As the department goes about the appropriate consultations—as they have been done for a very long period of time by this government and by other government when it comes to the use of Commonwealth facilities—I understand that community members have raised a set of concerns. Of course, the Commonwealth will be making sure community members get the full information because, clearly, whilst the member might think it is his job to fearmonger, I would actually think it is his job to get accurate information to people. So, on the question of accurate information, of course appropriate security arrangements will be made. On the question of accurate information, of course the federal government will fund and provide the necessary services so that people in the local community do not need to fear that somehow the services they rely on will then be taken away from them. That is not true. The Commonwealth will make the necessary investment to fund the required services. Of course, working with local schools and other community organisations, the Commonwealth will do what it has done in the past—which is meet the costs of education of the children involved.

I would say to the member—and it comes back fundamentally to a policy choice for the opposition—at some point the opposition need to make some policy choices about

what is a complex question. We have outlined—

Mr Briggs—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order which goes to relevance. The second part of the question was: ‘Why was there no Labor representative there on Thursday night?’

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister has the call. The earlier parts of her answer were directly relevant to the question. She should not digress with any other matters.

Ms GILLARD—Ultimately, members in this parliament face a choice on a policy question that is complex. The government has outlined a long-term strategy. It has outlined a series of arrangements about children. We are still waiting to hear from the opposition whether they endorse those series of changes about children or not. We are working through complex questions relating to a regional protection framework and regional processing centre. I say again: what we will never do is have a three-word slogan and pretend that that is an answer. We will leave that kind of cheap politics to the Leader of the Opposition.

Climate Change

Ms O’NEILL (2.42 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. Is the minister aware of any recent developments relating to the introduction of a carbon price into the Australian economy? Why is it important to the business community and households that the government takes action on climate change, and how is the government preparing to face challenges to achieving this policy certainty?

Mr COMBET—I thank the member for Robertson for her question. The government is approaching the challenge of climate change by concentrating on three areas in

particular: firstly, renewable energy; secondly, the improvement of energy efficiency in businesses and households; and, thirdly, working on the introduction of a carbon price. Of course, the introduction of a carbon price is a vital economic reform for business in this country because, without a carbon price, Australia's businesses and investors will continue to operate in an environment where there is considerable uncertainty when they are analysing alternative investment proposals.

Earlier today, nine of Australia's leading superannuation fund and funds management organisations announced plans to form a new industry panel that will be dedicated to pursuing certainty around carbon pricing. The panel consists of CEOs from some very large financial institutions, including AMP Capital Investors, BT Investment Management, AustralianSuper and a number of others. Together these nine organisations are responsible for about \$350 billion in funds under management and are extremely significant investors in the Australian equities markets. Earlier today, Mr Mark Lazberger, CEO of Colonial First State Global Asset Management, had this to say about the issue of a carbon price:

The current uncertainty surrounding carbon pricing hinders investment decision making across both emissions intensive and low emissions assets. To allow sensible long term investment decisions, the framework for pricing emissions must be resolved.

In other words, what Mr Lazberger is referring to, along with his colleagues on this panel, is that investors need to know what the carbon price is and how it will be constructed so that they can properly assess competing investment proposals not only in emissions intensive industries—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Tangney should not take the presence of the minister at the dispatch box as a catalyst for

him ignoring standing order 65(b). He is warned.

Mr COMBET—He seems to get quite excited whenever—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister should ignore interjections and interjectors.

Mr COMBET—What Mr Lazberger is saying on behalf of this investors group is that the issue of a carbon price needs resolution so that proper analysis of competing investment proposals can be carried out by major investors in our economy. A lack of a carbon price leads to investment in Australia becoming more expensive than it need be because risk has to be factored in. Households, of course, can also benefit significantly from measures the government is taking on climate change and, specifically, in the area of energy efficiency. By improving energy efficiency, families will be able to save money on their bills and achieve an outcome on the environment.

Following the release earlier this month of the report of the Prime Minister's task group on energy efficiency, the government will now engage with key stakeholders, including state and territory governments, to discuss how to take the next step forward to drive significant improvements in energy efficiency in our electricity systems, including at the domestic level. The fact is that there is one large obstacle here to making these important reforms and, in particular, on the issue of a carbon price. It is represented by the Leader of the Opposition. We have come to a position where the Leader of the Liberal Party, the Leader of the Opposition, is standing in the way of a critical economic reform that is supported by the business community, supported by major investors, and the Leader of the Opposition—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Mackellar on a point of order. Has the minister concluded?

Mr COMBET—Yes.

Asylum Seekers

Mr EWEN JONES (2.47 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the decision to locate onshore detention centres at Woodside in the Adelaide Hills and Northam in Western Australia. Will the Prime Minister rule out all other military facilities as onshore detention facilities?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. I would refer the member to the statement and information that the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and I released at the time that we announced these new detention facilities and also the arrangements for children. These are the government's plans for detention. We wanted to be transparent about a long-term strategy to undercut the fearmongering about other sites that had been going on around Australia. If the member truly wants to inform himself about this, all of the information he requires was publicly available and transparent on the day we made the statement.

Banking

Mr RIPOLL (2.49 pm)—My question is to the Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation. Why is certainty around banking regulation important and what is the government's response to comments about proposed reforms in this area?

Mr SHORTEN—I thank the member for Oxley for his question. He has shown a great deal of interest over his time in this place in improving services and certainty for consumers in the financial sector. Certainty is important because the consequences of getting certainty wrong in banking regulation can have catastrophic consequences for all Australians, as I am sure people opposite understand.

The big four banks in Australia—and many of their other colleagues—go overseas to raise a lot of their capital. Members opposite may be interested to know that that is in the order of 40 per cent of all the capital that is raised. What that means is that 40 per cent of an average Australian's mortgage is raised overseas. Of course, if overseas lenders lose confidence in the debate in Australia on banking regulation, that can have catastrophic consequences for Australian mortgage holders. I think the people opposite know where this answer is going. We all understand that, in fact, overseas lenders have been particularly sensitive in recent times following the very difficult set of circumstances which many foreign banks have experienced through the global financial crisis.

Mr Robb interjecting—

Mr SHORTEN—I always welcome the interjections of the member for Goldstein because who knows what they are going to be this week. They are very sensitive overseas to our changes in terms of banking regulation and the debate in Australia. Members opposite understand where this is going and they are not happy about it. The problems that can be caused by intemperate remarks from the opposition have a massive impact upon banking regulation. I want to know: what does the opposition have against average mortgage holders that they would jeopardise their interest rates by playing with fire? The reality is that this government, by contrast, understands the importance of banking regulation and it understands the importance of certainty. It was a Labor government who guaranteed the banks; it was a Labor government who, through the global financial crisis, ensured the settings were fair enough that we could get through it in a solid state.

Of course, the coalition shadow Treasurer very recently has said that perhaps we should—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SHORTEN—It was embarrassing. That is what the member for Wentworth said about his shadow coalition Treasurer colleague privately, and he should say it here. What happens is, when you start to talk about tinkering and regulating bank interest rates through the intervention of government regulation, you send a terrible signal overseas; you send a terrible signal to mortgage holders. The Australian mortgage market is too important to be treated with some sort of populist stunt. By contrast, you will see that the Labor government have cracked down on unfair mortgage exit fees; we have provided a better deal for Australians with credit cards; we have ensured that we will decrease the interest withholding tax. But, as much as the opposition may bicker and moan about the comments of the coalition shadow Treasurer, let us be clear: the comments of the shadow Treasurer put pressure on mortgage rates. If the opposition were ever to form a government, I have no doubt that they would replace the coalition shadow Treasurer with someone who at least understands the markets. The real issue here is that, when you talk about regulating the rates through ham-fisted intervention, you endanger all Australian mortgage holders.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, if the minister has not concluded, we would like to move an extension of time for two minutes!

The SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business has had great tolerance during the day. He is now warned! As I have reminded him—he can parrot these words—a warning is a precursor to naming.

Rural and Regional Health Services

Mr CROOK (2.54 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. With many local governments in regional Australia carrying the increasing financial burden of general practice doctor provision, would the minister please inform the House of the government's plan to address this issue?

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for O'Connor for his first question and congratulate him on his first speech, which he gave earlier today. Anyone who heard that speech would know that this question comes from a very real concern about the plight and the lack of doctors in his electorate. I know that there are many on the other side of this House, and on ours, in whose electorates there is a severe shortage of doctors and that it is causing significant problems across the country. This question comes from the member for O'Connor, who has dedicated a lot of his adult life to volunteering for the Royal Flying Doctor Service, and I am sure we will have a lot of time together to work out ways to solve what is a very serious problem.

But I can tell the member for O'Connor some good news. In this financial year, targeted rural health funding—this is for targeted rural health programs—in addition to what is paid under any of your general entitlements programs is now at \$795 million. Had the member asked this question of the Leader of the Opposition in his last year as the health minister, he would know that this is a 65 per cent increase on targeted rural health expenditure that is already flowing out into the community. This includes other investments such as the \$134 million Rural Health Workforce Strategy that we announced in the 2009 budget, which means that 500 more communities and 2½ thousand doctors are newly eligible for incentives. So, in the very many areas in O'Connor that are classified RA5, new relocation incentives of

\$120,000 are payable to GPs who move to these communities, and there are retention incentives that have been significantly increased for those who stay in those communities, of \$47,000. These are significant changes.

The member might also be interested to know—and I know that a number of other members from Western Australia have raised the issue of the number of GPs in Western Australia—that already serving are an additional 30 GPs being trained because of the investments our government made when we were first elected to office. We have since committed that we will increase those places even further, so that over the next decade there are going to be 5,500 extra GPs. I think all of us in this House need to work to ensure that those GPs go to communities where they are needed and go into practices where they are needed.

The member might also be interested that just a fortnight ago the Prime Minister and I announced the latest investments in clinical training places. Across O'Connor—in Albany, Denmark, Katanning, Narembeen—there are going to be nearly 700 additional clinical training days for doctors, nurses and allied health professionals working in rural and regional communities in the electorate. Of course, there are many, many other things that need to be done. We do not pretend that this is a problem that is already fully solved. We inherited a very severe workforce shortage and we are just now seeing extra graduates being able to graduate and be attracted to rural and regional Australia.

The member mentioned in his first speech the Leader of the Western Australian Nationals, who are in partnership with the Liberal government in Western Australia. There is more than \$350 million on the table that this government wishes to spend in Western Australia to help reform the health system. We

do not, to date, have an agreement with that Liberal government. We hope we will have one. For someone passionately interested in health coming from Western Australia, that might be a conversation that would be fruitful to have over the coming period as well.

Ms Oprah Winfrey

Mr GEORGANAS (2.58 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism. Would the minister update the House on the progress of the Oprah Winfrey project?

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I thank the member for Hindmarsh for his question. He is one of many members of the House who have expressed their support for Tourism Australia's success in attracting the *Oprah Winfrey Show* to Australia. People in the House should remember that our tourism industry at the moment is very challenged by the strength of the Australian dollar. People must appreciate that tourism is a major employer of Australians—just under one million Australians, directly and indirectly. We should also remind ourselves that tourism represents 8.3 per cent of Australia's total exports. In that context, the *Oprah Winfrey Show* is very important. Her show is viewed by over 40 million people each week in the United States and is broadcast to 145 countries globally. When she announced her willingness to come to Australia, to Australia's credit and great benefit she said that her Australian visit would represent the ultimate adventure. That is exceptionally important because Oprah has been named by *Forbes* magazine as the most important celebrity in the world. That represents a major endorsement of the Australian tourism industry.

Opposition members—What about Kevin?

The SPEAKER—The House will come to order! Those on my left seem to be easily distracted.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—At least two episodes will be filmed at the Sydney Opera House. They will go to air in the United States in January. This represents an investment by Tourism Australia of \$1.5 million. To assist the Australian tourism industry to promote its product, Tourism Australia has facilitated a pitch by each state and territory for an inclusion of their experience in the filming of the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. To date there have been expressions of interest from 3,000 product and service offers. Thousands of Australians, including many on the opposition side of the House, have sought tickets to the filming of the *Oprah Winfrey Show*.

Opposition members—Name them!

The SPEAKER—The minister will ignore the invitation to name them.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I know that the opposition does not regard tourism as an important industry. This is a major coup and I am pleased to say that, despite the global financial crisis, the North American market has proved to be very resilient for Australia. We saw 5.1 per cent growth for the period to 2009. Also, because it is related to tourism, the Shanghai world expo has been a great opportunity for Australia, with over seven million visitors to our expo site to date.

With the approach of Christmas, I remind the House that the tourism industry is doing it tough. Australia continues to have 117 million days of accumulated annual leave at this point, worth \$33 billion. I ask all Australian employers to give serious support to encouraging their workforce to have a holiday in Australia and, by doing so, to keep their mates employed.

Broadband

Mr TURNBULL (3.03 pm)—My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. If the government's aim is to provide Australians with faster broadband,

why is it requiring the NBN Co. to do a deal that will bar Telstra from providing 100 megabit per second broadband over its pay TV HFC cable network, which passes 2.7 million Australian homes?

Mr ALBANESE—As the shadow minister should know, what we are about is replacing the copper network, yesterday's network, with tomorrow's network, which is a fibre network to the home. That is why we are addressing those issues. The competition issues involved are being addressed by the ACCC, as is appropriate.

Coal Seam Gas

Ms LIVERMORE (3.04 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Will the minister update the House on his decision to approve two coal seam gas projects in Queensland? What conditions have been imposed on the projects?

Mr BURKE—I thank the member for Capricornia for the question. In 2008 there were a number of referrals for environmental approvals for projects led by Santos and QGC for coal seam gas projects in Queensland. Soon after receiving this portfolio, I travelled to Gladstone to inspect the sites and I also held meetings in Chinchilla with local government representatives and with some of the community groups that were opposed to the development. Last Friday I met the deadline that had been set for a decision under the EPBC Act and approved the projects subject to a large number of conditions. For the Santos proposal there were more than 300 conditions, for QGC there were more than 300 conditions and for the dredging project there were 52 conditions. Those conditions make sure of the essential protections which we must make—we must protect the Great Artesian Basin, we must protect the Great Barrier Reef, we must protect our waterways and our endangered species.

Mr Bruce Scott—Farmers.

Mr BURKE—We are talking about areas which include endangered species such as the northern quoll, the water mouse, dugongs, and migratory species going through the area. That explains in part the large number of conditions. Most importantly, there are some very tough conditions on the use of water. I note that the member for Maranoa has taken a strong interest in this issue and has concerns about the use of water.

The coal seams involve extraordinary quantities of water. A question came to light very strongly in information provided to me by Geoscience Australia as to whether or not the coal seams and the water contained within them were watertight. If they are watertight, then there is not a knock-on effect on the Great Artesian Basin; if they are porous, then potentially there may be an impact on the Great Artesian Basin. It was recommended that I take a highly precautionary approach. That has been reflected in the conditions which have been imposed. For that reason there will be a scientific committee which will be involved in testing the actual thresholds and pressure levels—repressurisation may be required in instances; full reinjection may be required in some instances—to make sure that in enabling the jobs and the investment to go ahead in Queensland we do not at the same moment ignore the interests of our farmers or ignore the significance of the Great Artesian Basin.

There have been a number of public comments, some positive and some negative, but I note the Maranoa Regional Council CEO, Stuart Randle, has said:

We are satisfied that the risks on water quality are being properly managed and ... they are actually taking water from completely separate water aquifers.

There are a large number of conditions, and I think that is appropriate. In taking into account the environmental values of the area and the various risks, I believe the large number of conditions do get the balance right and will allow the investment to go ahead.

Broadband

Mr FLETCHER (3.07 pm)—My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. Can the minister confirm that households which opt out of the National Broadband Network when it passes them can face a cost of \$300 if they want to retain telephone service after Telstra rips out their copper line or, if this is not the cost, what will that cost be?

Mr ALBANESE—The fact is that under the policy we have introduced no-one will be forced to connect to the NBN; no-one will be forced to subscribe to an NBN service.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order!

Mr Robb interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Goldstein is warned.

Mr ALBANESE—We are connecting fibre to the owner's premises at no charge to the owner or occupier. The opt-out model will allow the NBN to be rolled out faster and will reduce construction costs. The fact is that the way that we are rolling it out means that every owner has the right to say, 'No, I don't want an NBN connection,' and that is why we have allowed for that.

Infrastructure

Ms RISHWORTH (3.08 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. How is work on nation-building projects such as the Noarlunga to Seaford rail extension progressing? What impact is the government's nation-building agenda

having on the construction industry and our economy?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Kingston for her question. Just in the past week we have issued a construction contract for the \$291 million Seaford to Noarlunga extension, the rail extension into the southern suburbs of Adelaide most campaigned for by the member for Kingston, who now holds a very safe seat in the southern suburbs of Adelaide—something I am quite jealous of. This is a joint venture of Thiess and McConnell Dowell and is a major project for Adelaide. It includes the 1.2 kilometre Onkaparinga Valley bridge, whose span will be longer than the span on the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

The construction of the rail line will use enough steel to build 30 Boeing 747s. Construction will commence later this year and will employ some 400 direct jobs during construction. This is consistent with the report that has been released by the Australian Industry Group—I note that we will be attending their dinner here in Parliament House tonight—that found, along with the Australian Construction Association, a positive outlook for Australia's infrastructure sector due to the government's strong public infrastructure investment in road, rail and the National Broadband Network. This will offset what they have found to be a slower commercial and residential building sector as a result of the global financial crisis. This report, released in the past week, predicts construction work will grow by almost six per cent in the current financial year and almost eight per cent in 2011-12. I congratulate the member for Kingston and all those in the community organisations who campaigned so hard to make this rail extension a reality.

Plague Locusts

Mr SCHULTZ (3.11 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. I refer the minister to the recent rains that have come to rural and regional Australia following nine years of soul-destroying drought, bringing significant hope and confidence to farmers and rural communities. While these rains are predicted to bring the best wheat and canola crops in 20 years, there are significant problems such as locusts and increased pasture fuel build-up. Will the minister advise the House what initiatives will be undertaken to address this future fire and pestilence threat to Australian farmers?

Mr BURKE—I can answer that question largely in my capacity representing the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in the other place. I thank the member for Hume for the question and acknowledge his very strong interest in this. Once the good rains started to come, we knew that the good news was likely to come with some very bad news in terms of what the return of good weather means for locusts. The Australian Plague Locust Commission, based within the agriculture portfolio, performs an important function in making sure there are three different ways that plague locusts are dealt with. The first is that there are Commonwealth areas of direct engagement in Commonwealth regions where aerial spraying takes place, there is direct involvement from the state governments and, most importantly, there is an extraordinary level of work done by farmers on the ground.

When farmers do this work on the ground we need to understand the nature of a locust plague. The fact that the locusts are hatching in your area does not necessarily mean that is where they will do the damage. The work that farmers do—and there is only a very small window when you can do the spraying,

when they are in that nymph stage—is extraordinarily important in managing their own property to some extent but very much so for their neighbours. We are talking, for those who have seen the film footage of locusts or who have been unlucky enough to have seen them face to face, about what looks like just a solid back cloud about four metres above the ground.

We are seeing, and expect to continue to see, what the head of the Plague Locust Commission Chris Adriaansen has described as the worst plague in 70 years. Certainly, the good work that has been done by farmers, by state governments and at the Commonwealth leadership level means that that damage is being mitigated to a significant extent. But we should not pretend anything other than that this will be the worst locust plague in 70 years. That is what is expected, even if everybody does everything right. It does also come at a time when that has a real hit on the hopes of many farmers, and the question from the member for Hume alludes to that.

Just at the time when many people had been seeing a new moment of hope after years of the challenges, including mental health challenges, that come with long periods of dryness—just at that exact same moment—something of the nature of plague locusts hits. It causes a real level of not just economic devastation but personal devastation for many people. Even in that context, we can still say it is good that the rains have come, even though these sorts of consequences sometimes come with them. We can also say that, through the good work of all involved, whatever damage is borne in the coming weeks—and some of it has occurred already—it is certainly nothing to what would have happened if we had not had, from all levels, the leadership that we have had.

Indigenous Affairs

Ms SAFFIN (3.15 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. What is the government's response to GenerationOne's address to the nation on Closing the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians?

Ms MACKLIN—I thank the member for Page for her question and acknowledge the hard work she does in her electorate to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. I am very pleased to be able to congratulate GenerationOne for their terrific grassroots campaign to bring all Australians together to create equality of opportunity for Indigenous Australians.

Last night around six million Australians were able to see the broadcast put out by GenerationOne and to witness 13-year-old Madeleine Madden give a wonderful address to the nation, calling all of us together to close the gap—to do everything each and every one of us can do to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The GenerationOne website had around 1.6 million hits after the broadcast was aired and now has around 58,000 people signed up to support the campaign.

What Madeleine said to each and every one of us is that we really need to make our own individual effort and to play our own individual or community part, whether we are in business, in the community or in government. All of us need to work together to make sure that we improve the lives of Indigenous peoples. As governments we have a job to do. Each and every government around Australia has signed up to specific targets to close the gap—to close the life expectancy gap, the literacy and numeracy gap and the employment gap—and to make sure Indigenous people are able to meet their aspirations for themselves and their families.

The government has allocated more than \$5 billion to make sure we address the much needed work in education, health and employment. There are now specific efforts to help people get a job and to help Indigenous people to set up their own businesses. There are specific employment targets for government contracts that we expect to be met. There remains an enormous amount to be done, but I want to acknowledge Madeleine's efforts, GenerationOne's efforts and the efforts of many Australians who are doing so much to close that gap.

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (3.18 pm)—Mr Speaker, on indulgence, I would like to associate the opposition with the remarks made by the minister in relation to GenerationOne. When the former Prime Minister made his apology in the House on behalf of the nation, he referred not only to past matters but to the aspirations of this parliament and all Australians to improve the lot of our Indigenous brothers and sisters in this country. That remains a continuing challenge to which we all must be committed.

Ms Gillard—Mr Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the *Notice Paper*.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.19 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings* and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:

Aboriginal Land Commissioner—Report for 2009-10.

Australian Reinsurance Pool Corporation—Report for 2009-10.

Corporations and Markets Advisory Committee—Report for 2009-10.

Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amend-

ment (2008 Budget and Other Measures) Act 2008—Review of the operations of the amendments made to the Act, 30 June 2010.

Inspector-General of Taxation—Report for 2009-10.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Hartsuyker**) adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (3.20 pm)—by leave—Some of our most precious environmental assets, the nation's food bowl, and many strong and proud rural communities are all relying on a deeply unhealthy river system. The key challenge before the parliament is for this to be the term in which action is taken across the Murray-Darling Basin to restore the system to health. We need to do this in a way which delivers three core outcomes:

- healthy rivers
- strong communities and
- food production.

These priorities do not need to be in competition with each other. Sensible reform will find a way to provide all three. For generations Australia compromised these aims by managing the Murray-Darling Basin as though the rivers would respect state boundaries. Australia pretended that each state could manage its part of the system on the basis that the water in the basin disproportionately existed for that state alone. This led to poor management of our environmental assets and over-allocation of the resource. We saw magnificent Ramsar wetland sites compromised and threatened.

We saw parts of the river made unusable for food production through algal blooms and acid sulfate soils. In the Lower Lakes we saw the mouth of the Murray close for nearly

a decade and the number of dairy farms fall from 23 to three. During the long years of drought we saw entire communities survive by running their equity down to the brink and beyond while irrigation authorities would talk of zero allocations. It is important we manage the next drought differently to the last one.

A CSIRO 2008 report notes that impacts of climate change on water availability in the basin by 2030 are uncertain; however, a decline in surface water availability across the entire MDB is more likely than an increase. A decline in the south of the MDB is more likely than in the north. According to the MDBA, under a wet climate scenario there would be an increase of nine per cent; unfortunately, the more likely scenario is for drier conditions—with a possible reduction in water availability of 27 per cent.

Regardless of these projections, the health of the basin speaks for itself on the need for reform. In recent months many communities have felt the optimism which comes with the breaking of drought. Those who draw their income from the health of the river system have seen an opportunity to start moving back in front financially. Those who draw their inspiration and confidence from the health of the river system have seen the signs that the rain may have come just in time for some truly sensitive ecological communities.

In the Macquarie Marshes a combination of good rain and water buybacks has returned much needed water to this precious wetland. The change has been welcomed by local graziers because it has also restored the carrying capacity of the surrounding land. Downstream, the mouth of the Murray is flowing naturally for the first time since 2002 and locals talk about how you can see the light in people's eyes again because there is water in the Lower Lakes.

These are treasures of our natural heritage valued by Australians because as a nation we all know the beauty of our landscape is inseparable from how we view ourselves. It is enjoyed by locals and tourists, and cared for by paid rangers and officers and by Landcare volunteers. These are places which simply matter because of what they are—well before any calculation of their economic value.

In irrigation communities across the country like St George, Bourke, Dubbo, Menindee, Griffith, Shepparton, Mildura, Echuca, Renmark and Murray Bridge the river is woven into the lives and psyches of the proud communities whose histories are etched into our nation's story, and part of the lives of any Australian who likes to eat. The farmers in these areas need to be acknowledged for their role as producers but also for their commitment to good environmental management. Those who work the land see the need to care for it every day.

It has been against this background that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority delivered its guide to the draft or proposed plan 18 days ago. Following the release of the guide there has been a wave of strong reactions across the country:

- some people have passionately locked in behind the guide as a pathway to restoring the health of the basin;
- others have passionately argued implementation of the figures suggested in the guide would devastate their industry or their town;
- some who had always argued the need for an independent authority have returned without blinking to the interstate rivalries of old; and
- some have sought to question the political consensus which was forged in the Water Act.

There are a number of pieces of misinformation which have also gained currency since the launch of the guide. There has been an argument that the guide to the draft of a plan released by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority represents government policy. It does not. There is a belief in many communities that the government will forcibly acquire water from people. We will not. There is a belief that the plan, whatever it ends up being at the end of next year, will not take account of the good work already done in many communities. It will.

The status of the guide needs to be made clear. As I stated, it does not represent government policy. It does not even represent recommendations to government from the MDBA. The guide has been produced independently by the MDBA as a document for consultation in advance of the statutory consultation which takes place next year. Public consultations for the guide will run until mid-November. There are over 12 months to run in this consultation before I as minister am presented with the plan at the end of next year.

The MDBA has announced it will commission work on the socioeconomic impacts of possible sustainable diversion limits, and this work is scheduled to be completed in March 2011. The authority will then release its proposed Basin Plan. Sixteen weeks of consultation is required following the release. The authority then presents a final plan to the ministerial council, which includes representatives from each of the basin states, for consideration. I as minister can ask the authority to reconsider issues but once I have signed off on the final plan it is tabled in parliament where it may be disallowed by either house.

If the political consensus which emerged following the Water Act is allowed to collapse then we will be left with the possibility

of the final Basin Plan being disallowed. This would abandon environmental assets, destroy certainty for towns and irrigators, see a return to the state versus state rivalries which cultivated the problem in the first place and obliterate the chance to deliver long-term certainty for a healthy river, strong communities, and food production.

Part of the problem in maintaining consensus on these issues has been uncertainty in the community and around the parliament about whether the Water Act does in fact demand the plan adopt a triple bottom line approach of taking into account environmental, social and economic impacts of reform. The MDBA has been reported as saying that the act requires a focus on environmental issues first, with limited attention to social and economic factors. For this reason I sought legal advice from the Australian Government Solicitor to determine whether the interpretations referred to publicly by the MDBA matched the requirements of the act. I also stated here in the House that following receipt of the advice I would make it public. This morning I received the advice. It was made available to the opposition, Greens and Independents earlier today and I now table the advice. Broadly, the advice outlines that the Water Act:

- gives effect to relevant international agreements,
- provides for the establishment of environmentally sustainable limits on the quantities of water that may be taken from basin water resources,
- provides for the use of the basin water resources in a way that optimises economic, social and environmental outcomes,
- improves water security for all uses, and

- subject to the environmentally sustainable limits, maximises the net economic returns to the Australian community.

Much has been made of the international agreements which underpin the Water Act and it has been suggested that these agreements prevent socioeconomic factors being taken into account. In fact, these agreements themselves recognise the need to consider these factors.

The act specifically states that in giving effect to those agreements, the plan should promote the use and management of the basin water resources in a way that optimises economic, social and environmental outcomes. It is clear from this advice that environmental, economic and social considerations are central to the Water Act and that the Basin Plan can appropriately take these into account. I do not offer the advice as a criticism of the MDBA. What is important now is how the MDBA now responds to this legal advice.

I trust the issuing of the advice provides a level of confidence to members of parliament that it is possible to provide sensible and lasting reform of the Murray-Darling Basin within the current structure of the Water Act. Such reform needs to look at a suite of measures. Investment in all forms of water infrastructure needs to take place. This includes centralised irrigation infrastructure, on-farm infrastructure and works, and measures to more efficiently and effectively manage our environmental assets. The purchase of water allocations through the market will need to continue and this must only be from those who have chosen to put all or part of their allocation onto the water market. Where possible, with the leadership of the various irrigation authorities, strategic projects of rationalisation to avoid stranded assets and better target limited water supplies must be encouraged.

Reform is never easy. With the Murray-Darling Basin, failure to reform is even harder on basin communities. As each drought breaks, Australians know another is always on the way. I do not know how long we will be waiting for the next drought but I do not want it to look anything like the last drought. The leadership of the member for New England on the House of Representatives inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan on regional Australia will help inform the parliament of the challenges facing basin communities. These will vary from catchment to catchment, from town to town. Understanding these different impacts is essential.

While the government only purchases from those who put all or part of a water allocation on the market, those who work in the town are never willing sellers. When someone sells all of their water allocation there is no guarantee that the irrigator or the money which has been paid will remain in the community. These issues cannot be glossed over. That is why the regional impact is so important. It also explains why every extra efficiency in water use and every productivity improvement derived from research and development directly helps all members of the community.

The work I have referred to today will be complemented by a strong engagement from the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Ultimately, there will need to be confidence within the parliament for the final plan. I believe this confidence is possible, and indeed justified, if we keep the focus of providing healthy rivers, strong communities and food production. This is the very focus which the legal advice says is reflected in the Water Act.

Anything less will leave us no better than those who mismanaged the basin to the brink of its health. This parliament can cooperate and build a consensus which has always eluded the Murray-Darling Basin. It is a consensus which the environment needs, which communities need and which farm businesses need. The basin has shown over the last decade it is an uncompromising negotiator. Our job is to recognise the need for reform, and then to reform so that the challenges we face are not simply passed on in increasing severity to the generations which will follow.

I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for Groom to speak for 12 minutes.

Leave granted.

Mr BURKE—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the member for Groom speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding 12 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom) (3.33 pm)—I thank the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities for the opportunity to respond to his statement and also for the receipt of the legal advice, which clears up one aspect of Labor's botched basin plan process. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the minister, under the Water Act, can produce an outcome that delivers the triple bottom line approach. It remains unclear why Labor got this wrong in the first place and why they took six months to develop a water policy, 18 months to establish the authority and 36 months to commission a proper analysis of the socioeconomic effects on the basin—an analysis that was delivered by ABARE the morning that the guide was released by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. Why has it taken three years for Labor to commission

this advice? This is what the coalition believed all along—that the act initially passed by the Howard government did provide an effective balance between economic, social and environmental issues.

The mishandling of this policy area by the government has produced enormous angst, enormous upset and enormous fear in the communities that I represent and in the communities that run all the way down to the basin's mouth at Lake Alexandrina. The failure to deliver the promised water-saving infrastructure projects has only heightened community concern that most of the required water will come from buybacks. The failure to engage communities in the strategic process for buybacks has only heightened fears that the buybacks will continue to add to the stranded assets that already exist in irrigation plans and will occur in a way that maximises instead of minimises the pain to both rural producers and their communities.

The failure to ensure that the MDBA undertook a thorough socioeconomic analysis before releasing the guide has only added to the fears that social impacts will not be considered. The failure of the minister to front up in basin communities for two weeks has further added to that concern and to the concern that the government not only is not listening but will not listen in the future.

The failure of the government to seek legal advice at the first moment the MDBA chair raised the matter with the minister, apparently at their first meeting, only perpetuated the concerns and myths that the act was flawed. We welcome this advice today as a first step to easing the fears about this reform process and as a first step to providing some—not a lot, but some—confidence that the reform process may be back on track.

This is an important reform which the coalition were proud to start and we do not want the Labor Party to totally bungle it. We

want to see the plan successfully implemented. We have cleared up the legal issues which clouded the water debate over the last few weeks. What we need to do now is clear up what exactly the Gillard government's plan is for the Murray-Darling Basin. What is their plan? Two million people who live in the basin have an immediate and vital interest in what that plan may be—and, dare I say, all 22 million Australians want to see something done to fix the Murray-Darling Basin. We hope the government and the MDBA will respond to the advice they have received today in a way that ensures the original objectives of the triple bottom line—that is, an environmentally, economically and socially sustainable basin—are achieved.

From the outset, this government's handling of the Murray-Darling Basin has been a shambles. It is little wonder that the plan is running late, with the release of the guide delayed three times—and still it is underdone. Labor released the guide proposing the extent of cuts without providing any analysis of how those cuts may be achieved with the least possible impact. Labor's bungling is adding to uncertainty about the future of the entire reform agenda and threatening the health of both the river and the rural communities that live there. The MDBA's chair admits that the guide is lacking and that the socioeconomic impacts need more work.

I attended the meeting in Dalby on Friday where the MDBA chair and other people involved in this guide attempted to answer farmers' questions. I have to say no questions were answered in a way that provided any certainty, any security or even any understanding of what the guide set out to do. How can anyone—farmers, particularly, with a practical nature and a good understanding of how this all works—have any confidence in a guide that says there will be only 800 job losses? There are individual communities in my electorate and in the member for Ma-

ranoa's electorate where hundreds of job losses can be identified—from machinery dealers right through to coffee shops—because everyone is affected when water is taken out of a community. How can people have confidence that this plan that the Labor Party is formulating behind closed doors without consultation will not just decimate rural and regional towns? Last week we found out that ABARE and the Bureau of Rural Sciences provided the authority with its final report only on the morning that the guide was released. What sort of incorporation into the guide could possibly have come from that?

The other thing that concerns the coalition is the confusion and contradiction we are seeing from the opposite side. One moment the government, according to the Prime Minister, will do whatever it takes to implement the MDBA's plan. The next moment we have the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, who is sitting opposite me in the chamber, saying that the MDBA is an independent authority and the government will not interfere in its deliberations. And the minister for regional affairs says it is up to the government to produce the plan. This all says just one thing: this is a mess. It is so typical of everything that this government does. It is a mess that is causing an incredible amount of heartache in the rural communities that we represent. We on this side of the House who grew up in those communities—who understand the importance of water, who understand the stewardship that we have—are seeing more uncertainty, more concern by those communities that their futures are anything but secure.

May I conclude by saying that the coalition started this process of reform with a 10-point, \$10 billion plan, which Labor and the Gillard government have strayed widely from. The coalition had a good plan which

would return the river to health, primarily by investing in river communities to ensure they are able to produce more food with less water. Everyone understands that water has to be returned to the environment, but not at the cost of farmers in that community and not at the cost of Australia feeding its own population and producing very essential export dollars.

We foreshadowed the problems that have now engulfed the Gillard government and we called for a full socioeconomic study of the impacts of the basin reform. We outlined a plan that would get greater water-saving infrastructure projects back on track. We proposed more funding for community adjustment and established a fund to identify and kick-start new projects for sustainable water use. Labor has botched the efforts of the Murray-Darling reform, and that will hurt basin communities. Only the coalition have the insight and commitment to deliver the difficult reform in a way that does not cause panic and deferral at every turn. Australians deserve a plan that gets the balance right between the environment, the community and jobs.

The question marks over the assumptions made in the guide, especially on the number of jobs that would be lost, require a full and, most importantly, independent review. I do not have any problems with the MDBA. They do the job that is set. The task is set for them by the government, but they are involved in the outcome. They cannot be independent in their review of the socioeconomic impacts because it will affect what they have in front of them. There needs to be a fully independent body, separate to the MDBA, and that is why we are proposing the Productivity Commission. That will ensure that the answers are right, without prejudice and done in such a way that everyone—the government, the opposition and the rural communities who will be most affected by this—

can have the confidence that the answers are right. If the government are serious about engaging Australians in real consultations, they will support the referral of this, as affected communities deserve to know what these proposals mean for their towns, their communities, their farms, their lives and their future.

Victorian Bushfires

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (3.45 pm)—by leave—With summer not far away and the bushfire season imminent, I would like to take this opportunity to present to the House the Commonwealth's response to the final report of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. During the summer of February 2009, Australia experienced one of its worst natural disasters—the devastating Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria that resulted in the deaths of 173 people and extensive damage to land and property, and affected the lives of so many people. To date, the Commonwealth has provided over \$467 million to support the reconstruction and recovery of the many Victorian families and communities that were so tragically affected by this event. We are, however, acutely conscious that financial compensation alone cannot make up for the enormous loss, physical or otherwise, suffered by so many people on those days. That is why the Commonwealth is committed to taking what practical steps it can to reduce the chances of future disasters of that scale occurring again.

In the aftermath of the 2009 Victorian bushfires, the Commonwealth invested significant efforts to improve Australia's preparedness for bushfires and other disasters. As a result, the Commonwealth is significantly better prepared for this year's bushfire season and stands ready to assist the states and territories if and when a disaster strikes. The Commonwealth government continues

to play a significant role in the recovery effort. I acknowledge the work of Minister Macklin in the government's immediate response and ongoing reconstruction effort, particularly as the Chair of the Commonwealth Victorian Bushfire Taskforce. I also note the important work of the former parliamentary secretary, Mr Shorten, in his engagement with affected communities and in supporting the Commonwealth's role.

Let me turn now to the final report of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission was established on 16 February 2009. The commission released two interim reports, on 17 August and 24 November 2009, targeting priority issues for action in preparation for the 2009-10 bushfire season. For the Commonwealth, these related primarily to the delivery of emergency warnings to the Australian public, arrangements for the provision of operational assistance to the states and territories, and planning and building controls in bushfire-prone areas. The government acted decisively and has made significant progress in implementing the commission's interim recommendations.

The commission released its final report on 31 July 2010. The report contained 67 recommendations, of which five were primarily directed at the Commonwealth. These relate to bushfire awareness and research, Commonwealth firefighting resources, bushfire arson and environment protection legislation. The Commonwealth strongly supports these recommendations, and I will outline the government's response in respect of each.

The Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission's recommendation for the development of a national bushfire awareness campaign recognises that bushfire awareness and knowledge are crucial if we are to make adequate preparations and informed decisions about such events. The Commonwealth fully

supports the intent of this recommendation. We note, however, that such a campaign would need to be adapted to meet the unique conditions and emergency management arrangements of each state and territory. To this end, the Prime Minister announced on 13 August 2010 that the Commonwealth would work with states and territories to develop such a campaign.

The commission also recommended the development of an agreement that would allow the use of Commonwealth aircraft for firefighting and also support activities. Let me assure the House that the Commonwealth is committed to supporting state and territory firefighting operations in times of disaster. In particular, Commonwealth support is already provided under the terms of the Commonwealth Disaster Plan and the Defence Assistance to the Civilian Community arrangements. Through these arrangements the Commonwealth is able to provide the states and territories with access to specialised equipment and technology from the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, and the Department of Defence depending on the particular circumstances of each event. The Commonwealth continually monitors the effectiveness of these support arrangements and has implemented a number of initiatives to enable more effective planning and utilisation of Commonwealth resources during bushfires and also other events.

Another recommendation of direct relevance to the Commonwealth is that relating to bushfire arson reduction. Following the 2009 Victorian bushfires, I instituted an annual forum of Australia's fire, police, social services and justice agencies to promote national collaboration in combating bushfire arson. I take this opportunity to thank all the participants from the states and territories. The forum has proven to be very successful

with a number of initiatives developed to share information about convicted and suspected arsonists and improve the expertise of arson investigators across the country. A key outcome has been the establishment of the National Action Plan to Reduce Bushfire Arson in Australia, which was specifically welcomed by the commission.

The commission also recommended that the Commonwealth provide guidance and, where necessary, amend environment protection legislation to facilitate annual bushfire prevention activities. The Commonwealth supports the intent of this recommendation and is working to ensure that adequate guidance is available about the application of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 in respect to these matters and specifically in respect to bushfire prevention and management activities such as roadside clearing. The EPBC Act as it is commonly known also contains a number of tools, including conservation agreements and strategic assessments, which can assist in this regard.

The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission also recommended the establishment of a national centre for bushfire research to support long-term, interdisciplinary bushfire research. The Commonwealth supports greater research and analysis being undertaken in regard to all hazards, including of course the devastation that bushfires cause. This commitment was confirmed by the Prime Minister earlier this year when she committed the Commonwealth to work with the states and territories to provide national leadership on bushfire research.

Establishment of a national research centre would require ongoing commitment from all governments. The Australian Emergency Management Institute, within my portfolio, could play a key role, we believe, in this regard. An integral part of the institute's cur-

rent role is the delivery of strategic research for the emergency management sector on a range of all-hazards issues. As such, the institute is well placed to work with jurisdictions towards a national disaster resilience centre of excellence. To this end, the Commonwealth will work with Victoria and the other states and territories to develop options for the promotion of bushfire research within the nationally agreed all-hazards framework.

Beyond these five recommendations specifically targeted at the Commonwealth, the commission also made a number of other recommendations and findings of broader national significance. These included, for example, in relation to the development of the Commonwealth funded national telephone based emergency warning system, 'Emergency Alert' as it is known. Significantly, it should be noted that the Commonwealth has already committed to fund this system's enhancement to enable the delivery of warnings to mobile phones based on their location at the time of an emergency as opposed to billing addresses, which is currently the situation.

The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission should be commended for its important work.

In particular, I wish to place on record the Commonwealth's sincere appreciation for the dedication and hard work of the three commissioners—the Hon. Bernard Teague AO, Commissioner Ron McLeod AM and Commissioner Susan Pascoe AM as well as all supporting counsel.

The Commonwealth welcomes the commission's findings and will continue to work closely with Victoria and other states and territories to address the commission's recommendations.

Above all, the Commonwealth remains firmly committed to assisting the states and territories improve their emergency man-

agement arrangements by enhancing Australia's resilience to disasters.

The detailed response by the Commonwealth to the commission's recommendations will be available on the Attorney-General's website and circulated to the media this afternoon.

I thank the House for its attention.

I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for Stirling to speak for 10 minutes.

Leave granted.

Mr McCLELLAND—I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the member for Stirling speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding 10 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (3.56 pm)—The coalition welcomes the government's response to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. As the summer season approaches our attention is again turned to the grim reality that it is also a time when natural disasters such as bushfires are likely to occur. We join with the government in acknowledging the tragedy suffered by so many families and communities.

The coalition also takes this opportunity to acknowledge the brave and tireless work of Australia's tens of thousands of fire and emergency service volunteers. These are the men and women who are on the frontline of disaster management. We acknowledge too their families who support them and who understand their commitment to the safety and service of our community. I speak here not only of the CFA and rural fire volunteers, who are busy preparing for this summer's bushfire season, but also of the SES volunteers in Queensland and New South Wales in particular preparing for a summer cyclone and storm season. Disaster management in

Australia relies upon these people and this must never be forgotten.

The coalition, which represents so much of regional and rural Australia in this parliament, well understands the need for all levels of government to work together to prevent, prepare, respond and recover from natural disasters of all kinds. There is no better understanding of this than from former Liberal members Fran Bailey and Jason Wood, who both worked tirelessly to make their communities safer and who are sadly no longer members of the House.

We consider the best way to build resilience in communities across Australia is to engage with local government, local communities and emergency service volunteers. We hope that lessons can and will be learned from the experience of the Black Saturday bushfires. We hope too that as communities recover they will do so secure in the knowledge that they have the full and sympathetic support of both sides of this House.

On 17 August and 24 November 2009 we heard from the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission in their interim reports that many mistakes were made and more could have been done to prepare Victoria for a natural disaster of this magnitude. I would like to take this opportunity to commend Commissioner Teague and his fellow commissioners for their important work over the past year and a half. They have acted professionally and have dedicated themselves to the harrowing task of listening to the horrific events and weighing up the evidence that was presented to them so that we can all learn from Black Saturday.

As noted by the Attorney-General, the commission released its final report on 31 July 2010. The report contained 67 recommendations, of which five are primarily directed at the Commonwealth. These relate to bushfire awareness and research, Common-

wealth firefighting resources and bushfire, arson and environmental protection legislation. The most fundamental responsibility of any government is the protection of its citizens. All state governments and authorities must look carefully at the findings of the royal commission and learn from the mistakes as we approach this summer's fire season. The coalition is committed to the continual improvement of emergency management arrangements. We pledge our full support to whatever is required to effectively build individual and community resilience to disasters. I am therefore happy on behalf of the opposition to support the statement to this House by the Attorney-General.

COMMITTEES

Proposed Committee Membership 43rd Parliament Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The Speaker has received advice from the Chief Government Whip, the Chief Opposition Whip, Mr Windsor, Mr Oakeshott and Mr Crook nominating members to be members of certain committees.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (4.00 pm)—I ask leave of the House to move a motion for the appointment of members to certain committees.

Leave granted.

Mr McCLELLAND—I move:

That Members be appointed as members of certain committees in accordance with the following schedule:

Committee	Members seeking appointment
Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	Mr Neumann, Mr Husic, Ms Grierson, Mr Perrett, Dr Stone, Mr Haase, Ms Griggs
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry	Mr Adams, Mr Cheeseman, Mr Lyons, Mr Mitchell, Mr Schultz, Mr Tehan, Mr Christensen, Mr Crook
Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts	Mr Zappia, Ms Hall, Ms A. E. Burke, M K. J. Thomson, Dr Washer, Wyatt Roy, Ms Marino
Standing Committee on Economics	Mr C. R. Thomson, Dr Leigh, Mr S. P. Jones, Ms Owens, Mr Ciobo, Ms O'Dwyer, Mr Buchholz
Standing Committee on Education and Employment	Ms Rishworth, Ms O'Neill, Mrs D'Ath, Mr Symon, Mr Ramsey, Mr Tudge, Mrs K. L. Andrews
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing	Mr Georganas, Ms Hall, Ms O'Neill, Mr Lyons, Mr Irons, Mr Wyatt, Mr Coulton
Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications	Ms Bird, Mr Husic, Mr Symon, Mr S. P. Jones, Mr Neville, Mrs Prentice, Mr Fletcher, Mr Oakeshott
Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs	Mr Perrett, Ms Smyth, Ms Rowland, Mr Neumann, Mrs Moylan, Mr Vasta, Dr Stone
Standing Committee on Regional Australia	Mr Sidebottom, Ms Livermore, Mr C. R. Thomson, Mr Mitchell, Mr Haase, Mr Tehan, Mr McCormack, Mr Windsor
House Appropriations and Administration Committee	Mr Fitzgibbon, Mr K. J. Thomson, Ms Vamvakinou, Ms Hall, Ms Marino, Mr C. Kelly, Mr E. T. Jones, Mr Scott
House Committee	Mr Fitzgibbon, Ms Hall, Mr Hayes, Mr Entsch Mr E. T. Jones, Mr McCormack
Standing Committee on Petitions	Mr Murphy, Ms A. E. Burke, Mr Byrne, Mr Adams, Mr Symon, Ms Saffin, Dr Jensen, Mr Chester, Mr

CHAMBER

Committee	Members seeking appointment
Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests	Broadbent, Mr Van Manen Ms A. E. Burke, Mr Lyons, Ms Rowland, Mr Symon, Mr Cheeseman, Mr Secker, Mr Randall, Mr Windsor, Mr Alexander
Standing Committee on Procedure	Ms Owens, Mr Sidebottom, Mr Fitzgibbon, Ms Bird, Mr Broadbent, Mr Irons, Mr E. T. Jones
Publications Committee	Mr Mitchell, Mr Hayes, Ms Owens, Dr Leigh, Mr Vasta, Mr O'Dowd, Mr Irons
Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity	Ms Parke, Mr Hayes, Mr Zappia, Mr Simpkins, Mr Matheson
Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission	Mr Hayes, Ms Vamvakinou, Ms Grierson, Mr Keenan, Mr Matheson
Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings	Mr Murphy, Mr Hayes, Ms Vamvakinou, Mr Coulton, Wyatt Roy
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services	Mr Ripoll, Mr Griffin, Ms Smyth, Mr Fletcher, Mr A. D. H. Smith
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit	Mrs D'Ath, Ms Brodtmann, Mr Adams, Ms O'Neill, Ms Smyth, Mr Cheeseman, Mr Somlyay, Mr Briggs, Mr Frydenberg, Mr Oakeshott
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works	Ms Saffin, Mr Ripoll, Mr Georganas, Mr Forrest, Mrs K. L. Andrews, Mr Turnbull
Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety	Mr Husic, Mr Perrett, Ms Rishworth, Mr Zappia, Mr Hawke, Mr Fletcher
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	Mr Melham, Mr Griffin, Ms Rishworth, Mr Somlyay, Mrs B. K. Bishop
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade	Ms Brodtmann, Mr Danby, Ms Vamvakinou, Mr Fitzgibbon, Mr L. D. T. Ferguson, Ms Parke, Mr Murphy, Mr Gibbons, Ms Saffin, Mr Champion, Mr Griffin, Mr Byrne, Mr Georganas, Mrs Gash, Ms J. Bishop, Mr Robert, Dr Jensen, Mrs Mirabella, Dr Stone, Mr Ruddock, Mr Scott, Mr O'Dowd
Joint Standing Committee on Migration	Ms Vamvakinou, Mrs D'Ath, Mr Zappia, Mrs Markus, Ms Gambaro, Mr Ramsey
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories	Ms Brodtmann, Dr Leigh, Mr Adams, Mr Simpkins, Mr Secker
Joint Standing Committee on the Parliamentary Library	Mr Champion, Mr Adams, Mr C. R. Thomson, Mr Melham, Mr Christensen, Mr Broadbent
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties	Mr K. J. Thomson, Ms Bird, Ms Parke, Ms Rowland, Ms Grierson, Ms Livermore, Mr Briggs, Dr Stone, Mr Forrest

Question agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Afghanistan

Debate resumed.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (4.01 pm)—I continue my speech by reminding the House that the war in Afghanistan is one in which Australia has a proud history in its contribution. But I point out, as I was doing just before I resumed, that the locals are actually

taking the initiative themselves, whether that be in alternative farming methods or in their own education and health care. One of the pleasing aspects is the fact that the local tribespeople are now seeking the support of the NATO backed coalition to drive out elements of al-Qaeda in their areas and to take back their villages and their safety from this force. That needs to be noted, and it is obviously one of the goals that our troops in our mission areas are trying to achieve.

Western Australia is the home of the SAS as well as many other troops who are making a contribution to this conflict. A number of them have contacted me regarding the reasons why the troops are there and continue to want to be there. Many of them have done a number of rotations. Some of the reasons are, obviously, that they have trained for this particular situation, they are experts in their field and they see this as the fulfilment of their careers. Many people have more than one son or daughter serving in this region. The only comment they have made is that they sometimes believe that eight months is too long for the rotation and that four to six months, particularly for those with families, might be more beneficial.

I need to report to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that yesterday members of the Mandurah RSL—and this is in line with the comments from the member for Cowan about United Nations Day—pointed out to me that were they annoyed not only that we have 1,500 men from Afghanistan heading towards the northern former military camp but also that this is almost the exact number of troops we have deployed in Afghanistan. They wanted me to pass on the message that this should be not a camp for transition for those seeking asylum—who are all, largely, young men. We should be training these asylum seekers to go back and help take back their own villages, their own country, rather than seeking asylum in Australia.

I think this message is shared quite universally throughout the RSLs and throughout the community in general: ‘To those men who are seeking Australia as a destination we are happy to train you, as we are in Afghanistan. If you come here we will train you as well. You should go back and help defend your country because our troops are doing it there for you and you might want to make the same contribution yourself.’ When I was on the deployment which I spoke of earlier I met a young Perth lieutenant, David Uphill, who was in Kuwait, and I know the sacrifices that these young men and women make to serve their country, particularly as reservists. I am just so proud of the young Australians who are involved. Our exit strategy is to leave when our goals have been achieved. I want to conclude by saying that we honour those who make the sacrifice in this theatre. We honour those who have been wounded and we honour all our troops on the ground who are making us proud.

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth) (4.05 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Afghanistan war. A country’s decision to go to war is amongst the most significant that any nation can make, especially in the light of sacrifices made by armed forces in the theatre of conflict, where the costs of war are invariably high, borne immediately by the young and the brave but felt by generations ongoing. I also welcome the opportunity because it is in this forum that debates about something as serious as war should take place. Along with other members I place on record my appreciation of the role played by members of the Australian Defence Force and associated personnel. They are in a hard, risky and unforgiving environment and we acknowledge that fact here in parliament.

If you are interested in public life, the chances are that you will have thought a lot

about the nature of war. I know that I have: it's history, causes and consequences and the universal yearning that we have for peace. These are important matters. Whilst I would not describe myself as a pacifist, I do believe that to endeavour to forge peaceful relations and to use every effort to resolve conflict and arguments, especially between nations and most especially when the conflict is violent, is one of the most important tasks any society can set itself, through the way in which we approach this issue locally in education, governance, legislation, the values of our institutions, right through to the international arena. In this debate, we need to be mindful of our historical role through two world wars, our active participation in the United Nations and in peacekeeping efforts in our region, and I note also in an area of keen interest for me, Australia's continuing role in proposing genuine nuclear disarmament initiatives. Whilst little remarked on, this is a constructive contribution that we make and one of continuing significance world wide.

In relation to the war in Afghanistan and Australia's role in that conflict, I would like to make the following observations. The first is that, by normative standards, this war began as a just war. Given the genesis of the Afghanistan effort, with the events of September 11 and the hosting of al-Qaeda by the Taliban regime, it is a conflict that does not in my view equate to, as some have suggested, Vietnam or Malaya. It contains its own distinctive set of circumstances, yet it certainly conforms to the just war criteria. Additionally, it was joined by many, it was sanctioned through the United Nations Security Council and, notwithstanding some withdrawal of troops from countries such as the Netherlands, it remains a genuine multi-lateral effort. Australia's role and the rationale that underpins it have been spelt out here already by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence and others.

Ascertaining that a war is just is the right starting point for any debate about the Afghanistan war. Secondly, the goal of containing terrorist activity is—again, one of the rationales for our participation in the war—in our national interest, both as a country committed to universal human rights and democratic systems of government and as a people having experienced the full horror of terrorist acts. The fact is that terrorism has changed the risk equation for individuals, communities and nations. Terrorism is delivered through a fundamentalist prism, where no account of proportion, just cause, impact on civilians or other related matters occur. While the question around the capacity of al-Qaeda to again utilise Afghanistan is the subject of vigorous debate, given al-Qaeda's utilisation of other countries and locations, the task of countering and containing terrorism remains a priority when seen through the wider lens of world-wide fundamentalist Islamic efforts. The third point—and the one I want to focus on here—is that what begins as a just war must have a just transition out of diametric conflict and, hopefully, eventually come to some form of stable governance. It is here that the debate about Australia's role is crucial. For some, the existing shortcomings of the current Karzai government as well as the stuttering progress of military operations provide reason enough to get out. Whilst it is true that this is an operation that has not, despite some regional progress, achieved any substantial resolution—I do not consider this is a winnable war in the sense that that term is usually understood—it does not mean that an immediate withdrawal would assist. Indeed, it may well have the opposite effect. Whilst there are now efforts to bring together the Taliban and the Karzai government in discussions, there is recognition that, as in the words of Retired Army Chief Peter Leahy:

We are not going to solve counterinsurgencies like this with only military means.

He went on to say:

... it's essential they talk to everybody who's involved...

This does not mean that the efforts of building capacity, despite the huge obstacles in Afghanistan, should immediately cease. Furthermore, given the commitment by President Obama to start withdrawals at a future nominated date, it is hard to imagine that a peremptory exit by Australia would not add to rather than lessen the difficulties faced, given we are aiming to replace, in part at least, some of the positive measures which the now departed Netherlands forces were involved in.

It is the case that Australia's role has been prominent in Oruzgan province, where we have primary responsibility in leading the provincial reconstruction team. There are 1,550 personnel involved in the monitoring and reconstruction task force and special operations task group and around 50 civilians working in Afghanistan more broadly and 20AFP officers, 10 defence civilians and nine AusAID personnel and DFAT officers in Kabul, Kandahar and Oruzgan. Whatever the scale of achievement—and, yes, the aimed improvements in law and order, governance, training and the provision of services in both the education and health fields, as well as advice on the crucial task of getting the economy up and going are at this time incremental—the fact is that they are real gains. They are gains that need to be secured, contained and continued in the wider context of an overall settlement of the Afghanistan conflict. That is the key issue. If, as I believe, there is sufficient reason to continue our involvement then it is essential that it contributes in the coming period to meeting the critical needs of what, after all, is one of the poorest nations on earth.

As the local and regional diplomatic effort continues, we should build those efforts aimed at helping communities rebuild, especially with enabling local communities with better health and education support and facilitating an enlarged NGO capacity and delivery of aid. Here education is of vital importance. The years of conflict have left not only a depleted civil service but many schools without teaching resources, teachers and, in numerous cases, even buildings. I saw one statistic that referred to more than half the school dwellings in a province being destroyed or non-existent. Afghanistan envisages education as the right of all citizens. It has developed a national education strategic plan—now in its second iteration—which focuses on teacher education. Given that around three quarters of the Afghanistan budget is made up of overseas aid, the focused delivery of aid to address these urgent needs and, in this case, particularly education, is a clear priority.

Here Australia's aid commitment, which has increased off a low base to some \$100 million, can make a difference. While it is dwarfed by the military budget, it can and should be maximised in delivery at this time. There is merit in the suggestion that, coming out of the Timor exercise, where different agencies have liaison officers to facilitate greater cooperation between them, we should continue to build on these liaison roles. Given the range of immediate challenges on the ground in a strife torn country where basic services are negligible, it is critical that increasing integrated program delivery—civilian and military, and between agencies and NGOs—can happen in the short term.

I note in passing the suggestion from ASPI that, for instance, predeployment training be undertaken for all personnel in local Afghan culture, law and customs. I know there is already some training of this kind, but we should give special consideration to

ensuring that those personnel who are deployed are well acquainted with those cultural issues. We also should give consideration to the kind of expertise that is best suited for Afghanistan at this stage, especially in areas like dryland farming where Australia has much to offer.

Finally, one cannot depart this debate without noting the important human rights dimension that attaches to our involvement in Afghanistan. I note that the Attorney-General and the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, amongst others, raised this when they spoke, but we do have a moral responsibility to consider carefully the consequences of offering any opportunity to the Taliban or any regime for that matter that might see an escalation of the human rights abuses that have characterised the recent history of Afghanistan, particularly those regrettably against women. Amnesty International has noted that:

The Taleban have a record of committing human rights abuses - and abuses against women in particular ...

and show

... little regard for human rights and the laws of war and systematically and deliberately target civilians, aid workers, and civilian facilities like schools (particularly girls' schools).

For regions such as Oruzgan where female literacy levels are non-existent, such a return would be a calamity visited on a people who have already suffered much. It is clear that in the future we will need to develop additional international legal frameworks to combat terrorism. Some have suggested a new form of Geneva Convention where a legal basis for international terrorism is established. For the moment, we need to recall that one of the harshest lessons of war—and the ensuing damage, tragic losses and painful and sometimes extended end game—is that, once countries exit, if they have not carefully thought through the consequences or left in

place something for those who remain to build on, the tragedy of war is compounded. There are no easy victories or immediate solutions in this conflict but Australia, as it stays the course for now, should continue to provide the best support it can to a terribly important country whose good days surely lie ahead if peace can eventually emerge from this difficult and fractured era. I dearly hope that it can.

Dr STONE (Murray) (4.18 pm)—I welcome this opportunity to make a contribution to this debate about the Afghan war. I think it is the most important debate that we are having because Australians as a nation do not glorify war. We are not a warmongering society. I know that no-one in this parliament glories in the notion that we are currently at war in Afghanistan. This fact is borne out for me almost every day in my electorate, where driving around the 52 small towns brings me face-to-face with the war memorials and the cenotaphs. A lot of them are the only things still around in tiny towns where there is just a closed public hall and, usually right outside, a big granite cenotaph. These cenotaphs, of course, commemorate the dead, mostly from the First World War and some from the Second World War.

The point about those cenotaphs is that they are a place of mourning loss; they are not a place of glorifying great victories. When we do have statuary associated with these memorials and cenotaphs, it is invariably of a soldier with a bowed head obviously mourning the loss of his mates who have died in battle. So we are not a country that glorifies war; we never have been and we never will be. On the other hand, we are a country that always steps up, never expects others to do our heavy lifting, that is always there for our allies and is there to help keep peace wherever we can or to fight back tyranny when it comes near us or threatens others like us.

This is an important debate for restating what the nature of our engagement is in the rest of the world when it comes to deploying our Defence Force men and women. I stand proudly here too as the mother of a major in the Australian Army and as the daughter of a mother and father who served as volunteers in the Second World War and as the granddaughter of a light horseman who served in the First World War as a volunteer. But these are very typical antecedents of people who live in country Australia. Very often generation after generation volunteer and some return maimed, disabled physically and often also with mental health issues to deal with. But, of course, many do not return at all.

I have to say that in my experience very recently at Al Minhad, which is the place of deployment for our Australian Army, Navy and Air Force into Afghanistan and the Gulf, I was hugely impressed at the calmness, the professionalism and the stoicism of the Australian men and women of the Australian Defence Force. Some of them are in supporting roles and will never be going forward into the combat zone but they do essential work, whether it is in intelligence, in communications technologies, in pure administrative work or in supplying the people going forward.

There are a whole raft of jobs that are done by those who do not get the glory of the action when it comes to being on the ground but who are essential and no less often stressed, being so far from home and being in conditions that are institutionalised, where their own personal freedoms have been absolutely exchanged for their duties for their country. Those people in Al Minhad were often older people, in their later 20s and 30s, with officers older again. Almost all of them that I spoke to had families back in Australia, and those families too make an enormous sacrifice. We must always remember the wives, husbands, children, brothers, sisters

and partners left when any of our Defence Force goes forward and carries out the will of the people of Australia via the directions of this parliament.

I was concerned, though, in talking to some of the psychologists and others on the base. They of course spoke strictly professionally and appropriately to us, who were visiting parliamentarians wanting to know how we could help. I think it is important that the Australian government ensures, through our defence forces, that the very best decompression, as they sometimes call it, is offered to our serving men and women when they are leaving their deployment of, say, six months or longer. Indeed, even when they are just taking a break during their deployment we should ensure they do not just spend those few days on a base—in this case, Al Minhad in the Emirates—which is still not like a normal society. They are still surrounded by people all in uniform and under strict regimes. There is no alcohol on the base, of course, and they are still many hours away from their families.

I was impressed when I spoke to the Dutch, who were in the process of withdrawing at that stage. They talked about how their troops, when they are in a decompression stage—in other words, leaving deployment—went off to Cyprus and spent several weeks there in the company of chaplains, counsellors and other support people. Their family could be with them, they could be exposed to a normal tourist holiday type venue, behave like ordinary people out of uniform and have a real chance to readjust. If we could do something like this for our serving personnel, it would give them a better chance to try and get their thoughts in order before they stepped off the plane in Darwin, Sydney or Adelaide and into the arms of their loved ones waiting for them. It is very important that we look at how we are going about the task of ensuring that post-traumatic

stress is absolutely minimised when it comes to our great Australian Defence Force personnel. We expect so much of them and we are beginning to learn more and more about the stresses that can affect any human being and can recur years later if there is not proper support given at the right time.

We have experience in Australia of a great group of our Defence Force personnel coming back to this country who were not fully supported by the government of the day, were certainly not supported by the media and were not supported by many in the population. They were our Vietnam War returnees. They are still scarred, many of them, by the experience they had, where they were spat upon, abused and called baby killers. I know that is a long time ago now—some 40 years or so for some of them—but the scars they carry because of a non-caring, misunderstanding Australian public will be with them forever. So it is very important in this debate in this place that we restate very, very carefully—from the government side, from the opposition side and from the cross-benches—that we are proud of the work, the commitment, the courage, the stoicism and the sacrifice of Australian Defence Force personnel who serve in the name of this nation. We are proud of their conduct when they are deployed in other places. The reputation of Australians at war and in peace-keeping is amongst the best in the world in terms of our civilian interface and our adherence to understanding the rights of others in such circumstances.

I was very impressed at Al Minhad as I came to understand how we are trying to win the hearts and minds of the people in Oruzgan province in Afghanistan. This is a province which has very low levels of literacy and numeracy, where for generations women have not been allowed to be educated and where there is very poor health for all of the population and in particular for women

and children. In fact, Oruzgan ranks as one of the least developed provinces in Afghanistan. The literacy rate for females is on or about zero, and it is only 10 per cent for males. We have our trade schools in place, which aim to give young men in particular—at this stage—a skill that they can carry back into their communities, and this is a good thing that we do. I also very strongly commend the work that is beginning to be done with women in communities. That will obviously be very dangerous work, but we have to understand that, until we have the population understanding that the Taliban is not an alternative that will ever give them freedom and peace, until they believe that categorically, then the war will continue to oppress them.

Over 100 locals have now been trained and over 132,000 square metres of contaminated land has been cleared of mines under our Australian aid programs. We have improved food security through the distribution of wheat and other food items, including take-home rations for female school students—those pioneer women who are going to be educated. We support basic health and hygiene education, providing 1,780 primary school students—34 per cent of whom are girls—with basic health and hygiene education. Australians in Afghanistan, a long way from their loved ones and the comforts and security of their home, are trying very hard to give this war-torn nation a chance to experience some of the peace and security that we take for granted too often in our country. The provincial reconstruction teams are doing an exceptional job. We aim to spend some \$20 million in 2010-11 on development assistance.

It is important that Australians understand the full scope of the work that our Defence Force personnel and those we employ through our aid programs are doing in Afghanistan. It is important to understand that

this is not going to be a quick fix in a nation that has been war-torn literally for generations. As a nation that embraces democracy, that has enjoyed freedom but understands freedom comes at a price, it is important that we understand and state again and again in this parliament that we will always stand up and deploy our defence forces where we think we can make a difference, where we think that with our allies we can bring peace and security to other parts of the world and where we can make sure our own nation does not have terrorism visited upon it, because terrorism has been allowed to thrive in our near neighbourhood.

I want to state personally on behalf of the electorate of Murray our thanks to the Australian defence forces. Our electorate has long had an association with and supplied our brightest and best to the Australian defence forces. Our soldier settler communities are the backbone of what today is still a thriving food-producing community and our cenotaphs and our memorial cairns, our honour boards inside all of our little country halls and churches, pay lifelong and long-lasting respect to those who looked after our country in the defence forces before this current generation. This has been a very special opportunity for the Australian parliament to restate our respect and our commitment to do our best always for the security, safety and proper resourcing of our defence forces. We need to look at the long-term needs of our forces and of our personnel when they return home. I am sure that there is more we can do in that particular area. I thank the House very much for giving me this opportunity. I hope this debate will be read carefully by our defence force personnel, both those serving and those in Australia, so that they understand the gratitude of our nation.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (4.31 pm)—On 12 October 2010, the families of Debbie

Borgia and her 13-year-old daughter Abbey, Robyn Webster and Louisa Zervos commemorated their loss in the Bali bombings. These four constituents of mine in Grayndler were among the 88 Australians killed by terrorists in the Bali 2002 bombings. Those terrorists were linked to al-Qaeda. As it was with the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre, Australia was not isolated from the actions of terrorists just because those heinous crimes took place on another shore. I am reminded by the commemoration every year that we cannot afford to be isolationist in our approach to the global threat of terrorism.

The debate today on the Prime Minister's statement is an opportunity for every member of parliament to outline their views about our role in Afghanistan. These issues are not easy. These issues are not simple. They never are. I certainly respect the views of those who consider themselves pacifists, as I acknowledge those who want to see our troops immediately withdrawn from Afghanistan. There are many in my electorate who have conveyed that view to me. They are genuine in their views, including some strong personal supporters and indeed members of the Australian Labor Party. I respectfully disagree with their position. I want to quote the words of President Barack Obama when he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize last year:

... make no mistake: evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince al-Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force is sometimes necessary is not a call to cynicism—it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.

There are circumstances where the cost of inaction outweighs the cost of intervention. There are circumstances where we have a responsibility to act. The Second World War was one of those; Iraq was not. I did not sup-

port Australia's involvement in Iraq. I feel privileged to have been part of the Labor cabinet which decided to bring our combat troops home from Iraq in accordance with the commitment we gave to the Australian people in 2007. It is worth reminding the parliament that it was another Labor Prime Minister, John Curtin, who took the courageous decision in the national interest to bring back Australian soldiers from the Middle East and focus our efforts on Asia and the Pacific.

Our mission in Afghanistan is very different from Iraq. My support for this mission rests on three factors. The first of those is the international circumstances. Our engagement in Afghanistan was sanctioned by the United Nations. There are 47 nations serving in the International Security Assistance Force under a United Nations Security Council mandate, including Turkey, Malaysia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. The Security Council mandate was renewed unanimously earlier this month. Labor has a proud tradition of supporting multilateralism through the United Nations. We played a critical role in the establishment of the United Nations. The very idea of an international community would not exist if Doc Evatt and others had not written the Charter of the United Nations at the San Francisco conference in 1945. We take pride in our role as good international citizens.

Progressives have never been isolationist in their attitude to foreign policy. As we speak, Australia is playing a vital role in countries as diverse as East Timor, the Solomon Islands and the Sudan. Our police are playing a role in Cyprus. One of the factors which determined Labor's opposition to the war in Iraq was the failure to secure United Nations support. The legitimacy of multilateralism is undermined if we pick and choose which United Nations resolutions are worthy of support once they have been car-

ried unanimously. The reason for this international support is that it is responding to the international nature of those who would do our way of life harm. Al-Qaeda and, increasingly, other terrorist groups act globally. Nation states acting alone cannot respond adequately to the threat we face.

I have always repudiated extremist fundamentalism, whether or not it is based on religion and regardless of the religion which is being distorted in its name, whether Islam, Christianity or Judaism. As progressives we should not be more tolerant of extreme views or hesitate to act against fundamentalism simply because those extremists come from another culture. Targeting terrorists who claim to act in the name of Islam is not the same as targeting Muslims. The left and the right of politics both need to understand that. Progressives have a proud history of taking on extremists, but some progressives are still living under the shadow of their correct opposition to the Vietnam War. Over time, some of this opposition has turned into a knee-jerk anti-Americanism. It is ironic that, when he proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh chose to quote none other than the United States Declaration of Independence.

Since Vietnam it has been difficult for people on the progressive side of politics to argue the case for any military intervention. However difficult, we must be prepared to analyse circumstances as they are, not as we would like them to be. Indeed, there are some who argue that the war against terrorism is simply a creation of the media or of United States governments, particularly that of George W Bush.

For the families of those affected by terrorism, including those in my electorate, this threat is all too real. It cannot be wished away. Let us be clear what those who seek to impose an extreme and distorted interpreta-

tion of sharia law really stand for. They seek to kill people for the crime of teaching young girls to read and write. They seek to kill people who call themselves socialists. They seek to kill people on the basis of their sexuality. They seek to kill Muslims who do not conform to their extremist version of Islam. They harbour terrorists who have targeted Australians and would do so again given the chance. In fact, they seek to destroy the very fabric and stability of global economic and social activity. Under these circumstances, I simply cannot agree that we should just walk away from our responsibilities.

The third reason why I support our mission in Afghanistan is that our commitment is consistent with our ongoing national interest. We have an important role to play in the region. We are providing considerable development assistance to Afghanistan—over \$100 million this financial year. We are supporting basic health and hygiene efforts in schools. Our troops and AFP officers are helping to train and mentor the Afghan military and police in Oruzgan province. Our troops are training locals to recognise and remove mines across this province. Supporting these officers and soldiers should be something that all Australians do regardless of their view about our mission in Afghanistan.

We should never again repeat the mistake that was made post Vietnam. These soldiers and AFP officers are serving our nation upon orders from those above, primarily the government of this country. We must respect the role that they play and each and every one of them knows that they have the support of this nation for the courageous work that they do.

Today, some six million Afghan children are enrolled in school. Nearly 40 per cent of these students are girls. Afghanistan's economic growth has been strong, averaging 11

per cent since 2002—of course, coming off a very low base. That is not to say that progress has been as rapid as we would like. There have been real impediments there. There have been concerns raised about governance issues within the Karzai government. These concerns are very serious indeed and both the Australian and the international community are determined to assist Afghanistan to make substantial improvements on governance as they move forward.

The issue before us today is: what is our role in Afghanistan, going forward? Those who say we should withdraw now must also ask themselves what would happen to Afghanistan if we did. Would the Taliban, al-Qaeda and any number of other fundamentalist groups not try to re-establish themselves as the dominant force in the nation? Would the fighting really stop or would Afghanistan go backwards from the modest progress that has been made?

The challenge ahead is formidable. There is no doubt about that. It is clear that Afghanistan will not become a flourishing prosperous democracy today or the next day. It will take time, and whatever form the nation of Afghanistan takes over time is of course for the people of Afghanistan to determine. But I do not believe that we can abnegate our responsibility to fight terrorism whether on our shores or in Afghanistan. It is not in the interests of global security; it is not in our national interest. It is not what those who lost their lives to terrorism in Bali and across the world would have us do. Nor is it in the interests of those six million boys and girls who are now enrolled in school in Afghanistan. I commend the Prime Minister's statement to the House.

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (4.43 pm)—It was a beautiful autumn early morning with lots of sunshine and barely a cloud in the sky. People were on their way to work, en-

joying the sunshine or pouring into, or already at, their workspaces at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. All appeared well with the world, with the only apparent jarring note being a foreign voice heard over the air traffic control frequency at 8.24 on the morning of 11 September 2001. The voice said:

We have some planes. Just stay quiet and you will be okay. We are returning to the airport. Nobody move. Everything will be okay. If you try to make any moves you will endanger yourself and the airplane. Just stay quiet.

Twenty-three minutes later the Boeing 767 of American flight 11 flew into the North Tower of the World Trade Center at over 800 kilometres an hour.

How quickly we forget the emotions that ran hot that day—the anger, the confusion, the sadness, the horror of seeing people jumping from hundreds of feet up, desperately trying to escape the flames. And who can forget the collapse of the towers? We forget how determined we were, when the attack was found to have been perpetrated by al-Qaeda, to ensure that bin Laden and his murderous followers be brought to justice, and how we committed to going into Afghanistan to defeat the Taliban and prevent al-Qaeda from continuing their murderous ways when the Taliban refused to comply with UN resolutions relating to al-Qaeda.

The problem now is that we have lost our way. The strategic objectives that should be in place—clear, political aims—are not evident either from the Australian perspective or from an international coalition perspective. If we do not know what we are aiming for we are destined never to hit the target. These strategic objectives would allow the military to determine tactical objectives, milestones and the tactics required to meet those objectives. Otherwise we end up with an engagement with no clear end in sight. We also need to ensure that our forces have the capability

required to meet those objectives. I will say more on that later.

In addition to the military objectives, there are socioeconomic factors that need to be dealt with; otherwise we will leave Afghanistan saying ‘mission accomplished’ but the nation we leave behind will, in short order, revert to the chaotic failed state it was in 2001. One reason we were successful in Iraq was that Iraq had an educated middle class and a functional bureaucracy. At present neither is in place in Afghanistan. We need to ensure that, in addition to working towards a military victory, we put in place structures for long-term sustainability to put in place a viable nation.

It is said that those who do not learn from history are destined to repeat it. After World War I, the winners were determined, in the words of David Lloyd George, ‘to squeeze the German lemon until the pips squeak’. That indeed occurred after the Treaty of Versailles, with massive reparations levied against Germany. These reparations were paid off only this year, almost a century later. This squeezing of Germany was one of the direct causes of World War II.

After World War II a far more enlightened approach was adopted, with Marshall Plan aid and reconstruction authorities. The result was that our enemies became longstanding allies and vibrant democracies. After World War II, Germany and Japan, neither with a significant history of democracy, became two of the world’s great democracies. Albeit the current lack of a functional bureaucracy and educated middle class in Afghanistan, let us ensure that, in that country, the result is more closely aligned with the end of World War II than with that of World War I.

Before I get into the specifics and shortcomings of our engagement in Afghanistan, let me state that I am very concerned about the legal action being undertaken against

three of our soldiers. This action has taken far too long and, from what I understand, appears to be more of a fishing expedition than should be the case. We do not want our soldiers, who have to make split-second, life-or-death decisions, to be second guessing themselves due to concerns about the potential legal ramifications of any action they undertake. I am not saying that rules of engagement should be ignored or that illegal action should not be punished, but let us make sure that there are absolutely solid grounds for action against our fighting men and women before taking legal action—rather than using that legal action as a way to adduce information.

My biggest concern about Afghanistan is with the military capability we have in place. Lieutenant Colonel Mark Jennings, CO of the 1st Mentoring Task Force, diplomatically stated:

... we have just about enough to do what we are doing right now.

But he added:

I think it would be difficult for us to take on more tasks than we are currently doing.

The problem is: more needs to be done.

Our special forces appear to be operating predominantly around Kandahar, not Oruzgan where our regular forces are training the Afghan forces. The task we need to achieve in Oruzgan is not just the training of Afghan forces but the reduction of the Taliban threat in the province to a level that the trained Afghan forces would be able to handle comfortably. Problematically, at present our regular forces in Oruzgan are not allowed to even think about engaging the Taliban unless attacked. This means that any engagement of the Taliban will be in circumstances that simply do not favour our forces. Furthermore, if we take any casualties our forces vacate the field completely, which is bad for our morale and does not send the

right message to the Afghan troops we are training.

On 24 August our soldiers, in an unmounted patrol with the Afghan forces, were engaged in the green zone of the Deh Rawud region. They were fired upon and we lost a soldier. We vacated the field and apparently have not returned since. I am deeply disappointed that defence advice caused the Prime Minister to choose to criticise Senator Johnston when the senator called for more capability in support of our troops. Lieutenant Colonel Jennings' statement was instructive and indicates that increased capability is required.

Major General Jim Molan, the only flag ranked officer to have commanded on the ground in Iraq or Afghanistan, has called for us to send tanks. The fact is that the Canadians did not originally send tanks. They thought that tanks were not suitable and were unnecessary, yet once they sent them they found them to be invaluable. General Molan pointed out that there have been many occasions when the conventional wisdom has been that tanks were not suitable for certain areas, such as New Guinea, Vietnam et cetera, yet they have always proved invaluable.

The need for attack helicopters is illustrated by reports that Dutch Apache helicopters chose to stay 5,000 metres above a fire-fight—not engaging the Taliban—in which nine of our troops were wounded and one American was killed. That was appalling and clearly demonstrates why we need our own armed reconnaissance helicopters in the area.

Our defence leadership say that this is not required, yet they have asked the Dutch to keep five Apaches in the region due to our own lack of capability. The defence bureaucracy denying that more capability is needed is simply to cover up for the litany of acquisition disasters that are now coming home to bite. The fact is, the Tiger armed reconnais-

sance helicopter should have been in full service years ago, but due to bureaucratic ineptitude in defence it is still not in service.

Senior defence leadership have repeatedly banked on our not having to use our capability. This has been the case over a period of decades, where acquisition disasters did not seem to matter as the capability was not required on the day. We are now seeing these acquisition blunders, disasters and excuses coming home to roost, and this has to stop. We need comprehensive reform within defence, yet neither side of politics has, historically, been prepared to do what is necessary. Far too often we have simply taken senior defence officials at their word, while they resort to dubious claims that 'these are complex systems, so you must expect these delays'.

Let us look at a total disaster area—new air combat capability. We keep getting the run-around from defence bureaucrats, yet as a parliament we have not taken them to task for their blatant lies and misrepresentation. Complex systems? Consider the Lockheed SR71 Blackbird, a complex aircraft that cruises at mach 3.5 and at 85,000 feet, and which remains unsurpassed. That aircraft entered service within four years of Lockheed being awarded the contract in—wait for it—1959. That was a far more complex program for the time than the JSF is now, but there were competent people driving the program, led brilliantly by Kelly Johnson. Kelly will be turning in his grave at how the mighty Lockheed have fallen in their core competency.

In 2002 defence were telling us that the JSF would be in service in 2010—but I do not see any—and that they would cost \$40 million each. This was blatantly incorrect, and was also deliberate misrepresentation, while we see the likes of Air Chief Marshal Houston, Air Vice Marshal Harvey and Dr

Stephen Gumley deliberately using jargon not understood by most to conceal the real pricing. What do we find now? The JSF, eight years on, is still eight years away from service, and the cost will be well over \$130 million apiece—now more than the much better F22 Raptor.

The Air Power Australia think tank was giving a far more accurate representation in 2002 and has continued to give a far more accurate assessment of the situation. Their reward? Ad hominem attacks from defence people who should have known better than APA and are embarrassed, I believe, to have had their ineptitude demonstrated publicly. The JSF is not even on DMO's list of projects of concern. The reason? Because we have not contracted to buy any. But hang on—this botched program has already cost us billions of dollars, due to our paying to be part of the development program and due to the timeline slipping so far that there was concern about a capability gap, leading to the purchase of Super Hornets.

Defence now plans to scrap our fleet of perfectly good F111s. This is an abnegation of responsibility. These aircraft still have magnificent capability, and we can and should keep them in storage for at least 10 years. This could be done for about one-tenth the cost of a single JSF, and should be done. It is very cheap insurance. The JSF is not capable of achieving air supremacy in the time period it will be in service.

I am concerned by the belief system and institutionalised groupthink evident at Defence HQ, and the naive belief that the 'magic' of networks and stealth means 'we will know all', to quote their evidence to the parliament, and can essentially do all while using otherwise completely inadequate equipment. Indeed, the US is likely to lose air supremacy in the Pacific over the next decade, and anyone wanting to know why

should go to YouTube and look up Lieutenant General David Deptula's 2010 presentation to the US Air Force Association in Washington DC.

I call for comprehensive reform of the Department of Defence and hope that as a parliament we can find the courage that has thus far been lacking in previous parliaments. Our service personnel need real capabilities delivered in timely fashion, rather than misleading bureaucratic 'explanations' which we as a parliament have collectively put up with for far too long. If we continue to accept incompetent and misleading advice from the defence bureaucracy, we will end up having to explain why our service personnel are being sent home in body bags.

Finally, I congratulate Stephen Smith, the Minister for Defence, for his most recent direction to the department to use plain language for briefings to the government, the parliament and the people of Australia. For far too long, defence officials have used technical language to confuse, while distracting parliament from the real issues.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Clare**) adjourned.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call the member for Kooyong, I remind honourable members that this is his first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong) (4.59 pm)—Mr Speaker, I am honoured and privileged to represent the people of Kooyong, a place of strong community values and the home of the Liberal Party's great founder, Sir Robert Menzies—our longest serving Prime Minister.

Standing before the parliament of our great country, I see my journey to this place in the continuum of my family's story. My grandparents on both sides were migrants from Europe. In the late 1930s Morrie and Leah Frydenberg came from Poland to Australia to seek a better life. They arrived while Europe was plunging into darkness.

The experience was different for my maternal grandparents, Sam and Ethel Strauss, and their young daughters, including my mother, who were interned in the Budapest ghetto by the Hungarian fascists. They survived and eventually made their way through displaced persons camps to Australia. My great-grandparents, and many relatives on both sides, perished in the Holocaust, but one who survived is with us today. My great-aunt Mary Frydenberg spent two years at Auschwitz. She was transferred back to Germany by the Nazis and then sent on a death march, but she escaped with the assistance of a humane German guard. In her run for freedom, she was given shelter by a Catholic priest—at great risk to him—before making her way to Australia.

Mary's story serves us all as a constant reminder of hope, even in the presence of tragedy. Like so many other immigrants to our great shores, all of my grandparents came here with nothing. With his family of five crammed into a one-bedroom Bondi apartment, Sam Strauss found room to punch holes in belts to eke out a living. Morrie Frydenberg worked on the docks fixing naval vessels during the war and later went into small business, opening three haberdashery stores in country Victoria with his cousins.

I have vivid memories of accompanying my grandparents on weekends as they drove their Kingswood to Colac, slept over at the pub and restocked the shop. My grandparents on both sides worked hard, determined to give their children a better start in life. My

mother, Erica, became a psychologist and my father, Harry, became a surgeon. Both are deeply respected for their contribution to the health and wellbeing of their local communities. This is a source of great pride to my sister and I, as our parents built a home where unconditional love and the obligation to help others was never in doubt.

The welcome my family received and the opportunities and freedom they enjoyed is for me the essence of what makes Australia great. My parents, like my paternal grandparents before them, settled in Kew, right in the heart of the Kooyong electorate. Never would they have dared dream that, decades later, one of their own family members would represent Kooyong in the federal parliament. But in Australia anything is possible. We are only limited by our imagination.

The seat of Kooyong derives its name from the Aboriginal word meaning 'resting place'. It is my home and where my beautiful fiancée, Amie, and I hope to raise our family. Encompassing the suburbs of Balwyn, Balwyn North, Hawthorn, Kew, Camberwell, Surrey Hills, Deepdene and Canterbury, the electorate is characterised by natural beauty, demographic diversity and a thriving local economy. Not far from the embankments of the Yarra, one can find bustling shopping strips, historic public buildings and churches—many dating back to the 1800s. Some of the architecture from the Victorian period reflects the gently faded glory of an ambitious past.

You need only to be on a late afternoon tram to see some of the 30,000 school students making their way home from the more than 50 schools in Kooyong to realise that the electorate is an educational metropolis. More than one in five people speak a language other than English at home, with Mandarin the fastest growing among them. Vibrant ethnic communities, be they Chi-

nese, Greek or Italian, are flourishing in our suburbs and enrich the cohesive, yet distinctive, Kooyong community.

Kooyong has an active citizenry. The service clubs, religious organisations and community groups are passionately committed to helping others. It was a cause well advanced by my predecessor, Petro Georgiou, and is reflected in his work. One of the great strengths of Kooyong is that it is full of grassroots organisations that are inspired and created not by government but by the people themselves. They are exemplars of cohesion. I derive enormous satisfaction from working with the people of Kooyong. Lending a helping hand is not only meaningful for me but my first responsibility.

The history of Kooyong tells a powerful story about Australian liberalism over more than a century. On 18 March 1895 Alfred Deakin addressed a public meeting at St Columb's Church in Hawthorn with a speech entitled, 'What is liberalism?' His speech was an early enunciation of the attributes which we now identify as a fair go. His clarification call for equality of opportunity and a society tempered by a safety net for those in need has resonated through the decades. The members for Kooyong have taken heed of Deakin's words—many have been giants in this place.

Sir John Latham was Deputy Prime Minister and later Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia. Andrew Peacock was, like Latham, a distinguished foreign minister and Leader of the Opposition. But of course it was Sir Robert Menzies who consolidated the Liberal cause during the course of his long prime ministership. His record of achievement is a measure of excellence for all of us. It is of special significance to me that Heather Henderson, the daughter of Sir Robert and Dame Pattie Menzies, is in the gallery today. Thank you, Heather, for your

encouragement and support and, in particular, for sharing the stories of your father with me.

Each member for Kooyong has sought a tolerant, fair and prosperous Australia. I will be no different, for this is an honourable legacy. How would I like to see the future unfold? I want to see an Australia that is safe and secure. I want to see an Australia where the only relevant consideration is the content of a person's character. I want to see an Australia where families are valued and encouraged. I want to see an Australia where each citizen has the opportunity to be the best that they can be. And I want to see an Australia where individuals, not governments, invent the future. This is why I am a Liberal, this is why I joined the Liberal Party and this why I am here.

What drives us as Liberals are notions of individual liberty, individual responsibility and a fairness born out of a particular kind of equality. The equality which Liberals seek in a society is the equality of opportunity, not the other kind of equality—the equality of outcomes. It seems to me that these two notions of equality reflect the fundamental fault lines between us and the members opposite. It is not a thin divide. Let me illustrate.

How can we all be better off when a teenager loses his daily two-hour job at the local store merely because his employer cannot afford to pay the minimum three-hour shift? How can we all be better off when the government targets independent and Catholic schools merely because parents are exercising choice? How can we all be better off when the government discourages private health insurance at a time when the public system is overburdened? These examples go to the heart of the other side's preoccupation with the equality of outcomes. By mandating outcomes, the state removes responsibility from individuals and denies the worker, the

student and the patient the opportunity to be the best that they can be.

In the writings of John Stuart Mill, Edmund Burke and Adam Smith I have found what I consider the best elements of both liberal and conservative traditions. Mill's argument that the state only has the right to intervene in the affairs of the individual in order to prevent harm to others is a fundamental building block in my political philosophy. Burke's defence of the traditions of society and the institutions of the state and his opposition to utopian notions of change for change's sake are also critical to my understanding of what is an effective role for government. The opportunity to prosper is given its best chance through competitive markets—the insight reached by Adam Smith more than two centuries ago.

My vision is to achieve what Menzies termed 'civilised capitalism', unleashing the power of the individual and his enterprise while always providing a safety net for those who despite their best efforts are unable to cope. These are my motivations, my cause and my way, and they not negotiable.

In this place we are painting the canvas of the nation and its future. We have a responsibility to dream large and think of what is possible in a difficult world. It may appear a paradox but the first of my large thoughts is that we need to limit the government. Our government is too big. For problems large and small, bureaucratic outcomes always seem to be the default option. This comes at a price—paralysing monopolies and a culture of dependence. It removes incentives for innovation and creativity. It often crowds out a capable private sector, impeding its ability to create jobs. The net effect is a less productive nation. We must always remember that whenever we create a new arm of bureaucracy or expand a field of activity we are not spending our own money; we are spending

the money of our citizens who look to us as the guardians of their wealth.

More than 30 years ago, Margaret Thatcher said that the problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people's money. Thatcher's nemesis was socialism; ours is bigger and bigger government. My goal is to ensure that government learns to live within its means.

A rigorous reform agenda needs to be maintained by broadening our skills base, lifting the participation rate and creating incentives for those on welfare to find work. Our policies must engender a person's confidence in their own self-worth and, for those who can, a responsibility to make their own way in life. Less dependence on government makes for a better Australia.

The next battleground will be the simplification of a complex tax system. This will require reconciliation between the centralisation of taxation powers and the need to maintain an effective distribution of responsibilities and roles between federal and state governments. In a world of global capital and competitive tax regimes, the threat of sovereign risk is poison.

I come to this chamber with a deep interest in foreign policy and national security. It is a passion fired by a belief that Australia has an important role to play in the world. Our geography is a strategic asset. It sets the stage for all our thinking. Located in the Pacific region, our strategy must be to broaden and deepen our ties with Asia. Asian engagement must be a national endeavour. It is where the opportunities lie. Genuine commitment in Asia requires immersion across all areas of public and private sector life—commerce, education, diplomacy and people-to-people links. Building our foreign language competency is an important element in this. Such a strategy upholds the finest traditions of the Liberal Party.

May I remind the House that it was in 1957 that the Menzies government, in the teeth of opposition from Labor's Arthur Calwell, negotiated the historic commerce agreement with Japan. This was as farsighted as it was courageous. The wounds of Changi and the Thai-Burma railway had not yet healed. Through the 1950s, Percy Spender's Colombo Plan was visionary in its scope, helping to build a pro-Australia constituency among the next generation of regional leaders. Our challenge is to find and follow through on the next building blocks in what are always complex but fundamental relationships.

Governments have no greater duty than to protect their citizens. In a volatile international environment, we can take nothing for granted. Our alliance with the United States is the cornerstone of our national security strategy. It must be protected and defended by both sides of the House. Our friendship and common purpose rests upon more than Realpolitik; it reflects our values, traditions and commitment to the democratic ideal.

Those who seek to harm Australia and our citizens do so because of our values not our alliances. It is true that China is rising but this does not demand a choice. While China's growth has widespread benefit for our region, America must not be encouraged to vacate the field. On the contrary, American primacy in the Asia-Pacific, characterised by a web of alliances, is critical to maintaining the balance. I am under no illusions. During my time in this place the security threats and foreign policy challenges for Australia will not subside. They will constantly require our very best judgment.

The third challenge I wish to address today is responsible sustainability. The reduction of our per capita consumption of energy and non-renewable resources is necessary. But part of being responsible is knowing

what it will cost, who it will impact and how communities and businesses will need to react. There has never been a better time for innovative technologies, practices and solutions. It seems inexplicable that in Australia we have yet to have a constructive and thorough debate about nuclear power, the only baseload, carbon neutral energy source. More than 30 countries have successfully embraced the nuclear concept and more are coming on stream every day. It is a curious moral, economic and environmental position that we find ourselves in where we are prepared to supply uranium but not use it. Surely it is time to move on from the ideological battles of yesteryear.

Fourthly, I would like to address certain aspects of our education debate. It would be hard to find anyone who would disagree with the words of Thomas Jefferson that education is the first defence of the nation. It is a process with a beginning and no end. It is a foundation stone for civil society. It seems to me that there is bipartisan agreement with Menzies proposition that 'lack of money must be no impediment to bright minds'. But at this point the ideological battleground begins. Increased transparency for the performance of schools and a national curriculum as a baseline are welcome but what seems to be missing is taking the pursuit of excellence seriously.

In the case of schools this requires educational opportunities more tailored to the individual and less dominated by a centralised, unaccountable bureaucratic system. School principals, councils and those closer to their students are much more likely to get this approach right.

Much of Australia's future depends on opportunities created by research and teaching in our universities and the quality of training in our vocational sector. The funding of our tertiary institutions needs review. We must

do better than funding them at below the OECD average. To underfund these institutions is self-defeating because the harvest of intellectual property generated by them can be the source of our prosperity in the knowledge economy of the future.

In this sector we need big goals. We should aim to have 10 Australian universities in the top 100 by 2030. This would also provide diversity, choice and regional representation. The hard one but the one we really should go for is to have two of our universities rated in the world's top 10 by 2030. Then we can truly say that Australians will be afforded the opportunity to be the best that they can be.

The maintenance of public confidence in immigration is the final issue that I would like to address. I am one of the eight million Australians who have at least one parent who was born overseas. The success of the Australian migration story is a tribute to the tolerance inherent in the Western liberal democratic values and institutions of our great country. These values are paramount and reflect the kind of Australia we should always defend and strive to be. Australia's diversity is a source of strength and reflects a confidence and a maturity in our approach to the world. We should never lose sight of these fundamental attributes.

We too cannot avoid the numbers reflected in our changing demographics and the demand for labour arising from our economic growth. To meet both these challenges we require a vibrant and orderly immigration program. At the same time I am conscious that a failure to provide sufficient public infrastructure dangerously undermines the community's natural embrace of and optimism about the power of immigration. It is an experience I have seen in Kooyong, where clogged roads and plans for high-density living enforced over the wishes of

local people are having this effect. We must do better. We must harness the creativity and the capital of the private sector. We must set in place long-term land release strategies and plan for the future. If we do not, we fail future generations. Our leaders have an opportunity and, in my view, a duty to make the public case in favour of immigration. It is in the national interest and it is the right thing to do.

Today, I have the extraordinary privilege to stand before you because of the trust and hard work of so many people. I am deeply grateful to the Liberal Party, its members and the people of Kooyong for giving me the honour and the responsibility of representing them. To my many friends in the gallery, thank you for making the special effort to come today and for your support on this exciting journey. I could not have done this without you.

I want to thank my parents, Harry and Erica, for always loving me and for leading me gently by example. I am blessed to be surrounded by my young nephews, Oscar and Luca, and my niece, Claudia, the children of my dear sister, Lexi, and her husband, Adam. These beautiful young children are a constant reminder of the possibilities that we must make available to the next generation.

To my darling fiancée, Amie: your unconditional love, your fierce honesty and your endless support are a source of vitality and strength for me. This is very much our shared journey. I also thank Amie's parents, Jackii and Nich, for embracing me.

To those formidable former cabinet ministers with us today—Alexander Downer, Richard Alston, Peter Reith and Dame Margaret Guilfoyle—and one who should have been—Michael Kroger—and the ones who are not here—Peter Costello, Michael Wooldridge, Kay Patterson, David Kemp and Rod Kemp—thank you for your friendship

and for sharing your wisdom over so many years. I have had the privilege of working for Alexander when he was foreign minister, a man of deep conviction. He taught me much but perhaps most tellingly that in politics nothing is ever as good or as bad as it seems. Richard's selfless commitment to our great Liberal cause has been an inspiration. He has always been prepared to stand up and be counted.

Two decades ago my close friend and counsel, Steven Skala, introduced me to his mentor, Sir Zelman Cowen. Since then I have had the good fortune of being challenged over hundreds of breakfast conversations with Sir Zelman, the most brilliant, decent and civil of men. He and Lady Cowen are two of the finest Australians.

I would also like to pay tribute to John Howard and Andrew Peacock, both of whom have helped me significantly on my journey. I was fortunate to work with John Howard when he was Prime Minister. His dedication to the people of Australia knew no bounds. His leadership, integrity and determination were profound. His record will stand the test of time. Andrew Peacock afforded me friendship and insight into the Kooyong that seemed once his own. I deeply appreciate his support.

The key to the Liberal Party's success and why we had been in government for 42 of the last 66 years is that we are a grassroots volunteer organisation. There are hundreds of people who have stood up for me and I just want to mention the Swinburnes, the Booths, the Blackwell and Murray families, the Garwolis, Irene Hanvin, Jane Hargreaves, my campaign director Simon Frost, Tim Smith, Hugh Morgan and my friends in this House, Kelly O'Dwyer, Peter Dutton, Ian Macfarlane and my longstanding mate Greg Hunt. I am indebted to you all. I also want to put on record my thanks to the party's fed-

eral and state directors Brian Loughnane and Tony Nutt for their support.

Today under the strong leadership of Tony Abbott our fortunes have turned with more members on our side than on the other. This is no accident. It is a tribute to the strength of our party's message and to the people's confidence in our leader's ability to deliver it.

I am proud of my Australian story. Decades ago in the gathering darkness of Europe, my family could never have imagined this day. But because this country is truly a land of opportunity I have been given this chance. Working with my colleagues and my party I dedicate myself to advancing the Liberal cause in the betterment of our great nation and its people.

Thank you.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

The SPEAKER—Order! In the member for Kooyong's first speech he made mention of a raft of former cabinet ministers in the gallery, and I join with the member for Kooyong in warmly welcoming them, especially those who have become my recent friends. Before I call the member for McPherson, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech and I ask the House to extend to her the usual courtesies.

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (5.28 pm)—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am proud and honoured to make my first speech to the 43rd parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia as the member for McPherson, and I thank the people of McPherson for the trust that they have put in me to represent their interests both on the Gold Coast and here in this place. We have all followed very different paths to arrive here and our individual experiences have shaped the people that we are today.

I was born in Brisbane and grew up in Townsville where I attended Townsville

Grammar School, which, at the time that my sister and I went there, was a boys boarding school and a day school for boys and girls. I chose maths and science subjects because those were the subjects that I enjoyed and did well at. Through years 11 and 12 my results were similar to two of the boys in my class and towards the end of year 12 when we were looking at future career options, the boys were encouraged to become engineers and I was encouraged to become a maths teacher. My response to that though was to do some research and find out exactly what engineers did and so, after looking at the engineering subjects and the work options for engineers, I came to the conclusion that engineering would probably be a good career for me.

I graduated as a mechanical engineer, starting work with the Queensland Electricity Generating Board initially in engineering design before moving to Gladstone Power Station to work in plant maintenance. My next job was in the oil industry in Victoria. That was the first job where I was directly or indirectly supervising employees, including fitters, electricians, store workers and drivers, and I was working with them on the shop floor. At that site I was the youngest plant engineer that they had ever employed and I was also the first female. There were some bitter demarcation disputes in the early to mid-1980s, and the oil industry was certainly no exception. In order to keep the plant running effectively, I needed to be able to work with the employees and get them to willingly, or perhaps unwillingly, do the work that was needed. So dealing with demarcations in the oil industry as a young engineer was my introduction to industrial relations.

At the time that I studied engineering, the degree course did not include any subjects in industrial relations, and when I first started as a supervisor I had a very limited under-

standing of industrial awards and how to interpret the provisions. I enrolled in a graduate diploma in industrial relations so that I could learn more about the theory of IR, but the practical skills I learnt on the job. Shortly after I had completed the course I was offered a job as an industrial advocate with the national employer association, working in their metal, engineering and construction industries. My job was to represent the interests of employers, primarily small businesses, in negotiations with their employees about terms and conditions of employment.

After working for a number of years as an industrial advocate and in the broader field of human resources I was approached by the Victorian government to head up the industrial relations branch for the Department of Health and Community Services, as it was known at the time. The mid-nineties was a critical time for industrial relations in Victoria. The health minister that I was responsible to was the Hon. Marie Tehan, a politician and a woman that I hold in very high regard who was a significant influence on my decision to pursue a career in politics. So I am delighted to be a member of the 43rd Parliament alongside Marie Tehan's son, the member for Wannon, Dan Tehan.

For the last 15 years I have worked as an industrial relations specialist throughout Australia and New Zealand, where the focus of my work became alternative dispute resolution and, in particular, mediation. This work continued when, in 2002, I moved back to the Gold Coast with my family and we made the McPherson electorate our home. The division of McPherson, named after the McPherson Range, was first proclaimed in 1949, and the first elected member was Sir Arthur Fadden, later to become Prime Minister of Australia. I am the seventh member for McPherson and the 1066th person elected to the federal parliament.

McPherson covers an area of approximately 230 kilometres, from Clear Island Waters in the north to Mudgeeraba, Tallebudgera Valley and Currumbin Valley in the west and to the Queensland-New South Wales border at Coolangatta in the south. Our eastern boundary is the Pacific Ocean and includes the very well-known and popular beaches of Kirra, Palm Beach and Burleigh Heads. We have the best surfing beaches, with world renowned surf breaks at Snapper Rocks, Kirra and Burleigh. We have the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary, which has been attracting visitors from all over the world for the last 60 or so years. We have Tallebudgera Creek and the Currumbin estuary, where so many families have holidayed and return each year to continue that tradition. We have rock pools and some great walks through the Currumbin Valley and of course some fantastic walks along our beaches.

We have great shopping. We have our beachside markets at Coolangatta and Burleigh, emerging designers with boutique shops at Palm Beach, all the way through to our newly renovated and expanded Robina Town Centre at the north of the electorate. We have music festivals. We support young talent looking for the opportunity to reach their potential. We have kite festivals, film festivals and beachside art exhibitions. We have warm temperatures and lots of sunshine. We have something for everyone. We are the entry point, the gateway, to Queensland.

Today there are three things that I wish to speak about because they are important to McPherson and they define who I am and what I stand for: infrastructure, business and veterans. We have had significant population growth in South-East Queensland, and specifically the Gold Coast, in recent years, and this trend is predicted to continue. I have spoken to many local residents and business

owners, and the issue that is raised with me the most is the lack of transport infrastructure on the southern Gold Coast. They are concerned that the bottlenecks on the M1 cause delays as they travel to and from work and that the limited public transport on the southern Gold Coast means that owning a private vehicle becomes almost a necessity.

In 2007 both the Howard government and the then Labor opposition promised \$455 million to upgrade the M1. The priority area was identified as Nerang to Tugun, with an upgrade from four lanes to a six- to eight-lane motorway. To date the M1 from Merri-mac south to the border remains at four lanes. Not only does this impact on local residents and tourists but it has a significant economic effect, as the M1 is a major transport artery from New South Wales through to Queensland. Upgrading of the M1 must become a priority. Heavy rail, servicing Brisbane to the Gold Coast, goes only as far south as Varsity Lakes, and that station was opened only in the last 12 months. It took 11 years to lay 4.1 kilometres of track from Robina to Varsity Lakes, which is just one station. At that rate it will take about 40 years to get heavy rail to Coolangatta, which is simply not good enough. Stage 1 of the light rail project, which will service the northern end of the Gold Coast, is scheduled to come on line in 2014, but there is no evidence that the light rail will be extended to the southern Gold Coast, even in the medium term.

Transport infrastructure becomes an even more pressing issue when we take into account, as we must do, the Gold Coast Airport at Coolangatta. It currently has more than five million passenger movements per year and has experienced 10 per cent growth in the last year alone. We cannot have visitors arrive at the airport and face a bottleneck when they are trying to travel to other parts of the Gold Coast. Further, there is the very

real prospect that the 2018 Commonwealth Games will be hosted on the Gold Coast, and we must ensure that we meet the needs and expectations of athletes, officials and visitors. The issue for us is that traffic movement on the southern Gold Coast is already restricted and there are no real plans in place to address the needs of the area. However, we should not consider the M1, heavy rail and light rail in isolation. We must consider the overall needs of the Gold Coast and work towards an integrated solution. I call on all levels of government to work together and to also work with the community—the residents and the businesses—to find solutions to this most important issue.

Whilst we have a diverse business base—and I will speak more about that later—tourism is one of the Gold Coast's main industries and employers. Even though there are certainly some large operators on the Gold Coast, many small and medium businesses are dependent on the tourism dollar. It is fair to say that there has been a downturn in tourism in recent years and our businesses are hurting. Our accommodation providers tell me that occupancy rates are down and that room rates are significantly discounted in order to attract tourists and to compete with the larger providers at the northern end of the Gold Coast. Local businesses that rely on tourists are suffering. Coffee shops, newsagents, restaurants, local corner stores, tour operators and retailers are all struggling to make ends meet. We cannot afford to approach this issue, however, with a doom-and-gloom attitude. We must continue to look at ways to attract visitors to the Gold Coast and to encourage those who come for events to stay for a week or 10 days and not simply make a fly-in fly-out visit. Over the coming months and years, I will continue to work with our local businesses and tour operators to identify strategies to attract visitors to our

area, and I will always promote the best interests of the Gold Coast.

As well as tourism, we have a significant manufacturing and engineering industry and also retail, finance and education businesses. The common theme that is consistently raised with me by businesses across all industries is the amount of red tape and the associated cost to business of compliance. Further, the administration of reporting requirements takes business owners and operators away from their core business, further adding to costs. Having been a small business owner myself for many years, I understand the frustration in having to comply with government regulations when what I really needed to do was meet the needs of my existing client base as well as look for further growth opportunities. I believe that we should work towards a lean government that minimises interference in our daily lives and that government should not impose unnecessary and onerous regulation and red tape on citizens or businesses.

I turn now to our veterans to whom I believe we owe a debt of gratitude. We should honour our veterans and never forget the sacrifices that they and their families made for us. McPherson has a large veteran community. I have had a long association with veterans through my father, William Weir, who was a veteran himself. Dad's story is similar to those of a number of World War II veterans. He enlisted in the RAAF in October 1944 with his mother's written permission as he was under the age of 21 years. After serving at a number of bases in Queensland, he served in Labuan and then spent 18 months in Japan with the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Like many veterans, dad never spoke much about his RAAF war service, particularly the time spent in Japan after the bombings. However, in later years, his pride in his RAAF service and fellow ex-

service men and women led him to take on the position of National Secretary and Treasurer of the Australian Federation of Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex Servicemen and Women—the TPIs. His tireless work for this organisation saw him awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia. To dad the medal meant that his voice for the welfare and support of TPI veterans had been and would continue to be heard, and I intend to carry on his work.

What are the skills and experience that I bring to this place? As an engineer, I understand project management and the importance of meeting realistic timelines. I understand the need to maintain a sound theoretical approach in order to enable the introduction of new technology and to balance the issues of costs, benefits, safety and quality. I know that, as an engineer, if I had recommended a project be undertaken without a thorough cost-benefit analysis, my judgement would have been questioned and, if I had proceeded to implementation without a rigorous analysis, I would have lost my job. As an industrial relations specialist, I understand the role that employees have to play in productivity and continuous quality improvement at the workplace. I know that adversarial industrial relations is outdated and has no place in modern and progressive workplaces. As an advocate, I am experienced at listening to the needs of others and representing the views of those in the workplace and in the community. As a parent, I understand the importance of health and education to our future generations and the need to nurture and encourage our children. I want our children to have the opportunity to reach their full potential, whatever that may be. So, what do I believe in? In addition to what I have already said today, I believe in equal opportunity in the broadest possible sense. I believe in freedom of thought, wor-

ship, speech and association. I believe in a fair go.

To the members of the Liberal National Party who selected me as their candidate to represent the people of McPherson, I say thank you. To the President of the Liberal National Party, Bruce McIver, the executive and the staff of the Liberal National Party: congratulations and thank you for your outstanding efforts in the 2010 election and for your commitment to promoting the best interests of the party and upholding its principles. My thanks also go to Bruce Duncan, our regional chairman, and his wife, Muriel, who work tirelessly for the party throughout the Gold Coast region. To Peter and Lesley McKean, Ben Naday, Andy Lamont, John and Esther Leff, Peter and Mary Flynn, Jill Allen and Ann Nelson who went to extraordinary lengths to help the campaign, I say thank you. To our booth captains, scrutineers and booth workers, I say thank you. I could not have done it without you. To my campaign manager, Jeszaen Lee, who as well as all of his campaign tasks single-handedly organised information booths every weekend for weeks: thank you, you did a great job. To Glenn Snowdon: thank you for everything that you did for the campaign and your support for me. I could not have asked for more.

To my patron senator, Senator the Hon. Brett Mason: thank you for your support and encouragement. To the members and senators who visited McPherson and helped me in many ways—the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Tony Abbott; the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Julie Bishop; the Hon. Bronwyn Bishop; the Hon. Peter Dutton; the Hon. Sharman Stone; Scott Morrison; Greg Hunt; my electorate neighbours Steven Ciobo and Stuart Robert; Senator the Hon. George Brandis; Senator Barnaby Joyce; and Senator Russell Trood—I say thank you. I was helped enormously by our state members: the member for Cur-

rumbin, Jann Stuckey; the member for Mudgeeraba, Ros Bates; the member for Mermaid Beach, Ray Stevens; and the former member for Burleigh, Judy Gamin. I thank you for your support and friendship.

To my very good friend Susan Greenwood, who was diagnosed with terminal cancer two days before my preselection and passed away in May this year: it was my very great privilege to know you, Susan. To my good friends Jude Pettitt and Sue Kellogg: I thank you for your wise counsel, and I know that I can rely on you for more sage advice in years to come. To Janelle Manders, Hamish Douglas and Natalie Douglas, who are here in the gallery today: you have been a wonderful support to me and to my family over the years and I thank you very much for that. Janelle, I have always found your positive outlook and your attitude to life refreshing.

To my sister, Ann, who now lives in Broome with her husband, Ken, and is unable to be here today: I could not have asked for a better sister. Ann, this was your first election campaign and you did a fantastic job. To my mother, Moya Weir, who is here in the gallery today: you have been such a wonderful role model throughout my life. Dad would be so proud of you, as we all are. To my father, William Weir OAM, who died in March this year: I miss you and I miss your pearls of wisdom.

To my husband, Chris: we have always had an equal partnership and we have always supported each other's career choices, even when it meant that those choices made life a little—or sometimes a lot—more complex. You have always been there when I needed you and I thank you for that. My final words today are to my three daughters: Emma who is 14, Jane who is 10 and Kate who is seven. Each of you played a part in my being here today as the member for McPherson, and I

thank you for that. Girls: life will offer you many opportunities and many challenges. I encourage you to grasp every opportunity that comes your way with both hands. View each challenge that you face as an opportunity to learn and remember that, no matter what, you will get through it. Believe in yourself because you can do it. I believe in you.

Debate (on motion by **Ms King**) adjourned.

AIRPORTS AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 20 October, on motion by **Mr Albanese**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

upon which **Mr Truss** moved by way of amendment:

That all the words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words: “the House declines to give the bill a second reading until the Senate Rural Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee has reported to the Senate on its inquiry into the bill”.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (5.47 pm)—I congratulate the member for McPherson on her first speech and wish her every success in making the most of the opportunities that arise from election to this place. As I was saying before proceedings were suspended last week on the Airports Amendment Bill 2010, the proposed upgrading of the emergency services base at Essendon airport did not raise many eyebrows back in 2008. This was mainly because the services had been historically based along the western perimeter on the Tullamarine Freeway side of the airport well away from residential back fences along the Strathmore perimeter. The draft master plan had no detail on exactly where the new hangars and base would be situated on the airport. It was not until concrete slabs and metal frames started to be erected in the vicinity of

Strathaird Street and Mascoma Street in Strathmore that local residents became aware of a new building being constructed literally over their back fence. Upon making relevant inquiries, I was advised this was the new location for the new emergency services air wing. So a major new aviation facility, which the Victorian government has invested over \$20 million into constructing, has been built and is now in operation around the clock only metres away from residential homes.

Let me make it clear that people are not opposed to providing up-to-date facilities for our emergency service personnel. They do a fantastic job under a great deal of pressure. What people are opposed to is having no say or right of appeal on the biggest aviation hangar ever being constructed at Essendon airport being built close to their backyards. This new hangar could easily have been constructed away from residential homes, and the decision by airport management to relocate the new hangar to the current site was a very poor one indeed. I have requested a meeting with representatives from the emergency service air wing to discuss the impact of aircraft noise and disturbances on local residents.

Residents have also raised concern with me over the construction and operation of a car-holding and predelivery facility along the airport’s eastern perimeter. Residents were given a general overview of this proposal at the March 2007 public meeting and, as I reported to the House in March 2007, were advised that landscaping works would be undertaken to help minimise the facility’s effect on local amenity and noise. Again, as with the emergency services hangar, there were no specific plans or proposals put out for public comment and consideration. Residents now have a fully operational car-holding facility on their doorstep which they had no say in, and no landscaping works have taken place as initially airport manage-

ment indicated would happen. Residents have reported noise and disturbances from the facility at very early and late hours from freight and delivery vehicles. Some residents have also reported that excessive light spillage takes place during the night into their properties because of the way lights face the streetscape. These are just a couple of examples of the many issues residents could have provided invaluable feedback on regarding this facility had an effective planning process been in place at the time of the building's design.

The Australia Post mail-sorting facility is also a significant building which has been constructed close to residential homes along the eastern perimeter. The initial plans regarding this facility were generally outlined by airport management at the 2007 public meetings, but again residents had no formal process to have a say in the building's final design. Residents have reported that the late night and early morning operating hours generate noise. The facility has a path which connects to Mascoma Street to allow for postie motorbike access to and from the facility. Residents have reported to me that the building's colour and design do not fit in with the local streetscape and that, despite their request for landscaping around the Australia Post facility to help it better integrate into the existing built community, it has not occurred.

Residents were very supportive of the idea of landscaping works along the eastern perimeter. This was a suggestion put forward at the 2007 public meetings and an idea that I have supported in my representations to airport management and in various formal submissions. The fact is that there have been beautification and landscaping works undertaken throughout the commercial precincts—English Street and the western perimeter. These works have helped lift the look and feel of the site through the installation of

young trees, plants and shrubs. However, we have not had this along the residential eastern perimeter, and management state that such work would attract birds and affect flights. It seems odd that you can have landscaping works being carried out throughout the commercial precincts without having a similar effect. I think that residents deserve the landscaping work they have been requesting and were promised back in 2007.

During the last master plan process, Essendon Airport proposed and has since constructed a new entrance to the north of the site—the Wirraway Road entrance from the Tullamarine Freeway. This entrance was constructed between five and seven metres high above the ground. It was constructed with no sound barriers. Residents living in the immediate vicinity of this entrance, in Palagia Court and other surrounding streets, have expressed to me great concern that this new connection from the freeway has dramatically increased the noise levels in the area, and they would like noise walls installed. There is currently a 30- to 50-metre gap between the end of the nearest noise walls and this new entrance. I do not think it is too much to ask for the noise walls to be simply extended. I have made numerous representations to the Victorian Minister for Roads and Ports on this issue, and I am now working with local resident Denis James to help the noise walls campaign. The point is, if residents had had adequate notification and opportunity to comment on the proposed new entrance at the time, airport management and VicRoads would have been much more aware that residents wanted the installation of noise walls.

The Essendon Airport Noise Management Working Group, which was established by the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government following the approval of the master plan in 2008, presented a report to the minis-

ter which contained 16 recommendations on how to better manage and monitor noise and airport related issues. A couple of those issues related to a proposed shortening of the north-south runway, investigating the impacts on the community and analysing and assessing the impacts of closing the entire north-south runway. I believe that residents to the east and west of the airport must not be adversely affected by this possible change. I welcome the fact that this bill will formalise that community consultation must take place on any significant alterations to airport runways that change flight paths.

Local residents have to live with developments in their neighbourhoods for a lifetime. It is important that their views are sought and adhered to during the planning of any new development on Essendon Airport land. The changes to the act to ensure the community is better consulted on proposed airport developments are supported by me. Bringing the airport planning and master plan process into line with local and state planning guidelines will help achieve this and help make Essendon Airport a better neighbour. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (5.57 pm)—I certainly echo some of the sentiments expressed by the member for Wills about public consultation, given the difficulties we have experienced in the electorate of Pearce over the lack of public consultation. I am pleased therefore to have the opportunity to speak on the Airports Amendment Bill 2010. I note that in the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport's second reading speech he said the amendments contained in this bill underscore the objectives of the Airports Act, including: to promote the sound development of civil aviation in Australia; to establish a system for the regulation of airports that has due regard to the interests of airport users and the general community; and to promote

the efficient economic development and operation of airports.

On these points we are in agreement. However, in the minister's second reading speech, he said:

I introduced this bill into the last parliament but the bill lapsed when it was prorogued. At the time, the bill was referred to the Senate Standing Legislation Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport. The committee commenced an inquiry into the bill. However, it did not have the opportunity to fully examine the bill before the caretaker period began.

We are therefore entitled to ask the minister and the government why the undue haste in bringing this bill to the House before the Senate Rural Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee has had a chance to fully canvass the serious matters such a bill raises, as the shadow minister, the member for Wide Bay, outlined in his contribution to this debate last Wednesday. There have been some legitimate concerns raised by local governments and community groups and yet the Senate inquiry is not able to complete its work until 16 November. Surely in the interests of getting this legislation right it would have been prudent to await the outcome of that inquiry.

Unfortunately, the minister and his government have a track record of hastily made decisions and not following their own protocols. I am sure this is why we have seen so many of the government's programs get into difficulties. We saw evidence of that in the decision to appoint an air noise ombudsman during the election campaign, as I will outline shortly. Yet in the case where the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport completed a full inquiry into the effectiveness of Airservices Australia to manage aircraft noise in June 2010, there has been no response except the appointment of an ombudsman while the government was in caretaker mode. So from

this minister we get either decisions made in undue haste or no decisions at all where full inquiries have been conducted and recommendations made. That particular report does need acting upon, as it is damning of Airservices in their failure to consult all stakeholders directly in the matter of Perth Airport and changes made there. It is clear that the public, particularly those who live in the hills area of Pearce, have lost faith in Airservices and the government's ability to manage the issue of aircraft noise. For the people of Pearce, Hasluck, Swan and Canning, changes to flight paths were made in 2008 without proper consultation or referral to the department of environment. In fact, the lack of process was shameful. It has negatively impacted the lives of many and yet the minister has not seen fit to respond to the committee report.

Consistently, evidence collected during the course of that inquiry demonstrates a lack of organisational openness and transparency. Among the 10 recommendations of the report were the establishment of an Aircraft Noise Ombudsman, independent of Airservices Australia, to ensure greater transparency, openness and accountability and public confidence in the noise complaints process; an independent review of Airservices Australia's communications and consultation protocols, the strengthening of the community consultation process and funding of community advocates where there are significant changes proposed; the referral of changes to Perth airspace under WARRP to the minister for environment, as Airservices Australia did not seek advice on whether it triggered an environmental assessment; and a review of the aircraft noise exposure forecast process to ensure the accuracy of forecasts with a view of offering Perth residents a noise insulation scheme similar to that already operating in other capital cities in Australia.

I wrote to the minister on 14 July asking him to fully implement the recommendations of the report. I received no response from this letter until 27 September, after directing a second letter to the minister. However, without reference to the Senate report and its different recommendations, Minister Albanese issued a media release on 27 July 2010 regarding the establishment of an aircraft noise ombudsman. That was hardly an appointment at arm's length, as the suggestion of the minister was that this be paid for by Airservices Australia and originally to be located within Airservices Australia. I came to Canberra immediately after the election to speak to the then Acting Commonwealth Ombudsman, Mr Ron Brent, about my concerns as to the lack of arm's length operation of the ombudsman appointment. It is a matter of concern that that is the only recommendation that was acted on and it was acted on during a time when the parliament was in caretaker mode. We did not have a chance to comment about that particular matter and the need to have a completely independent ombudsman if there is to be any public confidence in that appointment.

Nevertheless, given that there had been no response from the Gillard government to the Senate inquiry, I think it scandalous that an ombudsman could be appointed during an election when the government is in caretaker mode. Not only does this go against the guidelines of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet but also it attempts to circumvent the real issues with Airservices Australia and aircraft noise. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet guidelines for caretaker mode indicate that governments should defer making significant appointments during the caretaker period, and I put it to you that this is a significant appointment, certainly in the eyes of constituents in Pearce and in many other parts of Australia

where people have been adversely impacted by changes to flight paths and other matters.

This appointment qualifies as ‘significant’ and, given the controversy of the announcement, I would have thought the Prime Minister and the minister, the member for Grayndler, would have opted against making such an announcement during an election campaign. I can only presume that this decision was made during the election in an attempt to save the then member for Hasluck from defeat.

My experiences in the electorate of Pearce and the stories related to me by constituents have shown, as the shadow minister rightly acknowledged last week, sometimes complaints have not been handled as well as they should—and that is an understatement. Sometimes communities have not been appropriately consulted about changes to flight plans and alterations to noise levels. Airports must also be conscious of ensuring they develop, maintain and nurture a good relationship with the people who live around them.

In regard to this legislation, though, the Senate committee has not had a chance to complete the new review following referral in this new parliament. In my experience the Senate does an excellent job of reviewing legislation, often ironing out serious problems, and it would have been preferable to have had this debate after the Senate committee had completed its deliberations.

As there does appear to be a lack of clarity and definition to aspects of this bill, I hope those interested in the legislation will present to the Senate committee in time for the finalisation of its inquiry by 16 November. A full and complete inquiry may uncover defects in the bill or ways in which it can be improved. Given the contribution that airports make as critical parts of our national infrastructure, we would be remiss if we did not take the time to get this legislation right.

Airports do play a vital part in contemporary society in the movement of people and goods. While it is important that they are not unduly hindered by excessive regulation and onerous costs, we must always make sure in this place that we balance that against the interests of the community surrounding the airports. While airports play a valuable role in supporting the economy and connecting Australians, aviation also imposes burdens on local communities that surround them through increased noise, traffic and pollution.

With so many people and industries relying on air transport today, it is unlikely that traffic will diminish any time soon, but given the power of Airservices to change the flight paths and impact on people’s quiet enjoyment of their property it is absolutely necessary to have a proper, open and accountable public process and consultation process before the changes take place, not after. In the case of the 2008 changes, this public consultation simply did not happen. It is vital that the public has absolute confidence in the process that we ultimately preside over.

Airservices should, though, take a leaf out of Perth Airport’s book in regard to the open and accountable public consultation process. Perth Airport set an excellent example earlier this year when it delivered its community information program when it had plans to resurface its major runway. Those communities which may have been affected by temporary changes to flight paths were fully briefed of the airport’s schedule of works and the importance of these works to take place at this particular time. Clearly, it is vital that in planning airports there is cooperation between all tiers of government and effective communication and consultation with the general public. The outcome of those works in Perth has been for the most part quite acceptable to the public. They knew exactly what was happening, when it was happening

and how long they would have to put up with the disruption.

Airport master plans are important to local communities as they set out development plans over a 20-year period and are updated usually every five years. Master plans and major developments are subject to periods of public consultation and this bill changes the manner in which these consultations are to be conducted. There have been reservations about aspects of those changes which need greater public airing. The Senate inquiry would have fully explored these issues so that we could have had a more informed debate in this chamber before being asked to approve this particular legislation.

I conclude by repeating the remarks of the shadow minister, the member for Wide Bay, when at the conclusion of his contribution—and a very sound contribution it was to this place—he said:

Whether or not amendments are required, and what those amendments should be, is not yet clear—

because we have not obviously gone through that process—

but we will take the appropriate action to ensure that Australia's airports are well and efficiently regulated.

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (6.10 pm)—I am pleased to speak on the Airports Amendment Bill 2010. I know the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, the Hon. Anthony Albanese, has an even longer history with Sydney Airport than I do due to the impact of the aviation industry and associated aircraft noise and the other airport operations on the people that we represent in this place. The bill being discussed tonight relates to proposed changes to the Airports Act 1996. The Airports Act establishes a regulatory framework for the Commonwealth airports that have been leased to private companies. The Australian government has applied a national

regulatory regime on these airports as set out in the Airports Act and its amending regulations.

I note that the current planning regulatory framework applies to both Bankstown and Kingsford Smith airports, which are both located near my electorate of Reid and not that far from the electorate of the member for Grayndler, the minister. It is pertinent to also note that these airports are two of the busiest in Australia. Bankstown Airport is, I think, the busiest in the Southern Hemisphere. There has been a significant impact from those airports on my local economy, the environment and the community that I represent.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you would think that, given the significant impact that such a large and important industry has for so many cities and regions, the previous Howard government would have undertaken to provide comprehensive long-term policy objectives to ensure efficient and effective oversight of the airports. But you would be wrong, Mr Deputy Speaker, if you thought that. It was not until 16 December last year that the Labor government released a national aviation white paper, *Flight path to the future*. That white paper is the first aviation white paper in Australia's history. It outlines the government's long-term policy approach to the very important Australian aviation industry. The white paper is the first comprehensive long-term aviation policy framework for Australia, outlining the government's long-term policy objectives for the industry, including the importance of minimising aviation's negative impacts on the environment and communities. The paper was a product of extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including, naturally, the aviation industry, the community as well as state and territory and local governments. The government's significant reforms, as pointed out by the minis-

ter, needed to make sure that we got the balance right.

Airports are important for our economy, but we must ensure that we support sustainable growth and provide mechanisms for sufficient community consultation. The white paper was able to identify several areas that needed improvement. One key area highlighted in the white paper was the need for improved consultation between the airports, their neighbouring communities, planning authorities and interested parties.

The government, however, also recognises the importance of continuing to promote the development of civil aviation in Australia; of establishing a system for the regulation of airports, taking into account the interests of the general community and airport users; and of encouraging the efficient and economic development and operation of airports. In essence, this bill will underscore the objectives of the Airports Act and give effect to the legislative reforms outlined in the white paper.

The bill will amend the act to strengthen the requirements for airport master plans and major development plans to support more effective airport planning and to better align with state, territory and local planning. If there are any inconsistencies between the master plan and the plans of state and local authorities, the airports must provide justification for such inconsistencies. Further, the bill will require the first five years of an airport master plan to include detailed information on the proposed use of land, including developments that are not related to airport services. Airport master plans will also need to include information on a ground transport plan, demonstrating how the airport's facilities connect with the surrounding road and public transport system.

Under the amendments, likely employment levels and effects will need to be in-

cluded in plans, including a report on how well the proposed development will fit in with the planning schemes for other commercial and retail development in the areas near the airport—in other words, an assessment of the potential impacts on the local economy and community. The minister made a very good point in his second reading speech: airports are not islands. Better integration of on- and off-airport planning is in everyone's interests, from passengers, to airline companies, to businesses, to local communities.

This bill will also restructure the criteria for major development plans to capture projects with a significant community impact, irrespective of the size and the cost. In addition, the amendments will prohibit specified types of developments that are incompatible with the operation of an airport site. An 'incompatible development' includes residential dwellings; community care facilities; pre-schools; primary, secondary, tertiary or other educational institutions; and hospitals. The bill also defines the redevelopment of any of the named facilities as an incompatible development if it increases the capacity of the development, except in exceptional circumstances. The environment strategy for an airport will now be included in airport master plans, instead of being a stand-alone document, to better reflect the context of the strategy.

Another key element proposed in this bill is increased and strengthened consultation and guidelines on any proposed changes to runways, including changes that are likely to alter flight paths or aircraft arrangements. Any alterations that change flight paths or patterns of levels of aircraft noise will now be required to go through the major development plan approval process, providing for public consultation.

The last amendment contained in this bill is particularly welcomed by my electorate and the constituents that I represent in this place, given the long history of unfair aircraft noise distribution over the inner west of Sydney. My community is very well aware of the gap in the current act, which resulted in the closure of the east-west runway at Sydney airport for upgrades, without an ounce of community consultation, under the Howard government. Unfortunately, constituents of the former electorate of Lowe, which I represented for 12 years, suffered for many years under the former coalition government's indifference to consultation about aircraft noise and associated environmental issues. Moreover, as I have mentioned many times in this House, the former Howard government sold Sydney airport without any genuine community consultation or real concern about properly addressing aircraft noise.

Further, prior to the 2007 election the Howard government concealed its negotiations with Sydney airport to close the east-west runway for safety upgrades. The people I represent were outraged by the temporary closure of the runway, as this altered flight paths to the detriment of many neighbouring residents in my electorate and in the minister's electorate. Due to the closure of the east-west runway, flight paths as prescribed in the Long Term Operating Plan for Sydney airport were necessarily restricted.

Once elected, the Labor government moved immediately to impose 22 stringent conditions on the runway end safety area—RESA, as it is known—project to minimise the impact of the east-west closure on our communities. These included a requirement that work be undertaken for 22 hours a day, seven days a week. I commend the minister and member for Grayndler for his initiative in that regard. I am pleased to say that the east-west runway is now fully operational

following the completion of the RESA project.

The outrage about the lack of consultation prior to the closure of the east-west runway was very loud and very clear in my electorate and in the electorate of the minister, the member for Grayndler. Once again, this example highlighted the very different approaches taken by the former Howard government and our government. Unlike the former Howard government, the Gillard government is making changes to improve transparency and consultation. The Labor government, under the leadership of the minister, has demonstrated this through many areas of government and again here tonight through these amendments to the Airports Act.

These amendments will affect not only the communities in my electorate but communities neighbouring all leased federal airports around Australia. The changes proposed in this bill are supported by other reforms outlined in the white paper, including the requirements for leased federal airports to host community consultation groups with independent chairs and for capital city airports to have a high-level planning forum with the state government and the Department of Infrastructure and Transport. This bill is part of a broad range of measures the transport minister and the Labor government have undertaken for airports and the aviation industry.

As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker Georganas, as someone who comes from an electorate in Adelaide that is also affected by aircraft noise, we have all championed fairer aircraft noise sharing for our constituents. I have done that ever since I arrived in this place 12 years ago and I am certainly not going to let up on it. Since the election of the Labor government in 2007, we have reaffirmed our commitment to maintain the curfew and cap on aircraft movements—another

initiative of the member for Grayndler—ensuring respite for noise affected residents. Further, the minister has announced that older and noisier jet freight aircraft will be banned from flying over thousands of Sydney homes, particularly late on weeknights.

The minister has also established an Aircraft Noise Ombudsman to assist with the dissemination of information and complaints handling. My local community campaigned on this very issue and I thank the minister for listening to our call. I note that I have already contacted the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman, Mr Ron Brent, on behalf of my constituents and I trust that we will receive his full assistance with those matters. I take the opportunity to congratulate him on his appointment.

I could talk all night about the initiatives of our government and the minister, but time has beaten me. We are actually doing something to get some fairness and equity in relation to the issues associated with the expansion of Sydney airport, and I commend the minister and the government for these initiatives. They are greatly appreciated by my electorate.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (6.24 pm)—I thank members of the House for their comments and contributions to the debate on the Airports Amendment Bill 2010. I know that a number of members will contribute to the ongoing debate on these issues, including the member for Hindmarsh and the member for Makin.

I will keep my remarks tight, given the time frame. The opposition has moved an amendment to defer voting on this bill until the Senate committee inquiry has concluded. This is nothing more than a delaying tactic. Let us be clear about a few things. Firstly, the Senate and the House are separate chambers and have separate purposes. If the Sen-

ate wishes to consider this bill through an inquiry it can do so, and the House will be able to consider any amendments in due course. The idea that the House should be held hostage to the Senate is ludicrous. Secondly, this deferral tactic has been tried by the opposition before, with the health amendment bill. Simply, the parliament must be allowed to function.

It is important to recognise that the Airports Amendment Bill has already been introduced into this House before. This current course of action is as a result of an extensive consultation process, leading up to the aviation white paper *Flight path to the future*. We had a discussion paper, then a green paper, then a white paper—so there has been full community consultation on this issue. This bill is about getting the balance right between ongoing investment in aviation infrastructure, community consultation and the integration of airport planning with local, state and territory planning regimes. With our airports becoming busier and our major cities growing, airport planning is more important than it has ever been before. The government is committed to bringing national leadership to planning our major cities, and the reforms contained in this bill support that broader agenda. The public rightly demand better information and consultation when it comes to airport development and especially the impacts of aviation on local communities.

I thank members for their contributions. The Senate is having an inquiry, and if there are any recommendations coming from that inquiry they will be considered as is appropriate. That is not a reason to delay the passage of this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Question put:

That the words proposed to be omitted (**Mr Truss's** amendment) stand part of the question.

The House divided. [6.30 pm]
(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes.....	74
Noes.....	<u>73</u>
Majority.....	<u>1</u>

AYES

Adams, D.G.H.	Albanese, A.N.
Bandt, A.	Bird, S.
Bowen, C.	Bradbury, D.J.
Brodtmann, G.	Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S.	Butler, M.C.
Byrne, A.M.	Champion, N.
Cheeseman, D.L.	Clare, J.D.
Collins, J.M.	Combet, G.
Crean, S.F.	D'Ath, Y.M.
Danby, M.	Dreyfus, M.A.
Elliot, J.	Ellis, K.
Emerson, C.A.	Ferguson, L.D.T.
Ferguson, M.J.	Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Garrett, P.	Georganas, S.
Gibbons, S.W.	Gillard, J.E.
Gray, G.	Grierson, S.J.
Griffin, A.P.	Hall, J.G. *
Hayes, C.P. *	Husic, E.
Jones, S.	Kelly, M.J.
King, C.F.	Leigh, A.
Livermore, K.F.	Lyons, G.
Macklin, J.L.	Marles, R.D.
McClelland, R.B.	Melham, D.
Mitchell, R.	Murphy, J.
Neumann, S.K.	O'Connor, B.P.
O'Neill, D.	Oakeshott, R.J.M.
Owens, J.	Parke, M.
Perrett, G.D.	Ripoll, B.F.
Rishworth, A.L.	Rowland, M.
Roxon, N.L.	Rudd, K.M.
Saffin, J.A.	Shorten, W.R.
Sidebottom, S.	Smith, S.F.
Smyth, L.	Snowdon, W.E.
Swan, W.M.	Symon, M.
Thomson, C.	Thomson, K.J.
Vamvakinou, M.	Wilkie, A.
Windsor, A.H.C.	Zappia, A.

NOES

Abbott, A.J.	Alexander, J.
Andrews, K.	Andrews, K.J.
Baldwin, R.C.	Billson, B.F.
Bishop, J.I.	Briggs, J.E.

Broadbent, R.	Buchholz, S.
Chester, D.	Christensen, G.
Ciobo, S.M.	Cobb, J.K.
Coulton, M. *	Crook, T.
Dutton, P.C.	Entsch, W.
Fletcher, P.	Forrest, J.A.
Frydenberg, J.	Gambaro, T.
Gash, J.	Griggs, N.
Haase, B.W.	Hartsuyker, L.
Hawke, A.	Hockey, J.B.
Hunt, G.A.	Irons, S.J.
Jensen, D.	Jones, E.
Katter, R.C.	Keenan, M.
Kelly, C.	Laming, A.
Ley, S.P.	Macfarlane, I.E.
Marino, N.B.	Markus, L.E.
Matheson, R.	McCormack, M.
Mirabella, S.	Morrison, S.J.
Moylan, J.E.	Neville, P.C.
O'Dowd, K.	O'Dwyer, K.
Prentice, J.	Pyne, C.
Ramsey, R.	Randall, D.J.
Robb, A.	Robert, S.R.
Roy, Wyatt	Ruddock, P.M.
Schultz, A.	Scott, B.C.
Secker, P.D. *	Simpkins, L.
Slipper, P.N.	Smith, A.D.H.
Somlyay, A.M.	Southcott, A.J.
Stone, S.N.	Tehan, D.
Truss, W.E.	Tudge, A.
Turnbull, M.	Van Manen, B.
Vasta, R.	Washer, M.J.
Wyatt, K.	

PAIRS

Plibersek, T.	Bishop, B.K.
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* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Original question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (6.38 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (6.38 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Airports Amendment Bill 2010 and I also wel-

come the reforms introduced by the minister that are contained in this bill. These reforms are long overdue and they will be very warmly welcomed by local communities around Australia, particularly those who live close to airports. Following the privatisation of airports around Australia, many communities experienced considerable grief. To take the House back just for a moment, in the mid-nineties 22 airports around Australia were privatised as part of the federal government's future direction for airports. At the time, airports were under the control of federal government law, and in the privatisation many of the conditions under which airports operated were retained. In the process of privatisation, the airports were leased for 50 years with a 49-year extension. As a result, we ended up with private operations on federal government land—therefore, operations which were exempt from state and local government laws.

The reforms in this bill will do three significant things which will be welcomed by local communities. Firstly, they will improve the development approval process with respect to ensuring that developments on airports are integrated with local area development plans. Secondly, there will be much better and broader consultation with local communities with respect to those development plans. Thirdly, there will be a streamlining of approvals relating to aviation matters—in other words, the core business of airports. Aeronautical and aviation matters ought to be streamlined because that is important to the people who use airports.

There are two fundamental categories of problems associated with the development of airports in recent years. The first relates to issues associated with aviation activities and the second relates to the commercial development of the surplus land on airports. I want to speak about both those matters very briefly. In regard to aviation activities, in

recent years there has been an increase in air travel right across the world, and so too in Australia. As a result of increased air travel, there has been an increase in the number of air flights, which in turn means more landings and take-offs, and increased noise for those people who live under flight paths or close by airports. In parallel with that is the fact that airports were once located relatively remotely from urban areas and today, as a result of urban sprawl and growth, most airports are located in close proximity to developed areas and some are right in the midst of developed areas. With the increase in aviation activities—increased take-offs and landings, an increased number of passengers and increased traffic on roads leading into and out of airports—we have seen a range of problems as a result of airports being located in the midst of development in metropolitan areas.

It is not surprising that there are problems associated with airport noise and the number of aircraft landing and taking off. But, in my view, that is not the critical problem. The critical problem relates to the commercial non-aviation development at airports as a result of the privatisation process in the mid-nineties. Airports have quite rightly recognised that they have land that is surplus to what is required for aviation purposes. When the airports were privatised the operators looked to use that surplus land for non-aviation activities and, in doing that, they were not required by law to comply with state or local government development plans. That is fundamentally where the real problem lies. If you are going to provide large-scale tracts of land for commercial development purposes then I believe it is most important that that development is consistent with the development plans of the respective planning authorities. I am familiar with airports that have been developed where that has not been the case. I do not know whether

it was an unintentional oversight of the federal government at the time or a deliberate intention of the federal government to allow commercial non-aviation development to take place in order to get a better price for the airports. But, whatever the case, over the last decade or so local planning authorities have found their development plans in turmoil as a result of developments on surplus aviation land.

I suspect that that surplus aviation land arises because most airports, and certainly the ones I am familiar with, were established 50 or 60 years ago, maybe 70 years ago, when aircraft were not as well designed and therefore the local communities required larger buffers around the runways in order to ensure the safety of the adjoining community. With the better designed aircraft there is much more certainty about their landing and take-off and much of the land that was originally set aside as buffer is now being used for commercial development. In a nutshell, what these reforms will do is ensure that, if we are going to have non-aviation development of airports, those kinds of developments have to be much more consistent with the development plans of the area, and the reforms do just that. That includes giving local communities the opportunity to look at those developments and to comment on them.

There is much more I could say about the development of airports and I will certainly do so on another occasion. But I welcome these reforms because they are reforms that I know in my own community have been called for for many years. And I know that in my own community they will be welcomed by the local planning authorities and the residents who I represent. I commend this bill and I commend the minister for introducing the reforms relating to this bill because I know that, just as my community will welcome them, so too will other communities

that are adjacent to or in close proximity to airports around the country.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

NATIONAL HEALTH AND HOSPITALS NETWORK BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 29 September, on motion by **Ms Roxon**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (6.47 pm)—The bill before us today, the National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010, establishes the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care as an independent statutory body and provides for the establishment of the National Performance Authority and Independent Hospital Pricing Authority under the proposed National Health and Hospitals Network reforms.

The commission was established under the previous coalition government by Australian health ministers on 1 January 2006. It evolved out of what was known as the Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care, which had itself been established in January 2000. It has developed an important role in the Australian health system to, firstly, lead and coordinate improvements in safety and quality in health care by identifying issues and policy directions and recommending priorities for action. It disseminates knowledge and advocates for safety and quality. It reports publicly on the state of safety and quality, including performance against national standards. It recommends national datasets for safety and quality, working within multilateral government arrangements for data development, standards, collection and reporting. It provides strategic advice to health ministers on best practice thinking to drive quality improvement, including implementation strate-

gies. And, finally, it recommends nationally agreed standards for safety and quality improvement.

There have been advances made in areas such as clinical handover and infection control as a result of the work of the commission. The commission is currently resourced through the Department of Health and Ageing by means of a cooperative agreement and funding from state and territory governments. The coalition does support an ongoing role for the commission within existing resources, but we hold serious concerns about this government's capacity to efficiently and effectively implement its supposed health reform agenda.

There are reports in some jurisdictions that there have been signatories to the agreement who are now reconsidering their positions and have raised concerns about a number of aspects of this government's proposed reforms. It was reported in the *Age* on 11 August this year that leaked emails show 'a long list of concerns raised by executives from Victoria's health department during a meeting with Commonwealth representatives last month'. The leaked emails, between Commonwealth and Victorian officials, reportedly went on to claim that it was extremely difficult to examine aspects of the reform package because it was 'hard to tell what the Commonwealth was trying to do'. Some of the additional concerns specifically include how the new funding arrangements would work, Victoria not being included in discussions about the draft boundaries for Medicare Locals, how specialist hospitals would fit with local hospital networks and whether Medicare Locals would be private companies or statutory bodies.

The agreement establishing the National Health and Hospitals Network was motivated by urgent political need, rather than as genuine and considered policy response. This was

evident very early with the scrapping of the National Funding Authority just after it had been announced. The authority was central to the National Health and Hospitals Network Agreement as 'a joint payment authority which makes it absolutely transparent that the money actually goes through to the service providers'. That was the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, on Sky News on 21 April 2010. To quote Kevin Rudd again:

What we've agreed to with the states and territories is not a state delivery agency; what we've agreed to is a joint state-Commonwealth statutory body which becomes the payment authority. There'll be full transparency, therefore, about how the money is being delivered to each of the local hospital networks.

That was again on 21 April.

The minister's response to the scrapping of the funding authority showed that the reforms were being driven as a political strategy out of the then Prime Minister's office, particularly as he became more desperate day by day to cling on to power, and it was certainly not based in a sound health policy perspective:

I'm afraid you'd have to put the question to PM&C about why they decided to release it at a particular time last night, that's not something that was in our remit.

That was not from a junior minister; that was actually from the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, at a press conference on 17 June 2010. It demonstrated the dysfunction within the government of the day. It demonstrated that decisions were being made purely based on political outcome, not on good policy outcome. That was the approach of the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. It is why the Labor Party got rid of the Prime Minister and it is why the health minister was completely excluded from deliberations which ultimately resulted in a compromise proposal, not one worthy of the much-needed health reform in this country.

In responding to questions as to why the funding authority had been so essential only weeks earlier, the minister stated:

... it's not appropriate for us to establish an authority where there is not a need to do so.

Unfortunately, bureaucracy was not one of this government's reforms. The bodies to be established include the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority, at a cost of \$91.8 million; the National Performance Authority, at a cost of just under \$110 million; Medicare Locals, at \$416.8 million; National Funding Authority, cost unspecified and, of course, since scrapped; the state based funding authorities, cost unspecified; and local hospital networks, cost unspecified.

The scrapping of the National Funding Authority and Victoria's leaked concerns about Medicare Locals and other elements of the proposed network show that there is a lack of coordination and huge scope for waste and mismanagement in the government's approach to these reforms. The claims of the Commonwealth being the so-called dominant funder, as mentioned in the minister's second reading speech, were never credible. John Brumby said at the time:

I object strenuously to the fact that these funds are being taken from our state and from other states and then being recycled back as "New Commonwealth money". What our analysis shows absolutely conclusively is that there is no new money in this for Victoria.

That was on 8 April on the *7.30 Report*. Rather than 30 per cent of GST being quarantined by the Commonwealth, as was first proposed, the budget estimates show that for some jurisdictions in 2011-12 it will be up to 49 per cent. We already know that taxpayers in states such as Western Australia receive far less back from GST than they pay. According to the COAG agreement, the amount of states' GST dedicated to funding the federal government's supposed 60 per cent hospital costs will not be fixed until 2014-15. It

remains to be seen how many jurisdictions will remain a party to the agreement at that time.

I also take the opportunity to address the comments in the minister's second reading speech regarding after hours care. Under the government's health reform proposals, GP surgeries will lose \$58 million in practice incentive payments for after hours patient care. The President of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Dr Chris Mitchell, was reported on 15 July 2010 as saying that removal of the incentive payment of up to \$6,000 a year per doctor will have 'enormous implications for the role of the GP' and 'has the potential to have an impact on the viability of general practice to deliver the services outside normal opening hours'. In fact, Dr Mitchell went further and said the removal would:

... jeopardise the fragile availability of after-hours services in some areas, and potentially increase the burden on ambulance call-outs and emergency department presentations.

What becomes very clear about this government's so-called plan is that it has adopted the same failed approach as the state and territory Labor governments—that is, to increase bureaucracy at every turn, to drag money away from frontline services. It is not a formula that has worked at a state or territory level. In fact, it has compounded much of what we see that is wrong in the health system today and this government, for ideological purposes, has decided to go down the same failed path. These incentive payments are to be withdrawn from 1 July next year, with Medicare Locals not operational for another two years—that is, until July 2013. This supports the concerns raised by the Victorian government and is further evidence of the inability of this government to competently implement policy. It is a matter the minister is yet to resolve.

The Labor government's National Health and Hospitals Network reforms purport to localise control of the health system. Unfortunately, the evidence suggests that these changes will result in centralisation and bureaucratisation. The partnership agreement states that local clinicians are not to directly participate in their local hospital network. Of course, lead clinician groups were proposed in response to criticism of the government on this issue, but it is still unclear what practical role they will have in decision making and resource allocation. The coalition believes it is important that local clinicians have an active role in the running of local hospitals. Doctors and nurses who know their hospitals are better placed to respond to on-the-ground needs than bureaucrats in a central office.

A single local hospital network for all of Tasmania has previously been proposed. Clearly, this could lead only to a greater centralisation of health and hospital services. If local clinicians are not to participate in the local hospital network in which they work, what happens if ultimately one network covers an entire state? Only the coalition's proposal for community controlled hospital boards would provide for genuine local and clinical control and better management of our health and hospital systems. I note that the minister made mention of the government's 1,300 promised beds in her second reading speech. I remind the minister that the coalition promised more than double that number—in fact, 2,800 beds—which is what is really needed to address access-block and reduce elective surgery waiting times. The government's Medicare Locals are themselves anything but local. Once again, it has been suggested that only one is to cover all of Tasmania and only one is to cover all of the Northern Territory. General practice needs more flexibility, not more red tape. Again, it has been difficult for the minister to articulate in practical terms how Medicare

Locals will interact or coordinate with local hospital networks.

The minister also made mention in her second reading speech of the role of GP superclinics. The coalition strongly supports general practice as the cornerstone of primary health care. The coalition's plan to invest significantly in longer GP consultations, after hours care, practice nurse services, MRI referrals, infrastructure grants and rural bonded scholarships would greatly enhance access to GP services and build on existing infrastructure. The coalition shares the concerns of many health and medical professionals about Labor's policies that undermine the doctor-patient relationship and the viability of existing family GP services. In addition to the changes to after hours care proposed under these reforms, the bungled implementation of the GP superclinics program represents another policy delivery failure of the Labor government. In particular, with only four of the original 36 fully operational after the Labor Party's entire first term of government, it underscores the ineffectiveness of this Prime Minister.

Many patients, doctors and other health professionals are concerned that the viability of existing family GP practices will be jeopardised by Labor's poor implementation of this program. There is evidence that an unfair regulatory environment has been created for existing family GPs. GP superclinics not in districts of workforce shortage have been able to employ overseas trained doctors when established practices in the same area are not permitted to do so. The withdrawal of services by established family GPs will be detrimental to patients who have grown to trust and rely on the dedicated services of their family GP over many years. The minister must guarantee that no existing general practice services will be reduced or closed as a result of the government's GP superclinics

program which she referred to as part of her comments on this bill.

I was sorry, I must say, to hear the minister only make a passing comment on mental health care as part of her contribution. Access to specialised mental health services is vital in alleviating pressure on health and hospital services, especially in regional and rural areas, and it is an enormous failure of this government to exclude it as part of its proposed health reforms. The coalition has provided a comprehensive \$1.5 billion plan to greatly improve access to services through 800 additional mental health beds, 60 new Headspace sites and 20 early psychosis prevention and intervention centres. If this minister were serious about genuine reform of the health system, she would listen to the support amongst health experts, within this parliament and in the wider community for this policy and act to implement it.

The bill before us does state that the act will be amended to include provisions to establish the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority and the National Performance Authority. Whilst the coalition supports the work that has been done and can continue to be done by the Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, we hold serious concerns about this government's ability to establish new, stand-alone bureaucracies that have a tendency for blow-outs. That ability should be questioned because this is a government that has at every opportunity increased numbers within the bureaucracy, and this is no exception. As I said before, people need to cast their minds back to when this particular policy was formulated. It was formulated by a Prime Minister who at the time knew that the public tide was turning against him, who knew that his own colleagues were not supporting him. Over the course of the weekend I read Barrie Cassidy's book, and it just underscored the dysfunction that took place in the government at the time. The

public should never forget that this policy was formulated by a desperate Prime Minister at a time when he was trying to detract attention away from the debates about insulation and about the school halls rip-offs. This was not a policy which was developed to try and fix the problems that exist in health care today. This was not a sincere government in its approach to policy at that time.

The scrapping of the National Funding Authority did ring alarm bells about a general lack of coordination and forethought in the establishment of new bureaucracies. It is unclear how the function of the commission will coordinate or interact with the functions of the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority or the National Performance Authority. The government should have introduced provisions for all the proposed bureaucracies together. It remains unclear why the minister has delayed legislation for the National Performance Authority and Independent Hospital Pricing Authority.

I would like to draw the House's attention to the comments of the former Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Lindsay Tanner, from his speech to the Australian Institute of Company Directors' Public Sector Governance Conference on 14 October last year. He said:

The indiscriminate creation of new bodies, or the failure to adapt old bodies as their circumstances change, increases the risk of having inappropriate governance structures.

This in turn jeopardises policy outcomes and poses financial risks to the taxpayer.

He went on to say:

Incorporating a new function within a department is almost always the preferred option because of the difficulties a small body faces in meeting its own needs.

The coalition supports the role of the commission but, consistent with Mr Tanner's

views, believes that this can be achieved within the resources of the department. The coalition calls on the government to provide all provisions to establish all bodies intended under this bill.

This is a government that has turned a \$20 billion surplus into a \$41 billion deficit and is paying around \$4.2 billion in interest on net debt this year alone. The coalition maintains scarce resources should be focused on front-line clinical care and will not support the creation of new bureaucracies without a strong and reasoned justification. At the very least, the minister should allow the parliament to scrutinise the complementary functions of the proposed bureaucracies together. Accordingly, I move the following amendment:

That all the words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

“the House declines to give the bill a second reading until the following provisions are presented to the House for its consideration:

- (1) provisions establishing the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority, including its full functions and responsibilities; and
- (2) provisions establishing the National Performance Authority, including its full functions and responsibilities”.

This is a government that needs to be held to account. It has—and not just in this program but in a number of others—created additional bureaucracies by at the same time distracting and taking away valuable and scarce resources to front-line services. The government should be called for this stunt. This was set up as a political distraction and it really lets down the doctors, nurses and patients right across the country, all of those people working in health care who were desperate for the reform that they thought Kevin Rudd had promised in the 2007 election when he said that he would fix public hospitals. But this is a government that has failed and this is why the coalition takes a principled stance

in relation to this matter. We will not tolerate Labor’s additional bureaucracies. Billions of dollars have been wasted at a state level and that same formula is now being applied at a federal level. We want to provide support to doctors and nurses at the front line. The coalition stands for a more practical, purposeful outcome, and we will continue to fight until we achieve such an outcome.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson)—Is the amendment seconded?

Mr Baldwin—I second the amendment and reserve my right to speak.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (7.06 pm)—I rise to support the bill in its original form and to oppose the amendment. It is the height of hypocrisy for those opposite to come to this place to talk about health care and say that they are taking a principled position when we saw over 12 years a decline in relation to the contributions that the then federal government made in relation to our health and hospitals system around Australia. It is the height of hypocrisy to stand and lecture us in relation to taking a principled position when they did everything in their power to try and kill off Medicare. This National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010 is an important and historic bill and represents a step forward in providing better health and better hospitals for all Australians. It establishes the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, thus delivering one of the major components of the government’s health reform agenda.

Through the government’s health reforms Australia is in the process of experiencing the most significant changes to our health and hospitals system since the introduction of Medicare. The only thing that stands in the way is those opposite. We are creating a National Health and Hospitals Network that is funded nationally and run locally. On the Central Coast of New South Wales they have

already started to put in place a number of the reforms that are needed. In only the past few weeks the New South Wales government announced that one of the new local hospital networks will be that of the Central Coast. This will be a truly locally run network—in effect, a local area health service—which up until now has been part of a much larger area health service based in northern Sydney. My constituents have told me consistently that they want a local health network and not one that is part of Sydney or the Hunter. I have made very strong representations on this and I am very glad to see that it is now planned that we will have our own local hospital network. It is great news that the Central Coast will again have its own area health service as it did in the past. I am happy to say that the New South Wales government has listened to the wishes of those in our region and to the representations that I have made.

The reasons for the change were quite simple. Having an area health service attached to Sydney was not practical or effective for Central Coast people. Over the next year there will be a transition from the existing northern Sydney-Central Coast area health service to the new local hospital network based in and run entirely from the local region but maintaining key links and networks with other health services in the state. The new local hospital network will include clinicians, healthcare management experts and community representatives. Our own local hospital network will mean better services for Central Coast residents and will also allow Central Coast health professionals, including doctors, nurses and other health professionals, to have a greater say in how local health services are delivered in our community. The federal government will have a major investment in the new local hospital network, and I personally have a major interest in ensuring that the new ar-

rangements work well for Central Coast residents.

We continue to witness ongoing challenges of supply and demand in our public health and hospitals system, with Wyong Hospital being the fourth busiest emergency department in the state and Gosford Hospital being the fifth busiest. I will do my utmost to see that with the support of this government we rise to meet these challenges. One of the key issues is ensuring our hospital emergency departments are able to see patients effectively and efficiently. Part of the streamlining of emergency departments involves having enough GPs in the community so Central Coast people can see a doctor when they need to and are not forced to go to the hospital emergency department instead. The GP superclinic at Warnervale will help alleviate area doctor shortages, as will the new GP superclinic closer to Gosford—for which a location has not yet been decided.

We have heard many and varied comments and analyses about the government's GP superclinics, but I would like to say that the GP superclinic model in my electorate is shaping up to be a great example for other areas across the country. The government's investment in the Warnervale GP superclinic is quite humble compared to the money put in by the operators, who will be putting in \$16.5 million worth of state-of-the-art medical services for the fast-growing suburbs around Warnervale. The federal government is putting in only \$2.5 million to ensure that that investment is made. More than 100 health professionals will be employed there across a broad range of medical services. The new clinic already has strong ties to the University of Newcastle and will provide a vital training ground for young professionals. The operators of the Warnervale superclinic already have vast experience from running a major medical centre in Toukley and are planning yet another multifaceted medical

establishment as part of the overall redevelopment plan for the Mariners Football Club at Tuggerah in my electorate—a proposal that this government promised a further \$10 million to in the last election. As part of the government's health reforms, that is the sort of positive result that we have already started to see on the Central Coast.

Let us go over exactly what this bill will achieve. The government is implementing major reforms to the funding and governance of the Australian healthcare system, which will place it on sustainable foundations for the future. Under the National Health and Hospitals Network, which was agreed by COAG on 20 April 2010, with the exception of Western Australia, the Commonwealth will become the major funder of Australian public hospital services. These major reforms build on the strengths of the current system and will ensure that these remain sustainable into the future.

The new governance arrangements will consist of establishing three agencies: the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority, the National Performance Authority and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. Arrangements for the IHPA and NPA are being finalised. It is intended that this bill will be amended to include provisions to establish the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority and the National Performance Authority. It is imperative that there be a strong focus on improving the safety and quality of health care that is delivered throughout Australia. To ensure that this is achieved, this bill will establish the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care as a permanent, independent body under the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997. This will ensure the independence of the commission, which is important to ensure its standing as an authoritative source of knowledge on health-care safety and quality matters. The commis-

sion will continue in its important role in helping to reduce harm caused by preventable errors, which will continue to have a positive impact on community trust.

An important part of the commission's expanded role will be to set new national clinical standards and strengthen clinical governance to lead the drive towards continuous improvement in quality and to safeguard high standards of care. The commission's expanded remit also extends to ensuring the appropriateness of care in all health-care settings, including primary care and mental health. Accreditation of health service providers is currently undertaken by a multiplicity of accreditation bodies and some high-risk services are not yet subject to accreditation, leading to a nationally inconsistent assessment of safety and quality standards. The commission will therefore continue its work in developing a national accreditation system and will develop a national model accreditation scheme. The development of national clinical standards, guidelines and indicators, together with its work on a national accreditation model, will support the take-up of the commission's work.

The states and territories have been consulted on the bill and are generally supportive. The government is implementing major reforms to the funding and governance of our health system to place it on sustainable long-term foundations. We are changing the way that health services are delivered through better access to services designed around patients' needs and a greater focus on preventive health and the provision of care outside of hospitals. We are also investing in our health system and our health workforce to deliver better care and better access to services for patients, now and into the future. The bill I am speaking on today is a key component of this overall health reform agenda, some of the key areas of which are

the capacity of our health system, better connecting care, access to services, preventive health, sustainability and quality.

To ease the pressures on our health system, we need to increase its capacity and the services available. This means more doctors, more nurses and more beds. The Gillard Labor government is investing \$1.2 billion as part of the National Health and Hospitals Network in doctors, nurses and allied health professionals. This will deliver 5,500 new or training GPs and 680 medical specialists over the coming decade. It will improve support for more than 4,600 full-time equivalent nurses working in general practice and help train and retain our valuable aged-care nurses. And we will support 800 allied health professionals working and training in rural areas over the next four years. We will also invest more than \$1.6 billion for more than 1,300 new subacute beds, to reduce bottlenecks and capacity constraints in our system. These beds will be delivered in areas like rehabilitation, palliative care and, importantly, mental health services, so that people can get the right care for their needs.

As part of the National Health and Hospitals Network, the government will ensure that services are better connected and coordinated, reducing fragmentation and the blame game. Local hospital networks will be established, like the one on the Central Coast. They will be more responsive to local communities, and new funding arrangements, such as the introduction of activity based funding, will provide strong incentives for better performance and reduced waste.

The Commonwealth will also take funding responsibility for 100 per cent of primary care, ending duplication and divided responsibilities. The government will establish Medicare Locals, which will work with local GPs, allied health and community health providers to drive local integration and coor-

dination of services and improve access to care. And, to bring the health system properly into the 21st century, the government will invest \$466 million to establish personally controlled electronic health records, reducing mistakes and duplication and ensuring that, with patients' consent, doctors have the information they need, when they need it.

The National Health and Hospitals Network will also deliver better, more timely access to health services in local communities across Australia. The government will establish a national after-hours GP and primary care service. This will enable anybody calling their GP out of hours to be referred to a nurse or a GP on the phone, and if necessary be referred to a local after-hours GP service, coordinated by their Medicare local. The government will also invest \$355 million in more GP superclinics and expanded GP clinics in about 450 locations across Australia. These will bring together in a single location services such as GPs, allied health professionals and practice nurses so that patients can more easily get the full range of care they need. The National Health and Hospitals Network will also provide strong guarantees and targets to improve access to public hospital services—reversing the neglect from the Howard government ripping \$1 billion from hospitals.

The Gillard government will invest \$750 million so that emergency department patients will have a guarantee that they will be treated, admitted or referred within four hours, where clinically appropriate. An investment of \$800 million for elective surgery will help back a target that 95 per cent of elective surgeries be delivered within the clinically recommended time, and a guarantee that patients facing excessive waits should have their elective surgery fast-tracked.

Keeping people well and out of hospital is a critical component of the Gillard Labor government's health reform agenda: while we are improving our hospitals, we also need to reduce pressure on them and keep people out of hospital in the first place. To achieve this, the government will take world-leading action to combat tobacco, which contributes to the death of over 15,000 Australians a year. The government will introduce plain packaging for all tobacco products—a world first—in addition to raising tobacco excise, which is expected to result in 87,000 fewer smokers. The government will also invest \$449 million to improve care for people with diabetes, which is fast on the way to becoming one of the major burdens of diseases in this country.

To ensure our health system is to be sustainable into the future, the Commonwealth will take, for the first time, funding responsibility for all GP and primary care services and all aged-care services. The Commonwealth will also become the dominant funder of Australia's public hospitals, paying for 60 per cent of hospital activity and capital, as well as 60 per cent of training and research costs in public hospitals. These changes will mean that one government will have dominant funding responsibility for all parts of the health system, ending the blame game and the perverse incentives for buck passing and cost shifting.

The government has already begun delivering on its reform agenda in six key areas: our hospital projects, including expanding hospital capacity as part of the National Health and Hospitals Network, and landmark Health and Hospitals Fund projects and regional cancer centres; investing in our workforce, with new GP training places online from next year along with nursing and allied health scholarships and locum places; primary care infrastructure, through more GP superclinics announced recently, and funding

rounds to upgrade general practices currently underway; e-health and telehealth, with Medicare rebates for telehealth from mid-2011 and electronic health records from July 2012; system reform, with local hospital networks and our first Medicare Locals being established from the middle of next year; and prevention, with investments being rolled out from mid next year for children and workplaces to prevent disease.

If we are to have a truly National Health and Hospitals Network spanning Australia, it is essential to have strong safety and quality standards so that all Australians can be confident that they will receive consistently high-quality care, wherever they live. This bill provides for framework legislation to establish the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. It is imperative that the government's health reforms ensure that the Australian public receives safe, high-quality health care. The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care will be established as a permanent body with an expanded remit to drive safe, high-quality care and ensure the appropriateness of services delivered in particular healthcare settings, including primary care and mental health.

This is an important piece of legislation and is part of an important reform process that this government is committed to. This bill should be passed without amendment. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (7.21 pm)—
Tonight I rise to address the National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010. I oppose this legislation because it directly affects federal funding going into the expansion of bureaucracy rather than into front-line services. My constituents demand that increased health dollars are focused on health outcomes, not building bureaucracies. When former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was

elected in 2007, it was on the back of promises to make our health system better. He promised 'to take the pressure off emergency departments, free up hospital beds and reduce waiting lists'. He said, 'I will work co-operatively to get our hospitals fixed, but in the end the buck will stop with me.' The buck did not stop with Kevin Rudd. Instead, the buck was channelled into a massive national media campaign to promote Labor's health plan.

As Kirsty Needham reported for the Fairfax media on 24 October this year:

The federal government's health reforms, negotiated with the states, were the subject of a \$9.3 million advertising spend over six weeks. This compares to \$9 million spent by the Health Department over eight months on advertising relating to the H1N1, or swine flu, vaccine.

While Mr Rudd is no longer leader, Prime Minister Gillard has continued his grand promises. Sadly, these promises have not translated into health reform in my electorate of Paterson, where my office regularly receives calls from patients who have experienced unsatisfactory treatment. My constituents are still having trouble getting in to see a doctor, still having trouble accessing after hours care, still waiting months to see a specialist and still experiencing the never-ending and increasing waiting lists to get into hospital for surgery.

Political grandstanding means absolutely nothing to someone who is forced to spend the night in pain until the local health service opens at 9 am. It means nothing to someone who has to wait two months to have a tumour removed, or to a family who has to worry about a day off work and fuel costs because their specialist's office is hours away. Introducing legislation into this House which broadens the health bureaucracy, rather than funding front line services, is an insult to my constituents. Increasing the bureaucracy will not ensure that my constitu-

ents get the service they require and deserve. That can be achieved only through consultation with local people, including professionals, who live in the area and work on the relevant issues each and every day.

Changes to the health and hospital system in Australia should be based on outcomes in the community, not on building bureaucracies. It was the Gillard Labor government's focus on broad promises, rather than locally based outcomes, that led it to announce \$7 million for a GP superclinic in my electorate of Paterson at Raymond Terrace. Many hours of discussion with patients and health providers, including Hunter Rural Division of General Practice and GP Access, which represents urban practitioners, has informed me that this funding could have been better spent to meet more outcomes in the community. I have therefore spoken and written to the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, to implore her to adopt an alternative proposal. That proposal is backed by general practitioners and allied health providers who work in my community.

Our proposal is that the \$7 million be divided so it can be invested in not one project but across three. Firstly, the \$2.5 million should be spent on the already approved Health One clinic in Raymond Terrace. The New South Wales government first started planning this project in 2005 and the Hunter New England Area Health Service has now purchased a block of land at the old swimming pool site in Raymond Terrace. Capital works documentation has been sent to the New South Wales Department of Health and preliminary concept plans have been drawn up. Meanwhile, a development application has also been prepared for lodging with Port Stephens Council in preparation of starting construction in 2011. Everything going to plan, this facility will open its doors by mid-2012, offering general practitioner services as well as hosting community health, allied

health, visiting specialists and other ambulatory care providers. Importantly, this proposal has the support of all the medical professionals in my electorate and in that region.

Spending \$7 million on one clinic just down the road from where the state government is already planning to build its own clinic is nothing but a waste and duplication. The Health One clinic will be operating long before a superclinic could be operating. Further, \$7 million is an extraordinary sum of money considering the fact that the GP superclinic that has already been built and is operational at Nelson Bay cost just \$2.5 million. This \$7 million in expenditure proposal has occurred only because the Gillard Labor government failed to talk to the right people, local people, about the health needs in the Paterson electorate. There were no meetings, no consultations, GP Access representing urban practitioners was not consulted, Hunter Rural Division of General Practice was not consulted—and they represent the rural practitioners in my area—and yet \$7 million was apportioned for the GP superclinic.

Smart spending would see \$2.5 million spent on the Health One clinic. That would leave \$4.5 million for other worthy projects. There is no doubt that this represents value for money for the taxpayer, which is always important. It is a government's duty to invest taxpayers' funds wisely. It is also a government's duty to represent those it serves, and what my constituents need is better health services in the Medowie-Tilligerry-Salt Ash area, as well as an increased GP presence in the Dungog-Clarence Town area. Recently, Clarence Town lost its last GP service because its only doctor retired. Local community groups have been crying out for a replacement service not only since losing their GP but also for the months prior. Despite this forewarning, the Gillard Labor government did nothing to assist. In fact, it refused a

funding application from Dr Drew in Dungog, who was trying to expand his practice to accommodate the needs of people in Clarence Town.

I have met personally with members of the Dungog and Clarence Town Country Women's Association and the Clarence Town Lions Club, who are working to find a way forward. Like Dungog-Clarence Town, the community around the Medowie-Tilligerry-Salt Ash region also needs increased health services. Demand is only increasing owing to the substantial residential growth in the suburbs, which includes RAAF personnel currently serving at RAAF Base Williamtown. Prior to the 2007 election, local RAAF personnel were promised a defence family healthcare clinic by Labor. However, despite winning government, that clinic was never delivered. In fact, it was one of the first promises broken by this Labor government. Thus, families who moved into the area have already missed out under the Labor government and now face increased pressure in not being able to see a GP. Many are now forced to travel outside the electorate into Newcastle in order to access the services that they need.

Therefore I would call on the Gillard Labor government to spend the \$4½ million in savings on new health infrastructure for the areas that I have just mentioned. The projects could be put out to tender in order to get the best value for money and the best value for the community. Commonsense investments such as these are important for regional communities like the Paterson electorate, where there is fast residential growth and a rapidly ageing population. We must begin to prepare for our new residents now so that future communities do not suffer a lack of services.

The National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010 is designed to expand the

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality of Health Care, which was set up by the coalition. The role of that commission is to be expanded to include 'setting national clinical standards and strengthened clinical governance'. As part of this agenda, the Gillard Labor government has also flagged its intention to establish an independent hospital pricing authority and a national performance authority. It is therefore concerning that neither of those authorities has been detailed in this bill, and should legislation outlining them be presented to the House I would consider the issue.

The cost of expanding the commission, including the establishment of those authorities, was included in this year's budget at a price of \$236.5 million. It is the coalition's view that this funding should instead be directed towards frontline services, including a major boost to mental health facilities. The funding could also cover the cost of the local health infrastructure needed across the country. In my electorate of Paterson, there is a need for a chemotherapy unit in Forster-Tuncurry. I have met with the management of Forster Private Hospital, which would be pleased to operate the unit for both public and private patients alike. Currently, chemotherapy patients have to travel to Taree, Port Macquarie, Newcastle or Sydney for treatment. This is an unnecessary stress, for both patients and their families, which could be avoided with a relatively small funding investment. A whole unit including computer systems, refrigeration, intravenous pumps and armchairs could be established for just over \$30,000.

Similarly, the Cape Hawke Community Hospital and Health Association, which leases Forster Private Hospital, is in need of a hydrotherapy pool to service the community. A budget for this project has already been completed and the pool could be built for \$750,000. This infrastructure would sup-

port a variety of patients with a variety of health needs. Hydrotherapy pools can be used to assist elderly patients with movement, for rehabilitation and pain relief and for treating illnesses such as rheumatic diseases, just to name a few. Unfortunately, the Gillard Labor government rejected funding for this worthwhile project under the latest round of the National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program, despite a detailed submission prepared by the association. That is why I made it one of my priorities prior to the August election, when I committed the necessary funding under a coalition government. Parties aside, I now call on the government to meet this promise and, at the same time, meet the real need in the Paterson electorate.

I would like to finish by reminding this House that without our health we can do very little else. That is why real outcomes and improvements must be the priority for new legislation. When I am out and about speaking to my constituents, from Raymond Terrace in the south to Forster in the north, I am always told about the need for a hospital, more beds, another GP, specialist services, longer health operating hours—and the list goes on and on, such is the need. Never do people implore me for another level of bureaucracy. That is why I cannot support this, without being absolutely certain that it will lead to the increased frontline services that I have just mentioned. I am not convinced that the current bill satisfies the needs of my constituents.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (7.33 pm)—In speaking to this legislation, the National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010, I note it is always very pleasing to follow the member for Paterson considering he comes from an area that is close to my electorate. I find it quite interesting that he has raised the issue of health services that are needed in his electorate given that he was a member of the

Howard government from 2001 to 2007 and that during that time he was not able to have any of these projects brought to fruition. I might also add that he needs to acknowledge here in this place that it was the Howard government that put a cap on the number of GP places, which led to the chronic shortage of GPs and other health professionals that I know he and his people experience in his electorate and I and my people experience in the Shortland electorate. So I do welcome the additional training places that the Gillard government has brought on line. As I am sure the member for Paterson knows and appreciates, the Gillard government is investing \$1.2 billion in doctors, nurses and allied health people as part of the National Health and Hospitals Network. It is for training an additional 5,500 new GPs and an additional 680 medical specialists over the coming decade, improving support for 4,600 full-time-equivalent nurses working in general practice, training aged-care nurses—which is vitally important for both the Paterson electorate and the Shortland electorate because they have very elderly populations—and providing \$1.6 billion for more subacute beds.

Health is one of the most important issues confronting Australians, and it is about the ability to access health care when they need it and the ability to have services on the ground. During the Howard years I was involved with the health and ageing committee in an inquiry into cost shifting and coming out of that inquiry we prepared *The blame game: report on the inquiry into health funding* with its recommendations. The blame game report has been used as one of the starting points to develop the National Health and Hospitals Network. From there the current Minister for Health and Ageing has put in place a number of structures that have led to recommendations as to the legislation that has been presented here in parlia-

ment and the legislation that will be presented later this week.

What makes me just a little angry is that, for all the years that the Howard government was in power, the previous speaker, the member for Paterson was not raising issues but was lauding the health policies of that government—a government that ripped \$1 billion out of our hospitals. Then he came in here this evening and went through his wish list, and even condemned the Gillard government for spending money in his electorate.

Health is important, getting it right is important and everybody working together is important. The legislation we have before us today is part of the framework of the Gillard government's efforts to fix the mess created by the previous government—a government that did not even respond to the blame game report of the health and ageing committee. That report was noted for its groundbreaking recommendations and for the fact that it recognised all the key factors that were creating problems within our health system.

The bill before us today provides framework legislation to establish the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. It will be an independent body and will later be amended to include provisions to establish an independent hospital pricing authority and a national performance authority. The Commonwealth will provide \$35.2 million over four years to jointly fund, with the states and territories, the continuation and the expansion of the commission to support improvements in safety and quality in health care.

The Gillard government is about safety and quality in health care. I previously stood in this parliament and spoke against coalition government legislation that downgraded the Commonwealth's commitment to providing health services. Now I stand here tonight as a

member of a Labor government that is committed to reforming our health system. The Gillard government will be introducing landmark legislation this week to secure better hospital services across Australia through fundamental reforms to the health system.

I implore members on the other side of this House to support that legislation. It is vital legislation that will deliver health care to their constituents. It is legislation that will put in place a funding model that will stop the blame game that was identified in the blame game report. The Commonwealth will be taking the majority funding responsibility for public hospitals and full responsibility for primary care, thus ending the blame game. There will be no more blaming the states or the states blaming the Commonwealth. It is a mature approach to health care. It is an approach which recognises that health care is about delivering health services to Australians rather than trying to abrogate the responsibility of governments by blaming the states or the Commonwealth. This is a Commonwealth which is taking responsibility. The change in funding arrangements will provide a foundation for major reform of the health and hospital system.

Madam Deputy Speaker Bird, I know you recognise how the Australian health system has suffered for such a long period of time from inadequate funding arrangements and from unclear accountability. That has gone on for far, far too long and the blame game report of 2006 recognised that. Unfortunately the then government did not even respond to that report which was delivered to it.

The new hospital arrangements will ensure for the first time that the federal government properly funds public hospitals in Australia, and that has been a very big issue over a long period of time. Those arrangements will reverse what happened under the previous government when the Common-

wealth financed a declining share of hospital funding. In actual fact the previous health minister, the now Leader of the Opposition, ripped \$1 billion out of the Australian hospitals.

The new arrangements will ensure for the first time that the Commonwealth will fund hospitals for each service rather than provide funding through block grants. This will increase accountability and will allow the Commonwealth, as the dominant funding provider, to introduce new national standards for public hospital services ensuring that all patients receive timely and quality services. It will also drive improvements in primary care and prevention.

The legislation will fund: 60 per cent of the efficient price of every public hospital service provided to public patients, which will lead to an improvement in health services; recurrent expenditure on research and training functions undertaken in public hospitals; 60 per cent of capital expenditure; and 100 per cent of GP and primary care services. This is a big change and is a real change in the way our hospital system works.

But the changes do not end there. I have already detailed the increase in the funding that has been committed to by the Gillard government. I have already spoken about the landmark reforms that the Gillard government has embraced. The Howard government ignored the need for these changes and actually cut training numbers and funding to hospitals. The establishment of the local hospital network particularly benefits the Central Coast part of the Shortland electorate. Previously the Central Coast was lumped in with northern Sydney; now they will have their own network. The Hunter New England hospital network will be very similar to the network that exists now. It has been shown to be a very strong integrated network, unlike

what was happening on the Central Coast. Medicare Locals will be established to work with local GPs, allied health workers and community health to drive local integration.

What this will do is bring health into the 21st century. It will establish electronic health records, which I see as being vital, particularly to those people living in rural and remote areas of Australia. It will establish a national after-hours GP and primary care service. Whilst the member for Paterson may not embrace the GP superclinics in his electorate—

Mr Laming—None of us do!

Ms HALL—I know members throughout Australia have embraced GP superclinics. The member for Bowman says that he does not support GP superclinics. I will put that on the record because I know that members on this side of the parliament are getting very positive feedback from the constituents in their electorates about the benefits of GP superclinics.

Seven hundred and fifty million dollars will be provided so that the service that patients get when they go to emergency departments will be provided within four hours. I should note here that \$280,000 has been provided to boost health services at Belmont Hospital. The residents in east Lake Macquarie will benefit from new medical equipment and improvements at the hospital following the historic health and hospital reforms, without which this would not have happened. The hospital will also undergo a \$25,000 refurbishment which will improve the triage area, allowing staff an unobstructed view of the waiting area from the triage desk.

The Howard government did nothing to improve health services. It was a wrecker. It impacted on the services that people were able to obtain. It oversaw the development of a chronic doctor shortage and it lost track of

the fact that governments are there to provide services to people, particularly in the area of health. Instead of providing services it took away those services.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Brendan O'Connor**) adjourned.

Leave granted for second reading debate to resume at a later hour this day.

MAIN COMMITTEE

Afghanistan

Reference

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (7.49 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the order of the day for the resumption of the debate on the motion to take note of the Prime Minister's statement on Australia's commitment to Afghanistan, be referred to the Main Committee.

Question agreed to.

NATIONAL HEALTH AND HOSPITALS NETWORK BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (7.49 pm)—No Australian is not immensely proud of our health system which has evolved over decades, one which leaves this country with the second longest quality adjusted life expectancy in the world. We are a nation that spends roughly an average proportion of GDP on health care amongst developed economies. We have a GP focused system which is almost unique in the world and we have a fascinating public-private blend that has seen both models thrive over the last two or three decades. We also have the pillar of a strong PBS. But all of this relies on safety and quality in health care, something that is utterly beyond question.

The history of the National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010 goes back to the year 2000, when the initial Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care was established under the dutiful and careful chairmanship of Bruce Barraclough. Over the five or six years that followed—the initial five-year period was extended—this commission, from relatively humble funding means of around \$50 million over five years, achieved enormous things in safety and quality in health care. Let me take this House back to the 1990s, when we faced an indemnity crisis that was almost unparalleled outside of the United States. At that time, the training of professionals like me was to never admit fault to a patient, to always keep exemplary notes and to accept that at some stage in your career, if not a multiple number of times, you would end up in front of a jury trying to defend your professional reputation in some of the most harrowing experiences a clinician can imagine.

That was changed, after a crisis that evolved throughout the nineties and up to 2001, under the care of Minister Patterson and then Minister Abbott. State tort law reform followed, and one of the great challenges that faced the Australian health system was resolved. At the same time there came a real focus on safety and quality. It was quite simple. We needed a commission with a relatively modest secretariat, which was effectively an ad hoc structure in parallel with the department of health and ageing at the time, and they had a broad and unspecified remit, under fairly modest financial arrangements, to work on safety and quality across the eight jurisdictions in the Australian health system.

The commission led and coordinated those challenges very impressively. They achieved significant gains in standardising the collection of data. We know that without the data we simply do not know what is hap-

pening and as a health system we do not know how to improve things. We cannot find the areas where there is a lack of services or areas in which things can be improved if we do not collect the data to establish that. One of the great benefits of having eight different jurisdictions offering health care is also something that is incredibly fraught—that is, the ability to compare and contrast between those services. Australia has an opportunity to have simultaneous health systems learning from each other, disseminating great practice. However, if, at the same time, we do not collate data in a consistent way, much of that can be undermined.

What happened between 2000 and 2006 was the establishment of recognised and agreed standards. Some of them did not require enormous amounts of funding. I would like to highlight the national framework for education in safety and quality. Health professionals of all sorts had never learnt about safety and quality in health care throughout their undergraduate degrees or even through their clinical training. Through the 1980s and 1990s most of it was intensively defensive. What we saw was an area developed by the commission that was picked up by all the states and territories and, ultimately, by the World Health Organisation and now it is used internationally. It has become an absolute world standard in safety and quality in health care.

Some of these things were hard to measure because the initial commission during those five years was not given a specific remit to implement. It was given, with its fairly modest funding arrangements at the time, only the opportunity to develop models which could be picked up by the states and territories. So it is with some regret that I recall that when the commission was eventually evaluated, one of the criticisms, quite disappointingly, was that it had failed to implement the very things that it was not ini-

tially established to do. But the one great thing that the Australian commission achieved is that it set up the platform that we are debating tonight, which is the need for an explicit authority to be built into the structures of Australia's health system—Commonwealth and state. The authority is more narrowly focused on safety and quality. It has a board, a chair and a CEO structure, which is probably more appropriate. It also has governance and will not be utterly reliant on soft forms of funding or the will of the government of the day for its survival. That is all absolutely vital. The authority will be headed up by some very impressive clinicians. All of that is very promising—and no-one would begrudge the need for the highest levels of safety and quality monitoring in this country.

The problem that has been so well outlined by the member for Dickson is that this proposal comes in the absence, in almost a vacuum, of any sort of direct action on the provision of health services. It comes at a time when the entire debate around health and hospital reform is limited to a discussion about whether the federal government can deliver primary health care in isolation and whether moving the federal government's contribution to health from 48-52 to 60-40 represents some form of a complete revolution in health care. If it is such a great idea, why not move to 100 per cent funding of the healthcare system? That has not occurred and there is a simple reason for that. Primary and acute health care are simply too hard for this government to reform. It was simply too hard to talk to administrations of a similar political ilk about the gaping chasm of health inefficiency, duplication, overlap and waste that currently exist between our two health systems. I have said before that Australia with the benefits in its health structure has one great challenge: a public system and a private system. With the latter, the faster you

work the wealthier you get. With the public system, the faster you work the quicker you go broke. Those two are never going to work effectively until we have a system where there is clear delineation of which level of government does what, and that has not been picked up in these reforms.

Acute care continues to bleed with people stuck in casualty waiting to be seen, because there is no incentive to have patients seen quickly. This improves under some state administrations and then it leaches away under others. At the same time, people are waiting on public hospital operating lists with no real hope of ever getting their operation because there is a secret list above the operating list and urgent people get moved above less urgent patients. These waiting lists become exactly that—waiting for the operation that never comes.

Mr Lyons interjecting—

Mr LAMING—I can bring out plenty of dental patients waiting for dental prostheses that will never come. There are people waiting for hip operations that will never come. The crude reality is that, if you look at some of these operations, they are being performed far more efficiently in the private sector. We can learn from the private health system by looking at how it operates, and there is no better example of that than in Queensland cancer service delivery. There will come a time when we face the fact that public hospitals cannot be expected to do everything and to do it well. There will be a time when private services will deliver it better. What we need is an unlocking of that potential within the health system, but at the moment that has not been achieved in these reforms.

The other focus of the government is the view that the move from 42-58 to 60-40 is some incredible change to service delivery. But I think the Australian people know very little is changing. They see that superclinics

are being promised but not constructed and that when they are constructed they are placed right next to ailing public hospitals. They are not going into the areas of great patient need. Edifices are being built worth millions of dollars in places where they will be flat out staffing them or where they are right next to existing medical practices that will be destroyed by a revenue model that is fundamentally government funded. When you build a \$3 million government funded facility, how can a private one just 500 yards down the road from it possibly compete?

I digress slightly to simply answer the great question, which is that, while we are waiting and Rome is burning for the tough health reforms that both sides admit have to occur, we have had the date for when the health system would be fixed—but that is now long past. We are waiting for action on waiting lists, including emergency waiting lists. We are waiting on the thousands of seniors in this country who are left in public hospital beds because they cannot find an aged care place. There has been nothing but promised inputs about transitional wards—but no action. It has been four years now and we have seen no change to most public hospitals in this country.

Mr Lyons interjecting—

Mr LAMING—You need to visit a hospital, Sir, and see that 30 per cent of those medical wards are blocked by seniors who simply cannot find a bed in an aged-care facility. That situation is worse than it was five years ago. The bed block is worse because the funding for aged care beds is simply not being taken up. That is because the infrastructure payments are insufficient to build, fund and maintain these places for our seniors.

Without taking our eye off the ball, we know that safety and quality is probably the highest goal of a health system after access.

Safety and quality is the true measure of whether we are committed to building a better health system, because it is one thing to be accessible and it is another thing to have well-trained clinicians working inside impressive buildings; but, ultimately, without safety and quality, we will have the situation where the wrong drips are put up, the wrong tablets are prescribed or, as many of us will remember in clinical situations, the patient walks in with a great big bag of glasses and says, ‘Doctor, none of these work.’ It is at that moment that you realise that thousands of dollars have been spent without a single improvement in the health of your patients. This legislation is a noble goal. There is no disputing that we need an authority. One was set up by a Howard government commission and it achieved great things but it is no substitute for having no action on the delivery of services for Australians around this nation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—Order! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 34. The member for Bowman will be given the opportunity to continue speaking if he so wishes when the debate is resumed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS
COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE
BUILDING THE EDUCATION
REVOLUTION PROGRAM BILL 2010

Consideration resumed from 18 October.

Second Reading

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (8.00 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The effluxion of time has not washed away the failure of the government with respect to the Building the Education Revolution and, while time might heal all, tragically for mums and dads, principals, teachers and school communities who have been bitterly disappointed by the outcome of the school hall debacle, the passage of time has not

changed their disappointment or washed away their feeling of being ripped off as taxpayers by this government's inept handling of the school hall stimulus program.

This Commission of Inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution Program Bill 2010 that I introduced last week and is being debated tonight would return some semblance of respectability to government handling of important government programs by giving a judicial officer heading a judicial inquiry the powers needed to summons witnesses, to subpoena documents and to hold inquiries both private and public in order to get to the bottom of who is responsible for the massive failure of the school hall program and, more importantly, to determine whether taxpayers have received value for money for the \$16.2 billion that has been spent on the Building the Education Revolution.

Last week in estimates startling revelations only made the need for an inquiry of this kind even more current and even more important. Some of the revelations included that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission confirmed that they are interviewing BER contractors and examining contracts between builders and the government to determine whether there is evidence of collusion. I think most people in Australia would recognise that common sense suggests that there has been some kind of funny business, collusion—whatever you wish to call it—between business, between government and within businesses to ensure that taxpayers have been fleeced to the tune of billions of dollars that have lined the pockets of state governments and building contractors.

The estimates revealed that only a third of BER projects have been completed and 40 per cent of BER funds are yet to be spent in the program. So it is not too late for a judicial inquiry to improve the rollout of the

school hall stimulus program. The minister—Simon Crean before and now Chris Evans—says that all these projects have begun and cannot be unravelled. Mums and dads and principals and teachers across Australia know that putting a bit of orange plastic fencing around existing playgrounds or tennis courts is not the beginning of a BER program. It is not too late for the government to admit its mistakes, to learn the lessons of the past and to ensure that taxpayers' money is delivered effectively and that they receive value for money. It is a particularly arrogant government that continues to speak no evil, to see no evil and to hear no evil about the school hall stimulus program when they know that they could now fix the problems that the opposition has been raising since April 2009.

Another matter that came out through estimates is that despite Julia Gillard's promise during the election campaign—yet another broken promise—that the costings for each project would be publicly revealed, none of the costings for the projects that have been overseen by this government are yet to be revealed in full in public. So what happened to their promises of transparency and accountability or the embarrassing comments by the Prime Minister that she would be opening the curtains and letting the disinfectant of sun shine in to ensure that every crack of government was exposed publicly through transparency and accountability? They were simply false promises designed to win over the support of the independents.

I call on the independents—those sitting on the crossbenches who I hope are listening to this debate—to recognise that this judicial inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution is an important opportunity for transparency and accountability to be more than just talked about but to be acted upon. This is an opportunity for the parliament to insist that transparency and accountability be

brought to an area where there has been clear government failure, where there has been clear government waste, where state governments, building contractors and others have fleeced the Australian taxpayer. The Australian taxpayer is crying out for the parliament to bring the rigour of a judicial inquiry to bear on the Building the Education Revolution.

I hate to think what the parents, friends, principals, teachers and others at schools like the Hastings Public School, Tottenham Public School in New South Wales, Berwick Lodge in Victoria, Holland Park in Queensland and Stirling East in South Australia—just to name five schools out of the hundreds that have raised concerns and complaints about their programs—are thinking about a parliament that does not pass a judicial inquiry bill which would give them at least the opportunity to be heard and to know that the inquiry had the power to make independent recommendations, could act independently of government, could subpoena documents and summons witnesses and actually get to the bottom of what has been probably the greatest waste of taxpayers' funds since Federation. It would probably only be surpassed by the waste of taxpayers' funds as part of the National Broadband Network.

The opposition has been raising these concerns since April 2009. The government announced its program in February 2009. In June 2009 I wrote to the Auditor-General asking for an Auditor-General's inquiry. On 25 June the Senate followed up and supported that inquiry. In late August 2009 DEEWR was already revising the guidelines and for the first time—in a \$16 billion program—introduced the notion that value for money should be achieved. It announced at the same time a \$1.7 billion blow-out of taxpayers funds' on Primary Schools for the 21st Century. It took until April 2010 for the Minister for Education at the time, now the

Prime Minister, to establish the Orgill task force, but without the powers to independently call witnesses and documents, to make independent valuations and to hold private and public hearings—without the powers that a royal commission would have if it were a judicial inquiry.

The ANAO handed down its report on 15 May 2010. It was a damning report. The report showed that the guidelines on the rollout of the program made it possible for rorting, price gouging, waste and mismanagement to exist and indeed flourish. It found that the program design means that schools are not getting the projects that they actually want or need. It found that it is virtually impossible to assess the success of the program against the benchmarks that the government itself has set, such as job creation. It found that the Minister for Education, the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance and Deregulation all knew that the initial funding was insufficient to cover the costs of the program, resulting in a \$1.7 billion blow-out. It found that the projects are massively behind schedule—and they continue to be massively behind schedule—and in fact will stimulate the economy into 2011 and probably 2012, years after the global financial crisis which the government uses as its fig leaf to pretend that the school hall program has been a success, by saying it was designed to stimulate the economy and that the government did not care that it was wasting taxpayers' money.

The ANAO found that there was a large degree of disquiet amongst school communities about the levels of consultation as well as about value for money achieved. Most damningly, it found that non-government schools had a high level of satisfaction but government schools a very low level of satisfaction, at 40 per cent. Why would that be the case? Because government schools did not get to manage their own projects and

non-government schools did get to manage their own projects—exactly the coalition’s policy at the last election and before. Government bureaucracies did over the government sector, while non-government schools got the projects they wanted, got value for money and were able to have money left over from the taxpayer.

I am aware that I was supposed to have 10 minutes on the clock, even though I have 30. My understanding is that this is a 60-minute debate and there are six speakers speaking for 10 minutes each. So, in spite of the fact that it appears I am still within time, my understanding of the process is that I am now over time, so I commend this private member’s bill to the crossbench—

Mr Hawke interjecting—

Mr PYNE—While the member for Mitchell is urging me on—because of the quality of the debate from the coalition side—I exhort the crossbenchers to support this private member’s bill, and I look forward to the debate from the coalition side. I expect we will get the same old platitudes from the government side.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (8.11 pm)—No matter how many times the member for Sturt uses emotive language like ‘fleecing’, ‘collusion’, ‘embarrassing comments’ and the like, the truth is that he gave almost no facts about that. Even audit report 33 from the ANAO does not say what he says it says. What it says is that the BER is actually fulfilling the purpose for which it was created—stimulating the economy, creating jobs and creating vital infrastructure. That is what the Auditor-General’s report finds. The facts are that the member for Sturt does not like that. I think it would have been a very, very unhappy electorate office when he saw that report.

In the electorate of Blair there are 221 projects in 65 schools, worth \$108 million.

The member for Sturt talked about schools which he claimed were unhappy. Let us talk about some schools in my electorate which are happy: Blair State School, Fernvale State School, Raceview State School. The member for Sturt talked about there being rip-offs in relation to state schools. Nonsense. Let us get the facts out. What would the member for Sturt have done if he were now the education minister? He would have ripped up contracts that were in place. He ignored the reality that 97 per cent of all the projects had started. So we would have had thousands of building workers and subcontractors thrown out of work and many small businesses hurt—and he wants to talk about collusion, about funny business. We would have seen the breaches of thousands of contracts if the coalition had had their way. So they should not come in here under the veneer of legal probity and integrity and talk about what they would have done, because that would be the consequence of their policy. I am just going from what they had to say.

We have 24,000 projects across 9½ thousand schools. Treasury says that this program has saved the jobs of thousands and thousands of Australians across the electorate. I do not know which schools the member for Sturt goes to in his electorate, but the BER is not just part of the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan; it is part of our education reforms—improving teacher quality, national partnership, reviewing of funding for schools, the MySchool website and on and on.

We do not support a judicial inquiry. There is already an independent inquiry in place headed by Mr Brad Orgill. The member for Sturt can come into this place and trash the independence of that inquiry, but that inquiry handed down interim findings with 14 recommendations and we have said we will follow them. We have said that we

will implement the agreements in relation to the inquiry.

Mr Pyne—When are you going to release the costings?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Vamvakinou)—The member for Sturt will listen in silence.

Mr NEUMANN—He does not like the fact that Mr Orgill has found that the vast preponderance of principals and people involved in those school communities actually say that the BER funding is working well in their communities. He just does not like it. No matter how many times he comes into this place and talks about school hall rip-offs and the like, it simply does not accord with what the Auditor-General found and it does not accord with what Mr Brad Orgill found.

Primary Schools for the 21st Century, an element of the BER, continues to be highly scrutinised. We have mentioned the Australian National Audit Office. We have had the BER Implementation Taskforce and the Orgill report. We have had Senate inquiries and parliamentary committees in Victoria and in New South Wales, and the government has committed funding of \$13.2 million for the BER Implementation Taskforce costs. The truth is that the coalition never supported the NBN, they never supported the BER funding and the member for Sturt has belled the cat. I do not know what his colleague the shadow minister for communications and broadband was doing here today with his bill on the NBN and I do not know what he was doing in the Main Committee with his private member's motion, because the truth is they will never support the NBN just as they will never support BER funding. That is the reality. It does not matter what we say or do. It does not matter what the school communities say or do. It does not matter how many tradespeople will get jobs.

Whenever I have opened a BER project in my community, I have asked the project managers, the school principals and the builders what kind of employment people have—the jobs that were created and the jobs supported. Invariably, to a man and a woman, these people tell me about dozens of jobs. Like Mal Jacobson from Painter Dickson, whose firm was working on the Rosewood State Primary School—125 jobs, for instance. These have been real jobs created in South-East Queensland as a result of the BER.

Those opposite have moved this private member's bill as a political stunt—that is all it is. They hate the BER; they have no commitment to schools. They would have ripped \$2 billion out of education if they had had their way and their policies had been implemented. They would have got rid of the Computers in Schools program, the digital education revolution would have gone, and you would have had thousands of people out of work. The member for Sturt's message in relation to all of this is: 'Don't worry that Treasury talked about the 200,000 jobs which were kept as a result of our nation-building stimulus program. Don't worry about the fact that in the last 12 months 353,000 jobs have been created in the economy because of the work of the federal Labor government. Don't worry about that at all.' He does not really believe in education. He believes in political pointscoreing. That is what his proposal for this judicial inquiry is all about.

The member for Sturt talked about that fact that we announced the formation of a task force. We did that on 12 April 2010 and we put someone of integrity and probity into that role—a businessman, well accepted, with no obvious ties. I am not aware that Mr Orgill is a card-carrying member of the Australian Labor Party. We funded the organisation and they looked into it. The opposition

mentioned 33 per cent. They claim that somehow \$6 billion to \$8 billion has been wasted under the BER. That is what it amounts to. How can that possibly be the case? It is not true. He alleges that this is mainly in the public sector. Where is there a skerrick, a scintilla of evidence? There is none.

The BER program was the largest part of our Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan. It was critical for our economy and critical for our communities. It was critical for hundreds of businesses in South-East Queensland where my electorate is located—for local contractors, newsagents, corner stores and bakeries. All of them benefited. Where there was a school there was a BER project, and that is the truth.

Those opposite have no idea with respect to education. I went to Ipswich East State School for seven years. I am proud of the fact that I went to that state school. They are getting \$3.2 million under the BER. For the first time they will have a decent hall—they have never had one. For the first time they will have a decent library—they have never had one. That is a real example of a school in a working class area in Ipswich in my electorate getting the kind of funding they need, so that kids in Ipswich will have the same rights as kids in the electorate of the member for Sturt. I want those kids to get the same advantage, and the BER is delivering it for them. It is nation building, creating jobs, supporting jobs in my electorate and giving kids every chance in state schools as well as in private schools. The BER deserves to be applauded and the coalition should hang their heads in shame for their opposition to it. (*Time expired*)

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (8.21 pm)—It is a great pleasure tonight to support this motion from the member for Sturt. I want to take up the points that the member for Blair

made in relation to this very important inquiry into the BER program that we are calling for. The member for Blair asserts that there are no facts and there is no evidence in relation to the need for an inquiry into the BER. I would say to the member for Blair: ‘Where have you been for the last two years?’

It is a fact that of the \$16.2 billion only \$9.8 billion has been spent. That means 40 per cent of the stimulus funding in the BER remains unspent today. So where are the jobs that the member for Blair said saved us from the recession? There were not 200,000 jobs. The reality is there were no mechanisms for job creation coming out of the BER program. That is what the ANAO report said. We have to be very clear about that.

I am here tonight to report a series of problems and failures with the BER, in my electorate and in my great state of New South Wales, that resulted from the decision of this federal Labor administration to pass the administration of the BER to the New South Wales government.

Mr Pyne—That was a mistake.

Mr HAWKE—That was a big mistake, as the member for Sturt quite rightly points out. I have asked the Prime Minister in question time about several cases—and this goes back to September last year—relating to Baulkham Hills North Public School and Annangrove Public School. These are great public schools in my electorate. They are fantastic schools with fantastic P&Cs, with honest P&C presidents who are not engaged in the political process. When the BER came to Baulkham Hills North Public School it made one mistake. The P&C president, Mr Craig Turner, was an architect, and he was one of the first to come to me. He said, ‘Why are we getting a new school hall to replace the existing school hall, for \$1.2 million, when it

is smaller than the existing hall?' I could not explain that.

I asked the Prime Minister—then the Deputy Prime Minister and responsible for this program—why the school was getting, for \$1.2 million, a hall that was smaller and could not hold the school population. Of course she went through a series of vitriolic responses that did not answer the question. When I turned up to that P&C and said, 'This is what Julia Gillard said to my question,' many of those people said: 'We voted for her. We voted for that government. We will never vote for that government again.' They are not Liberal people. They are people in a public school trying to do the best by their kids and by their school, and they were outraged.

I turn to a further case. Ms Donna Hunter of Annangrove Public School is a great P&C president and someone with a great concern for her local school. This is an outrageous example, and I want to highlight these examples because we do need a judicial inquiry into the BER and this bill provides for that exact thing. The experience of Annangrove Public School is one of the grossest examples in this country of waste and mismanagement in a government program. Annangrove Public School has just 90 pupils. It got \$850,000 under the BER program, something which ought to have been a boon and a gift for that school, something which should have set up that school for the next 20 to 50 years. It needed classrooms and it desperately needed new toilets for the school population. The school community asked for classrooms and toilets. What did they get from the New South Wales state government? A library. What did they already have? A library.

When you go to Annangrove Public School you stand in front of two libraries. You go to the existing library, which stands

next to the new library. The existing library is air-conditioned and is fully functional and serviced with shelves. The new library, which cost \$850,000, has no air-conditioning, has no shelving and is completely useless as a library building to that school with its 90 pupils—\$850,000. When you look at the line items you see there was \$66,000 in landscaping for that school. The member for Sturt and the Leader of the Opposition were good enough to come to this school and see it firsthand. They did not turn a blind eye like the member for Blair. They did not pretend it was not happening. They visited this school, spoke to the parents, spoke to the P&C and said, 'Show us what is happening.'

There was \$66,000 for landscaping but you find 12 plants, which had to be removed because they were a fire hazard, and a one-metre by one-metre patch of concrete. If this is landscaping then somebody has got a very good job out of that, I would suggest to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Somebody has profited from that, and I say that in the full seriousness of understanding what those words mean in this place.

Mr Craig Thomson—Say it outside.

Mr HAWKE—We have highlighted this issue outside and inside this chamber. You are welcome to visit this school and talk to the principal and the P&C president, Member for Dobell, because this is a serious issue affecting my community. There are other reasons we need an inquiry—an inquiry which, unlike the Orgill commission, has the power to call witnesses and get the documents to get to the bottom of it. One of the most fundamental reasons for needing that power in this inquiry is that there are more principals out there who do know that there have been big problems with the BER and its implementation. Many have spoken to me but I am not able to reveal their names and I

am not able to say what the facts are because they fear for their careers. They say: 'I cannot tell you this. I cannot tell you that the painting contractors that have been brought in by the New South Wales government to paint the school have cost five times what the principal can get a local contractor to paint the school for.' They know that there is a culture in New South Wales and in our country where, under this administration, you do not speak if you have a problem like that. But they are outraged. There are many principals who exist in this culture in Australia today who want to say something, who would do better for their school community if they could and who want to make a difference. That is why we have to get to the bottom of this.

We have to get to the bottom of this because this is a big government program. This is not the standard of governance that we should settle for in this country. We have to have an inquiry that has the powers to deliver the real outcomes to ensure that government funding is spent wisely, frugally and better. That is why the P&C president at Anangrove Public School, who as well is not political, came forward. When the member for Sturt and the Leader of the Opposition visited these schools, they told them, 'The coalition's policy is to return control to the local boards and the local schools.' The member for Blair said, 'What would you do, member for Sturt?' We have said clearly what we would do in government—that is, give the public school the right to pick its own buildings, the right to decide what it needs on the ground. It is a better model for public schools. Who benefited from the BER program? I come from a state with a blend of great public schools and great private schools, and every one of those private and independent schools got a great benefit out of the BER program. Why? Because they ran

the project. They designed it, they chose it and they delivered it.

The Catholic system is a great example of how you can do this right, but this government does not want to know how you can do it right. The worst outcomes were in the public schools—that is, from the party of the worker. You should be upset over there. The public schools in Australia got the worst outcomes from the BER and in many cases were ripped off. You really should hang your heads in shame because it is this side of politics that is saying here today that we should look into this, that we should ensure that every dollar spent by the public purse is spent wisely and spent in a way that delivers the real outcomes that our schools and education system need.

New South Wales is one of the worst examples of maladministration in Australia. That was what was found by the ANAO and by others, such as the Orgill inquiry. New South Wales does have problems; it does have a huge bureaucracy. Huge management fees were taken by the New South Wales government. Why is it that the Catholic system can deliver on time, on budget and with only a small proportion of management fees but the New South Wales government gets to take a large chunk of the money out in management fees? I have to say, on behalf of all my public schools, on behalf of all the principals who are too afraid to come forward due to the culture of the worst government in New South Wales history—a government that has gone beyond rotten, that has gone beyond stale and that has given public administration in New South Wales and Australia the worst possible name—and on behalf of all those P&Cs: no, this money was not spent wisely and we are here to do something about it.

I would encourage the members for New England, Kennedy, Lyne, Denison and Mel-

bourne to really think about this bill. We need to shine a light on this program because, no matter what side of politics we come from, we need to lift the standard of public administration in governments. We have to show governments like the New South Wales government that if you waste the money of taxpayers from New South Wales and the Commonwealth you will be held accountable. Something is rotten in the state of New South Wales and something is rotten with a federal government that is willing to vote down a bill like this, which aims to get to the bottom of it.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (8.31 pm)—We know what would be constructed if the opposition were in government: there would be flagpoles, Member for Mitchell—that is what you would choose. That was the contribution from your side when you had the treasury bench: flagpoles for schools. And there were conditions attached to those as well. So do not come in here lecturing us about contributing to vital school infrastructure when the record from your side has been absolutely abysmal.

You question the need for the stimulus package, Member for Mitchell. I ask you the question: where have you been? Where were you when the global financial crisis was on? Look at what people are saying about the targeting of the stimulus package in this country. The IMF are saying it is the best targeted stimulus package in the world. The Governor of the Reserve Bank has said that the stimulus package, the fiscal response from this government, was absolutely spot-on, and when he has been before the Standing Committee on Economics—when members from your side, the opposition side, have said, ‘You know, we should be taking the foot off the pedal with the stimulus package’—the Governor of the Reserve Bank has repeatedly supported the government on the stimulus package, repeatedly supported the

program and repeatedly supported the timing. So, Member for Mitchell, you should get some of your facts right before you come in here and debate this bill.

Quite frankly the Commission of Inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution Program Bill 2010 is a political stunt. It is nothing more. The member for Sturt is out after another headline and he is using this bill as a stunt to try and gain more publicity, attacking what has been the most successful and most wanted program in school history.

As an example, I will talk about some of the schools in my area on the Central Coast. There are 106 schools on the Central Coast and, of those 106 schools, all either have construction underway or have had construction completed. I was at Wyong Grove Public School just a couple of months ago. Wyong Grove has completed its school building, a new hall. Wyong Grove is one of the most underprivileged schools in the country. Do you know what the headmaster said to me about this school project, the BER project? She was so proud of what it had done for school morale. Kids were turning up to school because they had a new school hall in which they were being taught dancing for the first time. They were getting extracurricular programs that were being delivered in this school hall. She had had difficulty with truancy, getting kids to actually turn up to school, but because of the BER program we were getting kids to the school because they were proud of it. For the first time in this school’s history they were able to put on a performance for parents because they had enough kids there to do the dancing—dancing they had been taught as a result of this hall being put in place.

I have been to Tacoma Public School, a small school which has also had a new school hall built. Not only did a local contractor build the school hall but they put on

local apprentices who had been out of work for a considerable period of time. Young Rob was a carpenter that I met at Tacoma Public School. He was in the last year of his carpentry apprenticeship but had been out of work for six months. He had had little prospect of finishing his carpentry apprenticeship until the BER. To get work before he had had to travel down to Sydney for a couple of hours every day. As a result of the BER he got work locally. There were 106 BER projects on the Central Coast and 98 per cent of the people who worked on them came from the Central Coast. The BER provided local jobs for locals in our community, stimulating the community, making sure that people were kept in jobs and making sure the economy did not crash.

I would like to read a quote from the editor of the *Central Coast Business Review*. If Edgar Adams is not a member of the Liberal Party, he certainly at least spends a bit of time fundraising for the Liberal Party. He is certainly not someone from our side of politics. He does, however, edit the *Central Coast Business Review* and, while I must say that it tends not to give our side of politics the greatest run, about the BER Edgar said:

While this Editor does not agree with many of Labor's policies we have to agree that their stimulus spending in the schools was a masterstroke. On the Coast it saved the building industry and has done wonders for all of our schools. Anyone wanting to argue with that should talk to the builders and the schools. I have!

That is from Edgar Adams, the editor of the *Central Coast Business Review*—someone who is not friendly to this side of politics—who has come out with a stunning endorsement of our program, saying how well it has done and how successful it has been in putting people into jobs. That is what this program was all about—making sure that local economies were stimulated so that they had jobs, so that these projects were able to con-

tribute to society through employment but also build much needed social infrastructure.

At almost every school I have been to the headmaster has started the formalities of opening the new buildings by saying 'I never thought we would be able to build these buildings at my school—it was always a wish but I never thought we would be able to.' Then they go on to talk about how grateful the school is. I was at Brooke Avenue school the other day at Bateau Bay, just around the corner from where I live, and they were celebrating their 25th anniversary. It had been 25 years since any other building had been done at this school, until the BER. So 25 years ago they built the school, and since then when there has been growth in the school demountable buildings have been brought in. The BER is providing a permanent home, permanent classrooms, for those kids attending Brook Avenue school. That is having a great effect on their education and the future of that school. I am sure that in 25 years time those buildings will still be there. They have provided value for money for the people of Brooke Avenue school—value for money because we have buildings that were not there before that are going to last and that have ensured the employment of people locally and kept those workers off the scrapheap.

Let us not beat around the bush here. We had two alternatives during the global financial crisis. One was to let the market rip. That was the opposition's view—let the market rip, let a few hundred thousand people lose their jobs. The other was to put in place a very targeted stimulus package that included the BER. That worked. It provided social infrastructure that was much needed. That is the option this government took, and every member of the government is very proud of what has been done.

This is an obvious stunt by the member for Sturt, because we have already had an inquiry; we have had a task force that has gone out and had a look at these issues. It is important to go through the terms of reference of that task force. The task force was to:

1. receive, investigate and respond to complaints regarding the full operation of BER, including individual school projects, in particular—
 - (a) by referring complaints or evidence of potential breaches of the law, regulations or guidelines to the appropriate authority for action; and
 - (b) ensuring arrangements are in place between the Commonwealth and States and Territories to minimise duplication of complaints handling processes.
2. assess value for money aspects of individual projects, including project oversight and administration;
3. investigate and assess at its own discretion areas of the operation of the BER, especially as they impinge on the outcomes of projects at schools; and
4. make recommendations to the responsible authority about changes to policy, contracts or projects required to ensure the objects of the BER are realised.

Only 14 recommendations came out of that inquiry. Six are being acted upon immediately and the other eight are recommendations for the future. The task force has had a look at the complaints, and only three per cent of the total number of jobs were complained about—97 per cent were not.

In summary, we have 106 schools on the Central Coast. Whether they were the Catholic schools, whether it was Lakes Grammar Anglican School, whether it was Wyong Grove, that I have spoken about, whether it was Tacoma school or whether it was Brooke Avenue, there have been no complaints from those 106 schools. All we have had on the Central Coast, be it from the business com-

munity, be it from the P&Cs, be it from school principals, be it from past students or be it from people who are out after a job, is nothing but praise for the targeted stimulus package that made sure people on the Central Coast kept their jobs and schools got much needed buildings and the much needed social infrastructure that they have been crying out for for years.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (8.42 pm)—The Commission of Inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution Program Bill 2010 and tonight's debate are not about whether the government had good intentions. All too often we hear this defence from the government: 'Oh, we had good intentions; we wanted to do good things.' But that is not what this bill is about. This bill is about what happened when the government set out to implement a program to give effect to its intentions. What has occurred with the implementation of that program? To use a quote from the current Prime Minister, it is a mess. We have seen more than enough signs that there is something seriously wrong with this program in terms of mismanagement, waste and poor handling of public money. We have seen more than enough signs of trouble, to the extent that it is now appropriate that we take the extraordinary and the unusual step of establishing a royal commission to get to the bottom of this.

I want to put three propositions—first of all, that there is more than enough evidence of there being very serious problems; secondly, that Labor has sought to sweep those problems under the carpet; and, thirdly, that the Australian people have a right to know what has been done with their \$14.2 billion. Let me start with the evidence of the problems. We have heard this from the member for Sturt, and we have heard it time after time from others. I want to speak briefly about a couple of problems in my own elec-

torate. Let me quote, for example, the president of the P&C:

What we're concerned about is that the five classrooms that are over here are costing about \$3,600 a square metre. We had a building down here, that was burnt down by arson last year, being constructed with the same materials. That's costing \$1,700 a square metre ...

One is a BER building, at \$3,600; one is business as usual, at \$1,700. There is also the Gordon East Public School, where the new building being constructed is costing \$4,870 a square metre. In my introduction to this place, when I asked the then Deputy Prime Minister, who was the minister responsible, about that school, for my troubles I was described as an 'idiot'. Although I cheerfully note there may be other good reasons to describe me as an idiot, I do note that the P&C of that school subsequently asked the Orgill inquiry to come and have a look. So apparently things were not quite as rosy as the then Deputy Prime Minister tried to assert.

We have seen the evidence of the underlying problem, which is the appallingly poor process by which this money has been disbursed. The New South Wales government was handed a staggering amount of money—over \$3 billion—by the federal government. On any view, it is a grave error of judgment to hand several billion dollars to the New South Wales government and to ask them to manage it with anything approaching competence.

I went to a presentation by the senior New South Wales bureaucrat, Mr Angus Dawson, who told those assembled, 'We were told to spend \$3.5 billion in New South Wales within two years or hand it back.' So is it any surprise that there was very little concern given to the normal commercial discipline of saving money and spending money efficiently, or to something else that parents and taxpayers might reasonably expect—that schools would be given the opportunity to

genuinely choose what they wanted? As we have heard, there have been all too many unfortunate examples of schools being left with something which was very much their second choice.

The first proposition is that there is ample evidence that there is a serious problem. The second proposition is that this Labor government has attempted to sweep it under the carpet. The shadow minister, the member for Sturt, has been assiduously raising this issue. All of us on this side have been assiduously raising this issue, but we get these attempts at diversionary tactics. For example, when the then Deputy Prime Minister spoke on a motion on this issue on 2 June, she said:

... if you are going to effectively manage a program you have to support it and you have to believe in it.

Implication: unless you voted for it, you are not entitled to ask questions about how the money is being administered. On our side of the House we absolutely reject that. In fact, when I wrote a letter to the Deputy Prime Minister asking her about the basis on which a decision had been made that a school in my electorate was not eligible to receive funding under the rules of a program she had established, she wrote back and said: 'I should note my surprise that you are pursuing additional funding under the BER. As a constant critic of the program and as part of an opposition who voted against it, your hypocrisy in pursuing extra funding is extraordinary.'

There is absolutely nothing inappropriate with a member of the House seeking to understand whether the rules of a program dealing with the disbursement of public funds have been properly applied. Those who asked that question were simply subjected to personal abuse. That is an extraordinary way to deal with billions of dollars of public money.

The second justification we have had is: 'It is all about jobs, so you can forget everything else. Don't worry about the basis upon which the money is being disbursed.' Indeed, the then Deputy Prime Minister also said on 2 June:

... in order to effectively manage a program you have to understand what the outcomes being sought for the program are. A key outcome of the Building the Education Revolution is supporting jobs ...

I return to the point I made at the outset. This is not a bill which goes to the question of whether Labor approached this policy with good intentions. It goes to the question of how they administered this program and how they dealt with over \$14 billion of public money. It is very evident that there are serious problems afoot.

We have seen reports from various inquiries that have already been conducted into this program. That leads me to my third proposition: the people of Australia are entitled to the facts. If even the Deputy Prime Minister's handpicked inquirer is unable to avoid the conclusion that, for example, there is substance to complaints that have been put to him and if the Auditor-General raises issues in his report, then there is more than enough to indicate to us that there are reasons here to be very concerned.

One of the reasons we need a judicial inquiry is that the Orgill inquiry, even if you approached it in the most charitable way possible, does not have the power to get to the bottom of things. It does not have the power to summon witnesses. It does not have the power to issue search warrants. These are powers that a judicial inquiry would have. We have seen that there are sufficiently serious problems that we do need a body with such powers, particularly because of the climate of fear which, for example, the member for Mitchell raised when he spoke before me.

There is a raft of questions that the people of Australia are entitled to ask about the way that over \$14 billion of their money was spent. Why were the most basic principles of procurement ignored in the administration of this program—such as getting three competitive quotes before you go out and spend money? Why in so many cases were schools given very little real choice about what would be built at their school? Why was it made so difficult for schools to manage the projects themselves? In New South Wales, principals were told that they could manage the projects themselves but they would have to assume personal legal liability. Unsurprisingly, very few of them chose to do that.

I want to note the courage, vision and hard work of so many school principals and P&Cs who have worked very hard to get good outcomes for their schools. It is very unfortunate that this program has made it difficult for schools to get the outcomes they ought to have had. Fundamentally, what is of enormous concern is that we have serious signs of trouble and mismanagement. We need a judicial inquiry to get to the bottom of it.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (8.52 pm)—I want to start by thanking the member for Sturt for giving me the opportunity to speak about one of the greatest government programs in this country for many decades. He chuckles away there across the chamber. I know he thinks that it is all quite funny. The reality is that putting this on the *Notice Paper* is just a stunt. I listened very carefully to some of the contributions of others to see whether they were putting forward any real points. They want search warrants and the like, and they have all sorts of ideas, as if there is some grand conspiracy out there—an 'X file'. It is a simple program for the good delivery of infrastructure for a heap of schools across this country. If those opposite actually were interested in this program, they would look at all the positives of this program rather

than the tiny percentage of cases where there have been some problems and some mistakes. It is not as if we have not admitted that there have been problems. It is not as if we are trying to hide them. In fact we have made it completely open and we could not be more open about where the problems exist. Where the problems exist, we have said, 'We're interested not only in the good work this program can do but also in making sure that it is efficient and it is value for money.' We are of that view.

In these large programs you are going to find some problems and some issues. Not everything is going to be 100 per cent. But we are going to make sure that we do it effectively and properly and, as such, we already have in place an independent task force—the Building the Education Revolution Implementation Taskforce, headed by Brad Orgill. That task force has responsibility to review implementation of the Building the Education Revolution, including investigating complaints, assessing value for money arrangements in place between the Commonwealth and the states and territories, assessing value for money aspects for individual projects—every single one of them—and making recommendations to improve the BER. The task force has already delivered an interim report. It has made 14 recommendations, all of which this government are happy to accept.

Not only is the BER a great program; it is doing great things in this country. We are prepared to say that where we find problems we will go out and fix them. There will be issues in a program of this magnitude—that is life—but the thing is you have to have enough courage to implement the program in the first place. We have some new members in the House, and I apologise for not knowing the seat of the member opposite.

Mr Ewen Jones—Herbert.

Mr RIPOLL—Right. In the 12 years that the other side were in government, the best thing the former Howard government could come up with to invest in schools was a program for installing a few flagpoles. I am a big supporter of the flag. I love the idea of flagpoles. But, come on, let's get serious about some serious investment in our kids' futures.

I have also heard members on the other side claim that this is a one-sided program. It was quite involved. It was more than just infrastructure investment in schools; it was making sure that we invested as this country, along with the rest of the world, went through one of the toughest global financial downturns in over 70 years. We had a two-pronged attack and one involved doing something that had not been done in this country for 30-plus years—that is, investing in schools. Members opposite in the chamber can laugh about it, but it involves real money—tens of billions of dollars.

I have been to the schools, as have others in this place, and we have seen the infrastructure—the bricks and mortar—and we have seen the benefit that the buildings have brought to those schools, uplifting educational facilities that were very tired. We did it right across the board—every single school in this country. It was not like the sort of program the National and Liberal parties had while they were in government, which targeted just a few select areas and regions.

Mr Pyne—They certainly know how to run a program.

Mr RIPOLL—You are right, member for Sturt. They certainly know how to run a program very well, for themselves. But, unfortunately, that is not how you run government and, unfortunately, it is not how you invest in schools and in kids' futures. Government should turn a blind eye to which schools get investment because it should go to every

single school regardless of the region, where they are from or whom they represent. And that is exactly what we did. We invested in over 24,000 projects—9½ thousand schools, supporting students and local communities and regions. In a lot of depressed regions during the GFC when jobs were scarce this meant survival for a small country town, a rural community, a remote location or a school that had been suffering for at least 30 years—for some schools, maybe 50 years.

I have some fantastic schools in my area. The most recent one I visited was Redbank State School. Redbank school is celebrating 145 years—a great celebration, a great birthday. It is a little school. It started with just one teacher, who also happened to be the local pastor at what was a very tiny chapel. That was the school. Over those 145 years, it received sprinklings of investment. The biggest single investment that school has ever realised has been under the BER. The difference it has made to that school actually shocked me. I was surprised to see how much the kids have tuned into the value in their school and the difference it has made to the teachers and the principal. This is something they never could have dreamed of. They never dreamed of receiving an investment in their school of over \$1 million. It was outside the realms of what they believed they could ever achieve. I am really proud, as I know many, many teachers, students and principals are proud, of what the Building the Education Revolution program has meant for them and what it has delivered.

I do not object so much to the member for Sturt putting this on the *Notice Paper* and wanting to debate it. It is his prerogative. He has a job to do and I understand that. He is doing his job loyally for his party. But what he is asking has nothing to do with reality. He is not trying to get to the bottom of things in this; he is trying to tear it down, pull it

apart. He is trying to stop funding going to schools.

I query the real motivation behind having a royal commission. If the opposition had its way it would stop funding all schools, apart from the flagpoles. While I support it fully, as I am a patriot just like the rest of you, it did not do too much for uplifting the kids' education. So there is a lot more that we could do. There is a lot of things that we could do with some serious money in terms of making that investment. I do not support the motion that has been put on the table because it is just a stunt. It would be better if the opposition were to have a good look at the inquiry of the independent task force that is currently going on and have a look at the improvements that we are trying to make and actually support us on those, so supporting the schools, supporting the funding and making improvements. Let us get a better program out of this. Let us do the right thing by the kids, by jobs and by local communities, rather than trying to tear down a really great program.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—The time allocated for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

United Nations Day

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (9.01 pm)—I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that 24 October is United Nations Day which celebrates the entry into force of the United Nations Charter on 24 October 1945;
- (2) celebrates Australia's key role in the formation of the United Nations and the drafting of the United Nations Charter;
- (3) recognises that Australia has been a consistent and long term contributor to United Nations efforts to safeguard international peace

and security and to promote human rights, for example, by:

- (a) being the thirteenth largest contributor to the United Nations budget;
 - (b) contributing to many United Nations peacekeeping operations;
 - (c) firmly committing to increasing Australia's development assistance; and
 - (d) by continuing to push for real progress towards the Millennium Development Goals;
- (4) notes further the Australian Government's commitment to the multilateral system as one of the three fundamental pillars of Australia's foreign policy, namely that Australia is determined to work through the United Nations to enhance security and economic well being worldwide, and to uphold the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter;
- (5) notes that as the only genuinely global Organisation, the United Nations plays a critical role in addressing the global challenges that no single country can resolve on its own, and that Australia is determined to play its part within the United Nations to help address serious global challenges, including conflict prevention and resolution, international development, climate change, terrorism and the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction;
- (6) expresses its condolences for the loss of 100 United Nations staff lives in January 2010 as a result of the earthquake in Haiti, and expresses its appreciation for the ongoing work in difficult conditions of United Nations staff around the world; and
- (7) reaffirms the faith of the Australian people in the purposes, principles, and actions of the United Nations acting under guidance of the United Nations Charter.

This evening I attended and spoke at an event at the ACT Legislative Assembly to celebrate United Nations Day and the 65th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. I would like to congratulate the UN Association of Australia, the UN Information Centre, UNIFEM, the UN Youth Association

of Australia, the Australian Institute of International Affairs and the Deputy Chief Minister of the ACT, Katy Gallagher, for organising and supporting this event. Tonight I would like to recap some of the issues raised at the UN event. I began by remembering the victims of the Pakistan floods and the Haiti earthquake, as well as those of the numerous other disasters that occur but which seem to elude the attention of the media. Of course, Pakistan's is a tragedy on an enormous scale. Some 21 million people—the entire population of Australia—are homeless and many of them are suffering hunger, malnutrition and disease. The food crisis may well be long term given that the floods have devastated agricultural areas and much land is still under water, preventing the planting of wheat and other crops. Members may recall that the 7.1-magnitude earthquake that struck Christchurch in New Zealand recently caused no fatalities, while the same magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti in January this year killed more than 200,000 people, injured many more and left a million homeless. We are now seeing a serious cholera outbreak. The point is that disaster can strike anywhere but it is always the poor who are disproportionately affected.

The 17th of October was the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and of course yesterday, 24 October, was UN Day, which we celebrate here. These are good opportunities to reflect on the Millennium Development Goals, the progress that has been made and the considerable distance still to go. As I have heard the former Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, the Hon. Bob McMullan say, 'Of course when we reach the goal of halving extreme poverty by 2015 we still need to work on helping the other half of our fellow human beings who are living and dying in extreme poverty.' I welcome foreign minister Kevin Rudd's landmark speech to the UN

MDG Summit in New York last month during which he commented that the richest among us have a profound responsibility to help the poorest members of the human family out of poverty and he announced that Australia will devote 0.15 per cent of national income to the least developed countries, which will mean a significant increase in aid flowing to the poorest countries, of which 15 are in our own region and 33 are in Africa.

This year, on 2 July, we have also seen the creation by the UN General Assembly of a new UN agency called the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, known as UN Women. UN Women merges four UN agencies and offices devoted to the interests of women, including UNIFEM, and it is headed by Under-Secretary-General Michelle Bachelet, former Chilean President. The creation of UN Women is very well timed, coinciding as it does with the tenth anniversary of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which was adopted unanimously on 31 October 2000 under the presidency of Namibia. Resolution 1325 has been described by UNIFEM as 'a landmark legal and political framework that acknowledges the importance of the participation of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, humanitarian planning, peacekeeping operations, post-conflict peace-building and governance'. Felicity Hill, of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, said of the UN Security Council resolution:

The Council agreed that ... women deserve a place at the peace and security table, but this is not only because they have been tortured, raped and affected by war differently, but because they are simply alive and have the human right to participate in their society.

So the unanimous adoption of the resolution was a wonderful and breakthrough moment,

but the problem with resolution 1325 is that, despite being the broadest and most comprehensive statement on the rights and roles of women in peace and security, it is weak in terms of monitoring and enforcement. The implementation of the resolution has been erratic by member states, both in relation to the behaviour of troops they contribute to peacekeeping missions and in relation to providing a more effective participatory, justice and security environment for women within their own countries.

Resolution 1325 has since been supplemented by other Security Council resolutions calling for increased representation of women at all levels in the peace process, condemning conflict related sexual violence and aiming to strengthen coordination, monitoring and reporting including the appointment of a special representative for sexual violence in conflict.

We know that in World War I approximately 41 per cent of the war dead were civilians, while in contemporary conflicts 90 per cent of the victims are civilians, most of whom are women and children. And while, as the US Institute of Peace has noted, 'war-time rape is probably as old as war itself', there has been increased international attention in the past two decades due to the rape atrocities committed in the former Yugoslavia, in Rwanda and, more recently, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, among other places. Just a few months ago we heard the horrific reports of mass rape that occurred in the eastern Congo between 30 July and 2 August, whereby more than 300 women and children, including elderly women and baby boys and girls, were raped by members of rebel armed groups. The horror has been amplified by the reports this month that the victims of the rapes now face the same abuse from government troops who have been sent to the region to enforce a government ordered moratorium on mining.

Jeffrey Gettleman, the East Africa Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*, has reported that armed groups are actually committing atrocities to bolster their negotiating strength and that ‘in Congo’s wars, the battleground is often women’s bodies’.

On 14 October, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Margot Wallstrom, who had visited the Walikale region where the rapes occurred, reported on the matter to the UN Security Council. She noted the connection between illicit exploration of natural resources by armed groups and sexual violence, saying ‘the mineral wealth that should be the source of their prosperity is instead the source of their greatest suffering’. Ms Wallstrom called upon UN member states to enact laws to require companies to disclose whether their products contain DRC minerals and she called upon the council to give MONUSCO, the UN peacekeeping mission present in the Congo, the financial resources and other assets needed to carry out its mandate, which includes the protection of civilians, while noting that the primary responsibility for controlling the situation rests with the national authorities. Ms Wallstrom stressed that the rapes will continue so long as consequences are negligible and said they: ... will leave a devastating imprint on the Congo for years to come.

... ..

Rape is shattering traditions that anchor community values, disrupting their transmission to future generations. For the women of Walikale, peace is not a treaty, a resolution, or a conference but simply the peace of mind to live and work without fear. For these women justice delayed is more than justice denied—it is terror continued.

It is shocking to be standing here in Canberra, Australia and know that such abhorrent things as extreme sexual violence and preventable child and maternal deaths are happening around the world as we speak.

But, despite the pain and cruelty that endures, we can take heart from the enormous strides that have been made in the last decade within the expanding consciousness of the international community as reflected in the progress on the Millennium Development Goals, the emergence of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine and the increasingly specific Security Council resolutions 1325, 1889, 1820 and 1888 on women, peace and security. The fact that there is now a special representative reporting to the Security Council on the events in the Congo and calling for specific remedial action is significant. There is also the new agency, UN Women, which will put in place new strategies for progress on women’s rights and empowerment.

Although I no longer work for the United Nations and the only bombs and bullets I face these days are metaphorical ones, I remain inspired by the purposes of the United Nations as reflected in the UN Charter and the core principles contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, both of which, as everyone here knows, Australia played a key role in drafting. I am heartened by the large number of parliamentary colleagues of all political persuasions who clearly feel the same way as evidenced by the substantial membership numbers of both the UN parliamentary group and the UNICEF parliamentary association and by the motions that are lodged and debated each year in recognition of UN Day.

In this debate tonight I would like to recognise the efforts of UN and humanitarian workers who provide life-saving assistance to millions of people around the world, who work in conflict zones and areas of natural hazards and who place their own lives at risk in the line of duty. I pay tribute to the UN staff who have lost their lives in the service of peace. In January the UN suffered its largest ever loss of staff in the devastating Haiti

earthquake, where 100 UN civilian and military peacekeepers from 30 different countries were killed. Prior to that the largest loss of UN staff life in a single event had been the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad in August 2003.

In both tragic events I lost a number of good friends and former colleagues with whom I had worked in Kosovo, Gaza and New York and the world lost some of its best and brightest people. As I said in a parliamentary speech earlier this year, these are people who thought only of bringing good to the world and they have now taken their place with Dag Hammarskjold, Sergio Vieira de Mello, and many other fallen UN colleagues whose memory serves to fortify us in carrying on our efforts to help restore dignity to the lives of the world's most vulnerable.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Is the motion seconded?

Ms Kate Ellis—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (9.10 pm)—I suppose it is appropriate that tonight we celebrate the United Nations, and I take great pleasure in being able to speak to the motion proposed by the member for Fremantle, who has had a most distinguished career in the United Nations both in New York and in Europe, and who comes to this House with a skill set that no-one else in either chamber can match. We do well to take on board her words tonight especially in regard to the United Nations responsibility to women and children.

It is appropriate that we should take pride in Australia's part in the formation of the United Nations. We should take pride in the fact that we were part of the crafting of the Declaration of Human Rights. We should take pride in the fact that Dr Evatt was the first president of United Nations. Something that surprised me was that I could find no

actual tribute in New York to the man who virtually founded the United Nations. There were lots to the secretaries-general but I could not find anything that honoured him.

As the member for Fremantle said in her resolution tonight, the UN is the only genuinely global organisation that plays a critical role in addressing the global challenges that no single country can resolve on its own, and that is true. That is unquestionably true.

About this time last year I was in the United Nations and I spent the period from mid-September to mid-December as one of this country's two parliamentary advisers to the UN. My colleague at the time was the former member for Canberra, Annette Ellis. It was truly a marvellous experience to be in New York and to be part of the Australian team.

By embassy standards we do not have a big contingent in New York with only about 30 to 35 diplomats. From mid-September to mid-December the UN General Assembly meets. It is, if you like, the parliament of the UN, the parliament of the world. The concentration of all nations, national leaders and national heads of state are on the UN at that time. It is the time when every nation has to garner what it can in its influence on the direction of world affairs. The work there is not easy. The UN is divided into six committees and I served on three of them—the first committee, which is disarmament; the fourth committee, which is decolonisation; and the sixth committee, which is international and UN law.

As a parliamentary adviser one does not go over there for a junket, or at least Annette Ellis and I did not see it that way. It was full-on work every day—into the Australian Embassy by 8.30 am, down to the UN by 10 am, back to the embassy or to functions in the UN from 2 pm till 3 pm, back to the UN from 3 pm till 6 pm, and sometimes staying

on later into the night for functions, lectures and the like. It was full on. Every Monday morning in the embassy everyone had to report on the week that they had just been through and what they had done, and the ambassador dished out the jobs for the coming week. Quite often Annette and I represented the ambassador at functions or events. I asked him once: 'Why do you send us and not the junior diplomats?' He said, 'Some international delegations take it as a greater privilege if we send a member of parliament.'

Australia is quite unique in that it sends two Australian MPs—and you, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, have been one of them—to bolster the team at the UN during the assembly sittings. Some experts are also brought from government departments here in Canberra, and some of the diplomats from our team in the UN in Geneva also come to New York to build the team up to perhaps about 45 to 50. It is full on the whole time, especially in that fortnight when the world leaders are present.

I was very upset when our current foreign minister, the former Prime Minister, was there. He was scheduled to speak at about half-past seven one night, and we had a rare performance of self-indulgence from the presidents of Iran and Libya, who were expected to speak for 15 or 20 minutes. One went for an hour and I think the other one went for an hour and a quarter. So by the time the Australian Prime Minister got to speak it was 25 to 10 at night and people were going home. I was really insulted as an Australian to see our Prime Minister treated so shabbily. Nevertheless, those are the sorts of things you have got to contend with, and sensitivities are all part of diplomacy.

The quality and calibre of the young diplomats in the Australian mission in New York is quite exemplary. People aged from

25 or 26 through to their late 30s are quite young by international standards, and they take a workload the like of which you have not seen. They are skilled negotiators, even at that age, on the floor of the UN in the committees. I remember one day in particular. I did not even know the significance of the issue, but for many years they had not been able to get the five permanent members of the UN to agree on it. Many countries had tried, but it was the junior Australian diplomats who got all five of the permanent members to agree to the resolution. I can remember one girl coming across, saying, 'Oh my God, we've got China! We've got China!' Then they got Russia and they got someone else. It was considered quite a coup, and I took great pride in seeing them work so effectively.

In those committees of the UN I was very interested in colonisation. I take a great interest in the Pacific Islands and Australia's external territories and I had been to New Zealand to see what the New Zealand government was doing with regard to its external territories only just before we went to the UN. While we were in New York we went to Washington for four days and got to know what the Americans were doing. It was good to see that Australia measured up very well in that field. But it is interesting to see that Gibraltar is still an issue. The Malvinas, the Falklands, are still an issue, and we have a part to play as Australians in seeing that those things are attended to.

I spoke five times in the UN, once in the General Assembly. I must admit that to stand up at the green marble podium and speak to a plenary session of the General Assembly is quite a daunting exercise. But it was great to know that Australia could tell such a great story, and on that occasion the story was about increasing our aid to Africa by 40 per cent.

Sure, the UN is a good place. It is not beyond criticism. It is excessively bureaucratic. But you really have to ask yourself: if there was not a UN, what would you do about water, sanitation, agriculture, human rights, the protection of women and children? Who would do that?

I will finish on this note. One night I went to a display and there I was confronted with a painting of a woman with one arm hacked off trying to suckle a baby with the other. That left me with a burning impression from the UN, one that will live with me for many years to come.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (9.20 pm)—I thank the member for Hinkler for his contribution and interest. I also thank the member for Fremantle for helping to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the formation of the United Nations and to celebrate its work, its agencies and of course, most importantly, those people that work in the UN and dedicate themselves to making the world a better place.

Opponents have labelled the UN irrelevant, a geriatric 65-year-old overdue for retirement and ready for a pension. Indeed, critics have called it a dire threat to civilisation and individual national sovereignties and, indeed, a global plot to usurp the nation-state. We have all read it. We all hear it. At every public meeting you go to someone will bring that up. For supporters, on the other hand, it is the continued hope for the future and its best years lie ahead. I am sure we are all aware in this House that extremes never demonstrate the real truth, for to write up the UN too much regarding its success or to write it off too soon after its failures is to do little but exaggerate.

If one goes by the letter and spirit of the UN Charter, which came into force on ratification by a majority of signatory nations on 24 October 1945, multilateralism under the

United Nations has been, and will remain, the most effective international organisation to lead the international system from anarchy to order based on international law and from dominance by hegemony to international democratic governance. Multilateralism a la carte has been a feature of some major- and middle-power nations—particularly paralleling the neoconservative regime of the former Bush years and during the Howard regime in Australia between 1996 and 2007—whereby they would resort to multilateralism when it suited their interests and spurn it when it did not. Other choices have been unilateralism, bilateralism, regionalism or a device such as the coalition of the willing—sound familiar?

The true nature of the crisis or major challenges facing the UN, I suspect, are not so much the so-called new threats to international security, for example, those posed by genocide, ethnic cleansing and other large-scale violations of human rights—we have heard some of these highlighted tonight by the member for Fremantle—as well as terrorism, transnational crime, climate change, environmental threats, poverty, rogue nuclear arms activity, pandemics and others. Nor, I would argue, is there an international consensus on the nature of threats to security, most notably collective security, or on the methods to meet these threats. Nor is it about the failure of the UN to adjust to the existing global power structure. However, it should be that the global powers adjust to the body of international law and commonly shared human values underpinning the UN and embodied in the UN Charter.

As I have said before in this place, I believe the real crisis is, according to Muchkund Dubey, the former Foreign Secretary of India, who said:

... that the more powerful among the Member States now want to go back on this body of international law and on these common values, and are bent upon continuing to turn a blind eye to the

obvious inequities and imbalances in rules and regimes which govern international relations. The crisis lies in these countries having put themselves beyond the pale of some of the key instruments and frameworks of multilateral control, surveillance and constraints. The crisis lies in their preference for 'exceptionalism' or 'exemptionism' or for 'multilateralism a la carte'. The crisis does not so much lie in occasional paralysis in decision-making, but in the built-in system of unequal decision-making and decision under pressure based on the exploitation of the vulnerability of the weaker Member States.

The Australian government, I suggest, has an obligation to our people, our region and our planet to strengthen the multilateral rules based system. It does not have the right, as was evidenced during the Howard years, to tear it down along with others. Nor does it have the right to stand idly by in the name of some brave new unilateral world whose central organising principle is an ill-defined unilateralism with a non-descript moral purpose. Multilateralism is the best of a more positive evolving system, not unilateralism and not multilateralism a la carte.

Finally, I note that the United Nations has three noble aims worthy of pursuing no matter what the faults and foibles of the organisation. These are to end the scourge of war, to affirm faith in fundamental human rights and to promote social progress and better standards of life. I thank those people who deliver those aims.

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (9.26 pm)—I am pleased to rise tonight to support the member for Fremantle on her motion concerning the United Nations. It is a very important motion. Whilst I might not be able to bring the same passion that she can to this issue after her long years of experience with the organisation, there are some observations that I would like to make. Last year, during the last parliament, I visited the UN with the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties. We were conducting an inquiry on nuclear prolifera-

tion. To stand in the chamber of the General Assembly made me realise that, for all the criticisms that are made against the UN—that is, it is a talkfest and excessively bureaucratic—the reality is that it is there. We must not let happen to it what happened to the League of Nations, which was established after the Great War. The League of Nations collapsed in its effort to prevent another war from happening. Within a generation the world was again at war. All of us need to make the commitment to the United Nations, despite all of its alleged inadequacies, to make it operate effectively.

The motion goes to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. I have been somewhat frustrated over my time in this parliament—no matter what government has been in power—in achieving the millennium goals set for us by the United Nations. I got so frustrated that I took matters into my own hands. I wanted to make a personal effort. Last year I was privileged to table in this chamber a report of the struggling stateless Akha people in the Mekong hinterland of South-East Asia. They are completely vulnerable and exposed to child trafficking. They end up being sexually exploited. I was encouraged to go to the village after working with the Rotary Club of Swan Hill. Other motivated members of the Swan Hill community in my own home town established a donation tax deductibility status for an organisation called Children of the Golden Triangle. I was impressed with the commitment that ordinary Australians make. It is somehow not taken so much into account in our contribution to achieving the millennium goals. I believe this parliament owes organisations like that every means by which we can encourage Australians to demonstrate their commitment.

For the last decade or so, people from the Swan Hill community and other communities around Australia have been travelling up

to Mae Sai, a small village in northern Thailand that is right next to the Burma border, to help these stateless people. These people are one of 12 individual tribes scattered throughout the Mekong hinterland. We want to arrest the vulnerability of these people and give them skills in agriculture and education so that they will not be exposed and vulnerable to the ruthlessness of people who go there to steal their children in order to take them away into slavery.

I commend the member for Fremantle on her motion. Sixty-five years is a wonderful milestone for the United Nations. I am pleased to be able to stand here to support her motion. I also would like to comment on point (6) of the motion, which expresses condolence for the loss of life from the Haiti earthquake. There are not many Haitians in my constituency but I found a couple in Robinvale. They asked for my assistance in sending a package to their devastated family in Haiti. I was thrilled to be able to make a contribution to assist them. At that stage, they did not know whether their relations were safe.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 9.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Flinders Electorate: Seniors

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (9.30 pm)—I want to set out a plan this evening for protecting local seniors on the Mornington Peninsula, around Western Port and in Bass Coast in my electorate of Flinders. Let me begin with the town of Koo Wee Rup. Koo Wee Rup is a town with a significant number of seniors with many of the ambulatory challenges that people of a certain age face. They need a safe, secure environment. Koo Wee Rup has had to suffer unnecessary hardships due to the opening of the Pakenham bypass in 2007 without a commensurate alternative for

traffic which is funnelled through the town as a consequence. There must be a Koo Wee Rup bypass. This lack of a bypass is putting seniors and young children at risk. A peak of up to 90 trucks an hour go thundering past homes and pedestrians and seniors in the centre of Koo Wee Rup. The health and safety of local residents is compromised. There is no question about that.

To address the urgent issue, at the last federal election the coalition pledged \$3.6 million towards stage 1 of a Koo Wee Rup bypass. Sadly, federal Labor did not match this pledge and the town remains under siege from heavy traffic. In the meantime, pedestrians on Station Street have no effective footpath and are forced to walk on uneven ground perilously close to the passing trucks and cars and this is something which is rapidly fixable. I join with the town's residents and the Koo Wee Rup Walkers Group in calling on the state government to fund this footpath as a matter of urgency before the election, to make the commitment and to help the Cardinia Shire to achieve this goal.

The second area to assist with the local senior community and their health and safety is in relation to the health benefits of aquatic centres. There are two aquatic centres which we are seeking to have put in place across the electorate of Flinders. Firstly, on Phillip Island we are working hard—and the local community has worked especially hard—to build the case, to raise the funds, to establish support and to receive the state approvals necessary to put in place a Phillip Island aquatic centre. It would have facilities to assist seniors with hydrotherapy, to assist with the debilities which come with age and to ensure that these seniors, as well as many other people, have a therapeutic centre.

I would add to that the southern peninsula aquatic centre—or the SPA centre as it is known—which is to be in Rosebud and has

tremendous community support. There can be no excuse for the state government to delay the approvals process any longer. The council has been frustrated at every turn. The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council has done a herculean job to try and get the informal green light from the state and it has been blocked repeatedly. We see that the state government continues to stonewall a much needed project with a hydrotherapy centre for the most significant concentration of seniors in Victoria.

The electorate of Flinders is the fifth eldest electorate in the country on a demographic basis. The Rosebud, Dromana, Rye, McRae, Blairgowrie and Sorrento area is the heart of that population of seniors and an aquatic centre with hydrotherapy is desperately needed. The council has done a tremendous job, but the state has dragged the approvals process through the mud, and it is about time that the state government made a commitment to expedite the process to ensure that there is a way forward for seniors on the peninsula and similarly to ensure that there is support for the Phillip Island aquatic centre. Both would be steps forward.

The final area that I wish to raise in brief in relation to the safety and security of seniors is to ensure that the Do Not Call Register is given greater prominence throughout the electorate of Flinders. This is a Victoria wide issue. Many residents have been receiving phone calls from someone claiming to be from the federal government seeking their details and seeking ultimately to scam them of money. The best way forward here is, firstly, police investigation; secondly, the Do Not Call Register. It needs greater prominence and it should be offered to all citizens and seniors. (*Time expired*)

Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (9.35 pm)—Less than a month ago the internation-

ally regarded scientific journal *Nature* published a report on the state of the world's rivers. The international scientific consortium who produced the report examined the cumulative effect of such things as pollution, dam building, chemicals from agricultural run-off, the conversion of wetlands and the introduction of exotic species on the health of the world's rivers. They found that, right around the world, rivers are in a crisis state. They found that nearly 80 per cent of the world's human population live in areas where river waters are highly threatened, posing a major threat to human water security and resulting in aquatic environments where thousands of species of plants and animals are at risk of extinction—a very sobering story indeed.

Here in Australia we have been debating the future of the Murray-Darling Basin where again the science points to a river system in decline, needing action to restore water in order to avoid killing the goose that lays the golden egg. After I spoke on the Murray-Darling issue in parliament last week I received quite a lot of supportive emails, including one from a farm forester in Western Australia with qualifications in forestry and forest products named Tim Mitchell, who said:

It is patently obvious to an outsider from Western Australia that a type of 'Wild Rivers' solution is required here, with a mandatory un-grazed and multi species buffer zone of 500-1000 metres along both the Murray and the Darling.

Mr Mitchell's suggestion drove home to me the value of keeping the wild rivers that we still have. Given that and given the fact that the Leader of the Opposition has suggested getting rid of Queensland's wild rivers legislation, I want to highlight to the House, and support, the call by Australia Zoo that we uphold the wild rivers declaration of Cape York Peninsula's Wenlock River.

Terri Irwin has written to me, and no doubt to other MPs, about this issue. She points out that the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve was set aside as a living, breathing memorial to her late husband, Steve Irwin. This reserve contains the Coolibah Springs Complex, which plays an important hydrological role by providing perennial flow into the Wenlock River and is home to a rainforest type found nowhere else in the world. These springs are threatened with a bauxite mining proposal from Cape Alumina Ltd. Terri Irwin says:

... I understand that mining is an important industry. However, we have learned over the last 50 years of bauxite mining that it is critical to set aside the most environmentally sensitive areas such as the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve and not consider mining them.

The Director of Australia Zoo, Wes Manion, has written:

The Wenlock River has the richest freshwater fish diversity of any Australian river, and supports a critical population of critically endangered Speartooth Sharks, endangered freshwater Saw Fish and the vulnerable Estuarine Crocodile.

He says:

... Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve stretches across the ... Cape York landscape in a mosaic of tropical savannah woodlands, rainforests, rivers, creeks and wetlands like a big ... patchwork quilt. It represents outstanding biodiversity which should not be strip mined for bauxite. I agree with Wes and Terri. I was a guest of Australia Zoo at their bush camp on the Wenlock River, in the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve, for several days in September. It is a magnificent place, where the real Australia can still be found. I also saw extensive areas where bauxite was being mined. We should not kid ourselves that it is possible to strip mine areas for bauxite and then rehabilitate them to restore their wilderness values. It cannot be done within the lifetime of anyone now alive.

As well as visiting Cape York, I have also had the pleasure of meeting a number of Cape York traditional owners. A number of them came to Canberra at the end of September. Their views are very important, not least because the opposition leader has been asserting that wild rivers legislation and declarations are not in the best interests of local Indigenous people and are not supported by local Indigenous people, regularly citing Noel Pearson on this point. Well, the traditional owners have made it clear. They have said:

Abbott's intention to overturn Wild Rivers does not have our support and he should drop his crusade immediately.

... ..
We call on Tony Abbott to acknowledge that Noel Pearson does not speak for all Indigenous Australians—he is not our elected leader. ... we ... can speak for ourselves ...

I support the calls by my Labor colleagues Senator Furner and Graham Perrett for the ongoing protection of this unique part of our ancient, beautiful and fragile land.

National Dugong and Turtle Protection Plan

Mr ENTSCHE (Leichhardt) (9.40 pm)—It is great to see somebody who has been educated by Wilderness Society propaganda! I am glad to see that the member for Wills has a focus on ecological things. Maybe he will be able to support me when I stand here as a voice for a couple of our very iconic marine species, our dugongs and our turtles. Maybe he can assist us in organising to get together a national dugong and turtle protection plan, something that has been neglected by the Labor Party for far too long. It would be great to save these natural wonders, to preserve these creatures so that our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren may actually have the opportunity to see one and know that they exist in the flesh.

On 7 October in Abu Dhabi, at a meeting for the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, it was stated that the dugong is expected to face extinction globally within the next 40 years. It is estimated that over 2,000 of these beautiful creatures are being killed each year in Queensland waters alone. They are already starting to face extinction. In Mauritius, in Taiwan, in many of the straits of Indonesia and in many other parts of the world, the dugong has already suffered local extinction. It is going to happen in this area unless something is done at the national level, because the threats and the challenges to these magnificent species mean that we may have another Tasmanian tiger on our hands.

During the last election, Greg Hunt, our shadow minister for the environment, came to my electorate and, recognising the threats and the challenges, announced a \$2.6 million program to start to look at dealing with the challenges to these animals, including \$1 million towards marine debris clearance and setting up a program to help us to start to know what we are dealing with with our dugongs—because unfortunately there is absolutely no idea of the numbers that are there at the moment. There has been no census done of these creatures. Working with traditional owners—not dealing with propaganda but dealing with facts—I am sure we can get to an understanding of the status of these animals. It is very, very important that we start to do this. We need to first of all put a moratorium in place that stops the taking of these creatures and then use the knowledge of traditional people in their areas to work with the scientists to get a very accurate census of the numbers of these animals. If we do not do this now, we are also going to be robbing our traditional people of an opportunity to participate in one of their native title rights, because these animals will be disappearing in the not too distant future.

There are people who have been out there calling for support, and I would like to recognise particularly James Epong, a traditional Indigenous leader from south of Cairns who has been doing lot of work in this area. His group has already put in a ban on the taking of dugongs and is very keen to participate in a census of these creatures. Colin Riddell, a good friend of mine in Cairns, has now for a long time been putting a lot of pressure on the government to try to get them to start doing something there. There is Bob Irwin, a good friend of mine who I have known for 30-odd years, I remind the member for Wills. I also knew his son when he left school, so I know the family very well. Bob has been 100 per cent behind this. Derryn Hinch, like the member for Wills, is from Melbourne and is a keen environmentalist, but he deals in facts. He is also behind it. I appreciate the member for Ryan, Jane Prentice, talking on this today, and I join the shadow environment minister, Greg Hunt, in calling for a national dugong and turtle protection plan. If we do not start to do something now, if we do not put that moratorium in and start doing the numbers now, there will be no dugongs and no turtles to count in another 30 or 40 years, and Australia will be a much sadder place for the loss of these most magnificent creatures.

Hindmarsh Electorate: South Australian Veterans Touring Group

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (9.45 pm)—I would like to congratulate the South Australian Veterans Touring Group on their work this year, culminating in their August 2010 visit to Vietnam and their good works in support of some of the most vulnerable and underprivileged children of that country. The group describes itself and its mission thus: ‘A non-aligned group of like minded people who have the needs and welfare of underprivileged people at heart working compassionately to see to those needs by

providing food, clothing, medicines and necessities.’

The 2010 visit resulted in the donation of over \$10,000 worth of goods to the people of Nui Dat, the Ba Ria government orphanage and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. These funds were able to provide these orphanages with in excess of 3,000 kilograms of rice, over 500 bottles of soy sauce, 10 bags of washing powder, 54 boxes of noodles, 20 cans of insect spray, soap, baby food, tinned milk, nappies, sanitary wear, toilet paper and essentials to last the whole year. The list goes on and on. Goods are obtained from sources as local to the orphanages as possible in order to help not only the orphans but also the local economy.

I have known the South Australian Veterans Touring Group for a number of years now. Every year they head for Vietnam, attend the service at Long Tan on August 18 and give what aid they are able to pay for as a result of their fundraising efforts over the preceding year. The Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus look after the mentally ill, the physically disabled, amputees, people with AIDS or who are HIV positive, Agent Orange victims and orphans. This orphanage is commendably attempting to increase its self-sufficiency through growing crops and raising livestock—chickens, ducks, pigs and even fish.

Some things are more difficult to provide for oneself. At the orphanage at Ba Ria, which the Australian Vietnam Veterans Reconstruction Group rebuilt, the touring group members found a 20-day-old baby who was terribly dehydrated. The child was to be seen by a doctor later in the day—that afternoon—but its condition was such that it may not have survived. Trained medics among the group members instructed staff how to administer fluids to the baby and were most pleased to learn that the child pulled through.

In Hanoi the group met with Jimmy Phan, a Vietnamese-Australian who has established the program Know One Teach One and now has a training centre in Saigon. KOTO, as it is known, is providing vocational training to orphans, street kids and disadvantaged children generally in hospitality and the hotel industry. Many children from disadvantaged backgrounds grow up toward nothingness—no family, no skills, no prospects of work. Children turn to crime and prostitution in their social desolation. Wonderful people like Jimmy Phan, who give these adolescents an opening, a window to a constructive future through the acquisition of skills and the establishment of a career, therefore deserve the thanks and respect of all who disdain social dislocation and the perpetuation of human misery.

I would like to pay special tribute to the South Australian Veterans Touring Group for their ongoing voluntary work in helping to sustain and improve the lives of some of the world’s most disadvantaged children. There are countless children around the world who could benefit from such help. It is so highly commendable that these South Australians, who have a strong connection with Vietnam, work to provide what assistance and support they are able to.

Mr Wayne Honeychurch is my primary contact with the group. I have been more than pleased to speak with and assist him, and thereby the group, over several years now. I look forward to not just providing future assistance but travelling to Vietnam with the group to see the results of their work firsthand. I am sure all who visit see just how much more work is needed. Wayne’s fellow fundraising coordinator, Ryk Traeger, and Lloyd Stephens also deserve mention. I have had the pleasure of meeting with them and hearing about the terrific work that the South Australian Veterans Touring Group has done and continues to perform.

Rural Communities

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (9.49 pm)—I rise this evening to talk about something I am quite passionate about and that is how we can halt the slow decline of many of our rural communities across Australia—those lovely little country towns. Once upon a time Australia was dotted with thriving small towns, many of which, not long after Federation, lived on the agricultural wealth of the region and—I see the member for Lyne here—on the wool industry. We used to talk about, in the history I learned at school, ‘riding on the sheep’s back’. In those days we had about eight to 10 million people in this country. Today we are a nation of in excess of 22 million and growing.

Contributing to the decline in the fortunes of our agricultural sector in Australia have been the harsh realities of economic rationalism, government choices in some cases and the pulling up of railways. In Queensland the forced amalgamation of many shires has had a significant impact on many country towns through the loss of part of their workforce. Many of those country towns once had a local government which was at the heart and centre of the community, because local government is about local issues, and many of those communities have just lost heart. They still have fight in them, but they have lost heart because they feel that the government is not supporting them. The amalgamation of those shires has led to a number of them continuing to decline in size.

We have to reverse this decline before it is too late, Mr Speaker. Our capital cities, as you and many in this House would know, are growing beyond the capacity to meet the needs of the people who want to live there. They have traffic congestion and water shortages, just to name a couple of issues. These large towns continue to grow, with ever more people wanting to move into our

capital cities. There is an opportunity to attract these people to regional and rural areas, but we must change the perception that many city people have of our country areas. We need to lose this image that rural communities are just like that old, lonely roly-poly running across a drought stricken plain. That is the image that some have of our outback towns, but we must change that perception because it is not the reality.

Regional, rural and remote communities so often offer opportunities for many types of businesses. There are opportunities galore, but we have to be able to encourage people to move into rural communities and out of our congested capital cities. We must tap into that potential and attract and encourage people to move out of our capital cities. There really are great benefits in making the tree change and we must strongly promote those benefits.

The future of much of our rural and remote Australia is a case of ‘if we build it they will come’. One example where the infrastructure has been built in my electorate is in outback tourism. It is a growing opportunity—hospitality, motels, the tourism attractions—that we have out there. It is certainly changing the economy of many of our towns. But we have to build the infrastructure. To halt the decline in our rural communities we must make serious investments in infrastructure.

The government often talks about nation building, but so often these nation-building projects are in our capital cities. I am not saying that our capital cities do not need this infrastructure. They certainly do. But many of them have suffered from short-sighted Labor state governments over the past decade, in particular in my own state of Queensland. If we had just a third of the money from royalties out of our mining sector going back into our rural communities we could

invest it in roads and other essential infrastructure and see people moving out into these rural communities. But where does this money go? It goes into the capital cities. It is spent in the capital cities, yet the wealth has come from the rural communities—from things like the coal seam methane gas extension that was only announced last Friday by the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Tony Burke.

The minister announced, for instance, that that Santos and British Gas project for LNG, which is to be exported out of Gladstone, is going to drill 6,000 holes in this coal seam methane area. Yet there was no announcement about money being invested in the Warrego Highway. All of that infrastructure to build the coal seam methane gas industry is going to pass over the Warrego Highway. We have to have royalties being returned to the regions where the wealth comes from to build this infrastructure. (*Time expired*)

Lyons Electorate: Building the Education Revolution Program

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (9.54 pm)—I want to congratulate the government for Building the Education Revolution and what it has meant for local communities in Tasmania. I was at a school fair at Hagley over the weekend, at one of the primary schools in my electorate. It is a farm school. There are many small farms in the district. The place was buzzing and children were proudly showing their parents around. They had lots of events going on, including go-carts and pony rides, jumping castles, face painting, with lots of stalls all busy raising money for their school.

In the background was a new hall in the process of construction. The plans were publicly displayed for all to see and many took the opportunity to look at the plans and the partly finished building. This was not an un-

usual event. Many other schools in my electorate are using their facilities or showing off their facilities at community events. For the first time in some 40 years, buildings are being renewed and the children are responding to those new building by ensuring that their parents and friends come to see what is happening.

Cressy District High School had an open day recently based around the trout fishing in the district. It is a very popular area for fishing. Many youngsters were encouraged to take up fishing at this event because the prizes being offered were very big. The 'big one', Tracey, is worth about \$10,000 if you can catch him. He has a big tag on him, but he has not been caught for many years, so the \$10,000 is safe. Cressy High is my old school so of course I am always proud to go to that school and perform openings. The youngsters there had put a lot into the Cressy open day, taking part in the fishing fashion parade, operating the stalls around the school and greeting the guests as they came in. They knew a lot about the new buildings and expressed pride of belonging to me as I wandered about during that day.

I have also recently been to Molesworth, Meander, East Derwent, Deloraine and Maydena primary schools and the students' pride and enthusiasm for their schools has been amazing. This program has been eye-opening for me in that many country kids in my day had to be dragged to school. Here are kids turning up at weekends and holidays to take part in all sorts of events. I believe that new buildings are putting new life into both teachers and students who have become proud of their schools. The community has started to take an interest again in what is happening in education and their schools in particular. I do not think that has happened for many years.

I have been very impressed at how the program has worked in Tasmania. Both federal and state governments have worked with the communities to get the program to work smoothly and achieve what the communities wanted. Perhaps our model in Tasmania worked better than any others, but we have had no schools refuse the program and I have only heard of two minor problems which were quickly sorted out.

If we could do the same in our other programs I do not think we would have any problems putting the federal government's programs into place. I believe the key has been community involvement. Each school I have talked to has been intimately involved with the projects and what was being built, including the design, the fabric and everything else to do with the projects. The principals have been actively working with the builders to sort out day-to-day problems and have been very much part of the process. A lot of the building has been going on during school time, which has meant both teachers and students having to cope with the building site, but no-one seems to have worried.

I have even seen early childhood students out on the playground looking at the machinery—the diggers, trucks and other machinery—and seeing firsthand how the work is done. It was obviously a plus for little boys, but girls were there too. I have heard many renditions of 'Bob the Builder' at openings, with the actual workers on the site named in the song. Many of the kids there were wearing their hard hats and their safety vests, learning about work. This program is also teaching kids about work on the site, on the job. It is a great program. These projects have allowed many communities to build into their future. It has been very well done. *(Time expired)*

Herbert Electorate: Football

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (10.00 pm)—It has come to my attention that Football Federal Australia is considering the abandonment of the Townsville based North Queensland Fury, which plays in the Hyundai A-League national competition. The Fury have quickly become part of the city's sporting landscape. They share the national competition stage with the North Queensland Cowboys in the NRL, the Crocs in the NBL, and the Fire in the WNBL. My son Andrew and I are regulars on the hill at Dairy Farmers Stadium when the Fury play their home games. The 'Green Army' of Fury supporters are passionate about their team and the world game.

Any new venture requires time to hit its straps. Be it a restaurant or a national competition sporting franchise, it needs support both from the grass roots and from the governing bodies. Support for the Fury has been slowly but surely building in recent months, despite some difficulties in securing ongoing financial support and in building consistent crowd numbers. The Fury are not alone in finding themselves in need of support as the code works to build its national profile. The people of Townsville will support anyone who is having a dead set go. What they will not do is get involved with a franchise where the people making the decisions in Sydney or Melbourne do not give the local team enough time to establish themselves in and with the North Queensland community.

The FFA is to be praised for the support they gave in the team's first year but deserve the criticism levelled at them for their apparent contempt of Townsville's local football public. We as a community have every right to believe that the FFA would be providing ongoing support for our team as they do for other teams in the A-League. We have over 3,000 football players down at the Murray

sporting complex each weekend who are passionate about their chosen code. From the Saints' Sand Crabs under-8s through the local premier league and the razorback's state league side, they see the Fury as their pathway to an opportunity to support and possibly play in an elite competition from home.

I would like to make special mention of the work done by David and Keith Williams, who give generously of their time to ensure Indigenous junior players have a path to follow. With his speed and natural athletic ability, David is certainly a crowd pleaser and the crowd stands whenever he is in possession. Keith is back office at the club and works with his brother and others in all communities throughout the region providing a message of looking after your health, a good education and playing for the love of the game.

Fury coach Franz Straka has brought a new, energetic brand of football to the Fury. Our team is exciting to watch. They are young, passionate, and work hard at football. We are heading in the right direction and the coaching staff must be applauded for their approach to the game. Crowds are building and the sponsorships are increasing. All we need is a little time and continued support from the FFA.

Just last week a new shirt sponsor, Queensland Nickel, was announced. But all this could be for nothing. Our local newspaper, the *Townsville Bulletin*, carried a front-page story this morning, labelling FFA chief executive Ben Buckley 'Public Enemy No. 1'. A banner headline above a photo of Mr Buckley says, 'This is the man who wants to kill the Fury.' The newspaper is mounting a public campaign to save the Fury from what appears to be a corporate assassination. One cannot help but wonder if the same arms-length corporate stance would apply to the Sydney or Melbourne teams. As a proud

member of the Townsville community and an enthusiastic supporter of the Fury, I call on the FFA to reconsider their reported decision and give the club more time to prove their viability. This uncertainty is having a damaging effect on the playing roster as the club is not in a position to guarantee anything at all beyond this year.

I recall the many problems faced by the Cowboys, the Crocs and the Fire when they first entered their respective national competitions. These franchises were able to overcome their teething problems and are now viable participants in Australia's national sporting scene. I have no doubt that the Fury, with the support of the FFA, the business community and football fans throughout North Queensland, will become a viable business and eventually a power to be reckoned with in the A-League. Once again, I urge the FFA, the business leaders of the north and football fans everywhere to send a clear signal to Mr Buckley that the Fury must be part of any national competition.

Chisholm Electorate: Education

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (10.04 pm)—Tonight I rise to speak of something of great importance to my electorate—higher education. My seat of Chisholm is home to three very large higher education institutions—Monash University, the Melbourne campus of Deakin University and Box Hill TAFE. To give you some idea of how large this is in my electorate, Monash University, one of the largest universities in the country, has on campus 50,259 students. Of those, 26,689 are at Clayton campus in my electorate of Chisholm. There are 15,262 FTE staff at Monash University. Of those, some 8,000 staff are employed at the Clayton campus of Monash in my electorate. Deakin University has 34,616 students enrolled across the board, with the vast majority enrolled at the Burwood campus—16,942. Staff numbers

are impressive. There is a total of 2,978 staff, of whom 1,163 are located at the Burwood campus. I do not have the statistics on hand for Box Hill TAFE, but these numbers are mirrored. My electorate has one of the highest educated cohorts in the country. So higher education is near and dear to my electorate.

Last Monday night I had hoped to speak on the private member's motion on changes to youth allowance. Unfortunately, issues with chair rostering did not permit me to get down to the chamber to give that speech. I was going to talk about the government's stance in the last parliament and our reaction to the Bradley Review of Higher Education in Australia. Two very important things came out of the Bradley review, and one was that more money needed to go into higher education. I am proud of a government that has actually contributed a vast amount of extra income to our university sector—something I do not think we have praised ourselves enough for. That is very important in my electorate, and I certainly know from the vice chancellors and the CEO at Box Hill that they are greatly appreciative of the money, particularly the HEF money for higher education, that has gone into building projects. I am very much looking forward to being at Monash for the sod turning for the New Horizons centre, an \$86 million project that will add greatly to the already terrific facilities out on the Clayton campus.

The Bradley review also talked about student income. For many years students have been living below the poverty line. One issue was the independents allowance. Too many people were using the 12 months of staying out of higher education as a free ride to getting student assistance. One of the great tragedies of my electorate is that, although the university is in Clayton, not many of the young people who grow up and go to school in Clayton ever get to go to the university.

They come from a sociodemographic that would not usually achieve that. One of the fantastic things the Bradley review has pointed to, and which the federal government has done, is the lowering of the threshold for where people's income cuts in so that students genuinely in need of assistance can actually get access to that money. People within my electorate, in metropolitan Melbourne, were impacted by this greatly. Many of them could then go onto university.

I am one of the proud people in this place who is a first generation university educated individual. My four siblings and I—the five of us—are all Monash University graduates. It was a very proud day for my mother when she got to see the last of her children graduate from Monash Uni. We thank the Whitlam government—there would have been no way my parents could have sent their five children to university without some assistance. The proudest day I ever had was seeing my mother graduate many years later, from the University of Melbourne. It was a wonderful thing that, in later years, she could go and graduate herself. We need to applaud higher education and we need to support it with money.

We also need to look at an issue that is having a huge impact upon my electorate, and that is student visas. Changes to the visa system were required to stop roting of the system, but these steps have gone too far. At the Monash campus in my electorate it looks like there might need to be 300 redundancies to offset the downturn in overseas students. The overseas student business is the highest income earner in Victoria. And it is not just the money that goes to the university; the effect flows through to my local community. The local take-aways would be in huge strife if there were no overseas students to feed. (*Time expired*)

Economy

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (10.09 pm)— Over the weekend the Treasurer was in South Korea for the G20 finance ministers meeting. As he swanned around the world economic stage taking credit for the past reforms of the coalition government, there was increasing concern back home that Labor's budget was heading for serious trouble.

Labor based its forecasts for a budget surplus by 2012-13 on the assumption that the rest of the world would grow strongly in the wake of the global financial crisis. This assumption was imprudent given the degree of uncertainty in the world economy. The main concern at the G20 is that the global economy is not recovering as well as many expected, and that the path back to surplus for the Australian budget will be much more difficult than Labor likes to believe.

Achieving a surplus will require a reduction in the budget deficit of 4.5 per cent of gross domestic product over three years. This will be a very difficult task in light of the reckless spending and borrowing that the government has embarked on over those past three years. During the latest round of Senate estimates it was none other than Dr Ken Henry, Secretary of the Department of the Treasury, who warned the government that the government's spending would put upward pressure on interest rates. He said:

In an economy close to full capacity, a tightening of fiscal policy would mean that there is less work left to be done by monetary policy, and that would mean, other things being equal, that interest rates would be somewhat lower.

He also warned that there are always spending programs before government which are very difficult not to make some upward adjustment to, for a variety of reasons. The government needs to explain what this means for their current fiscal policy settings and what it means for the economy.

With the budget on a permanent stimulus footing, monetary policy is working in the other direction. Reserve Bank Governor Glenn Stevens, in his statement on monetary policy on 5 October, referred to the current monetary policy setting as being ready to combat signs of overheating in the economy. He said:

The current stance of monetary policy is delivering interest rates to borrowers close to their average of the past decade.

He added:

If economic conditions evolve as the Board currently expects, it is likely that higher interest rates will be required, at some point, to ensure that inflation remains consistent with the medium-term target.

Interest rates have now reached a steady average, with future interest rate rises likely if inflation persists. With rates returned to normal levels, the government risks forcing them up even further if it does not take real action to address the state of the budget. This was a point made in the Red Book recently prepared by the Department of the Treasury and the Department of Finance and Deregulation for the incoming Labor minority government. Treasury and Finance made explicit warnings to the current government, saying:

Tighter fiscal policy, and measures to boost labour force participation and productivity, could play a useful role in complementing monetary policy, reducing the size of the required increases in interest rates and the exchange rate.

Treasury and Finance also made clear warnings against Labor's waste, saying:

... there is also scope for the government to improve the quality of its own spending programs in a way that takes pressure off interest rates and the exchange rate.

We have had six interest rate rises in the past year under this government, implemented in order to prevent an outbreak of inflation. Meanwhile the government continues to roll out more stimulus, despite the clear indica-

tion from Treasury and the Reserve Bank that such stimulus is no longer required and is in fact having a deleterious effect on the economy.

Labor will now be forced to deliver a minibudget, but do not expect Labor to make the tough decisions. The Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Senator the Hon. Penny Wong, told Senate estimates last week:

... the devolved arrangements under the financial framework mean that agencies are responsible for implementing government policy.

So if the government fails in its attempts to rein in spending, then it is the fault of individual government agencies—not the fault of the Treasurer or the Prime Minister. Of course, if Labor is able to retain some of its election promises, I am sure it will be the government that gets all the praise.

Labor cannot have it both ways. It must face up to the hard decisions and take action in the national interest. Labor has over promised once again, but its refusal to face up to this fact is having a real impact on the state of the budget and the wider community. Labor must heed the warnings of Treasury and the Reserve Bank. It cannot put off action any longer.

Fowler Electorate: Green Valley and Miller Libraries

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (10.14 pm)—Many members in this place would have fond memories of story time as a child or of studying hard for exams in the quiet and peaceful environment of their local library. Many members may in fact still take themselves and their families to the local library for research, social activities or simply to track down a book they have been meaning to read for a while. I can clearly attest to the large number of residents in my electorate who enjoy the spoils of the Green Valley and Miller libraries. I know this because many of

those residents who enjoy using those libraries have overwhelmingly voiced their outrage at a plan by Liverpool City Council to close those two important facilities.

The council is looking to close the Green Valley and Miller library branches in my electorate, as well as libraries at Moorebank and Casula, as a means of reducing council running costs. I am sure this House can appreciate that this plan was certainly not welcomed by local residents. The local papers have been inundated with letters to the editor and online comments calling on the councillors—that is, the Independent and Liberal councillors—to reverse their decision.

The residents are furious over the lack of public consultation before the decision was made, as well as the prospect of having to travel further to reach the nearest library in areas where public transport is not adequately provided. I wish to share some of the comments that residents have been making. Kylie Clark wrote:

I am in walking distance to Green Valley library and I have taken my children there since they were little. Every Friday they have their share story time which the kids love. The kids get so excited to go to the library which has helped develop their love for books ...

Another mother echoed those sentiments by saying:

Any time of the day there are people there and in the afternoons it is full of local school kids. The study rooms are well utilised and the staff are friendly and helpful. I don't think that Liverpool will have the same atmosphere and it would forever change—

if they closed the library. And finally, a male perspective to the debate from Alex Boromisa:

Liberal and Independent councillors used their majority of votes to pass a motion which takes away libraries from the most disadvantaged communities in South Western Sydney. They have even declined to consult with those communities.

The majority of Liverpool councillors have decided not to listen to what their community wants. They have decided to put the bottom line ahead of what is in the best interest of local residents, and I find that somewhat disturbing. Accordingly, I have moved a notice of motion that was seconded by my colleague, the member for Werriwa, which calls on this House to note the importance of public libraries in communities across Australia.

The motion calls on the House to recognise that libraries provide access to information technology, research and educational resources, and recreational materials for many people who otherwise could not afford them. The motion also congratulates public library staff for their commitment to lifelong learning in the community and notes that public library collections help address disadvantage by ensuring free and equitable access to collections for all community members. Importantly, the motion also calls on this House to express concern over the actions instigated by the Liverpool City Council to close the Green Valley, Miller, Moorebank and Casula public libraries.

The needs of the local community should be a real consideration for these councillors. I urge them to show some common sense in this matter. If, for nothing else, the retention of local libraries engenders a love of books and a love of lifelong learning, I would have thought that would be something significant that a local council could contribute to. If they did that they would assist in the development and success of the youth in their area. I know about the issues of the bottom line and the costs associated with running such facilities, but I think the costs of not doing that in a modern community would far outweigh the benefits they see in closing those libraries.

Social Justice

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (10.19 pm)—I take the opportunity tonight to speak about social justice. It is a concept that is increasingly referred to throughout society and it makes people feel good. The words roll off the tongue very easily. It is a noble-sounding concept and they are pretty much buzzwords in the media, in business, in community and even in schools. But what does the term ‘social justice’ actually mean?

The description provided on Wikipedia, a common source for many people these days, begins by talking about human rights and equality. It does sound pretty good. Certainly, who in this place would not agree with supporting human rights and equality? After all, they are among the core underpinnings of a liberal democratic nation. Reading on, however, we can see what the basic tenets of social justice are and this is where disturbing undertones begin to emerge. Social justice incorporates a commitment to greater economic egalitarianism, which is a concept that requires equal economic outcomes for all members of society, regardless of their input. It is no wonder that economic egalitarianism is therefore also the basic principle of socialism and communism, because regardless of whether you work for 10 or 100 hours a week, you get the same reward. How is economic egalitarianism to be achieved? Progressive taxation is part of it. That means the more you earn the more you pay.

It is convenient for the supporters of economic egalitarianism, such as the extreme Left parties like the Greens, to refer to big salaried corporate CEOs, but it also applies to all those constituents of mine who work in the mines. They earn more because they work long hours and take on the extra and arduous work that comes with working in the mining sector. Under the tenets of social justice, the returns for their work will be in-

creasingly taken away from them by progressive taxation. Another part of economic egalitarianism is income redistribution. I fear, however, that the proponents of the economic egalitarianism found in the concept of social justice have the intention to use income redistribution as the ultimate leveller to achieve their egalitarian goals, and this extends to the view that it is not the right of anyone to do much better in society than anyone else.

The fundamental belief of economic egalitarianism and social justice is therefore that the individual has no right to property, wealth or assets more than any other person and through the social justice tenets of progressive taxation, income redistribution and even property redistribution, the ability of the individual to prosper and to benefit from harder work and greater effort is withdrawn. The only problem is that socialism and communism have failed everywhere. There are no success stories, no shining examples. In every place it has been attempted, the experiment has simply produced a litany of human misery. It failed, as socialism has always failed. Once you remove incentives for the individual to innovate and extend themselves then stagnation follows. No-one sees the point in trying their best; instead, accepting the dogma that society is responsible for providing for the individual. Economic egalitarianism therefore leads to an entrenched welfare dependency and an economy that will stall and then go backwards.

Therefore when we look at 'social justice' as a concept, we must understand that it goes beyond the lofty idealism of human rights and equality. Its core is all about socialism and bringing the innovators and the ambitious back to the level of the many. Social justice assigns blame for society's problems to those who are making money, as though one person's success is the direct cause of another person's failings. This is wrong. Its

most vocal proponents may insist social justice is all about equality of opportunity, but that is wrong because it does not seek to lift up and encourage those not achieving their potential but merely to drag down those at the top by taking away their ability to prosper and their will to achieve their best. Therefore, I am critical of those who use the phrase for socialist intent or with reckless indifference to its elements.

To help all people to realise their potential, what is actually required is to create the will in the individual to achieve their best, and education is the best means to achieve that ambition. My view therefore is that the concept of 'social justice' and the closely related socialism actually hurts and does not help those it seeks to assist. I would encourage those who claim to be committed to social justice to look more closely at the tenets of what they propose and be more careful in the use of the term. It is easy to jump on a bandwagon, but all of us have an obligation to fully understand the concept before we proclaim ourselves to be a supporter, because all that glitters is not gold.

Sustainable Population Strategy

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (10.24 pm)—The *Intergenerational report* projects that Australia's population will reach 35.9 million by 2050. In my view, it is only a projection, a model. It is based on sound modelling, though, and is probably a good projection in that we know where we have been in the past, we know where we are today and we have a good sense through economic and demographic modelling of where we might be in the future. So 36 million by 2050 seems like a reasonable number, give or take a few million either side of that. The reality is that population growth is placing pressure on Australian cities, particularly our capital and major cities, at today's population of 20

million. The real question is: how will we manage at 36 million?

Take my seat of Oxley, for example. It is in the statistical area of Ipswich east and contains suburbs such as Goodna, Camira, Collingwood Park, Springfield Lakes and Springfield Central. This is an area in Australia with the largest average annual population increase of around 7.3 per cent for 2004-09. The greater Springfield and Ipswich areas have about 150,000 people. It took a bit over 100 years to get there, but it is now projected that in the next 15 years we will double that number. It is quite a serious issue for people who live in those particular areas. Any future population strategy or policy needs to take into account the impact on the sustainability of Australia's cities and the projected population growth. For me, population and population growth are not about a number. There are plenty of examples right across the world of very successful cities, both large and small, where numbers range from one million people to over 20 million—through good planning some seem to manage that number very well.

In July, Minister Tony Burke announced the establishment of three panels to advise the government on sustainable population issues. Those panels are the Sustainable Development Panel, to be chaired by the Hon. Bob Carr; the Demographic Change and Liveability Panel, to be chaired by Professor Graeme Hugo; and the Productivity and Prosperity Panel, to be chaired by Ms Heather Ridout. For me, any model of city population and growth and development can work, but it must be coupled with the policies of sustainability as well.

The advice received from the three panels will form the basis of a public issues paper to be released later this year. For me and for many people, this will truly be an exciting time where the community can get involved

in helping shape what the future will look like and what cities will look like in this country. Minister Burke has also said that we need to get beyond seeing this as a debate on immigration. Of course, he is talking about population, and he is right. Population is much more than that; it is about our regions, our cities, our infrastructure and the sustainability that we build into regions and infrastructure. We heard earlier from the member for Maranoa who talked about sustainability in regions. He was talking about the little towns that are disappearing and how people are leaving the towns and heading to the cities. I do not think we can have the debate in two separate spaces. They are the same debate.

With regard to projected population growth, the panels need to understand that a business-as-usual approach when it comes to planning Australia's cities will no longer do. Our cities today are already choked. Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and even the smaller regional cities are choked. We all face exactly the same problems. For me, sustainable cities will require a decentralisation policy—a policy where we can start to build beyond the cities. Infill in itself is not just the solution, but it seems to be the only approach that our major cities are taking. We need to take a much more holistic approach across all levels of government on planning and on issues of water, food production, energy production and waste. Decentralisation is the key.

We also need to look at coordinating the link between jobs where people live and recreation where people want to play. Often they are in separate places. We drive from where we live in the outer urban fringe areas to the city where we work and then further to somewhere else where we play. This is putting pressure on our infrastructure and this is not sustainable. That is the debate we ought to be having today. That is the debate I be-

lieve that as a government we are bringing on this topic. I congratulate Minister Burke in these areas. Of course, a conundrum exists in this area: we need to grow to maintain our standard of living, but at the same time we have to cope with all the problems that it brings.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 10.30 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 10.30 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Billson to present a Bill for an Act to reduce the compliance burden for employers under the *Paid Parental Leave Act 2010*, and for related purposes.

Mr Briggs to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes:
 - (a) the announcement on 18 October 2010 by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship about the commissioning of a detention facility at Inverbrackie in South Australia costing \$9.7 million to accommodate 400 people, consisting of family groups who are undergoing refugee status assessment;
 - (b) that the Prime Minister and the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship failed to consult with the State Government of SA, the Adelaide Hills Council and the local Woodside community on the commissioning of this facility; and
 - (c) that the Prime Minister visited the Adelaide Hills on the Sunday 17 October 2010 immediately prior to the announcement and made no mention of the plan to commission the detention facility at Inverbrackie;
- (2) provides a reference to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration to undertake the following inquiry:
 - (a) that the Joint Standing Committee on Migration inquire into the commissioning of a detention facility for 400 people comprising family groups at Inverbrackie, including:
 - (i) the suitability of the site for locating a detention facility for the purpose of accommodating family groups in comparison with alternative options available to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship;
 - (ii) the impact of the operation of the facility on the local community, including on health, education, recreation, transport, police and other community services;
 - (iii) the impact on defence operations, personnel and family groups based at the Inverbrackie facility;
 - (iv) the impact of the facility on the local economy and small business;
 - (v) the level of community support for the commissioning of the facility;
 - (vi) the level of cost and extent of services and facilities provided to clients at the detention facility; and
 - (vii) potential risks that need to be managed for the successful operation of the facility;
 - (b) that the Joint Standing Committee on Migration undertake public hearings in Woodside, SA and Canberra, ACT to facilitate the participation of community members, local service providers, council officers and state and federal departmental officials to assist the Committee with its inquiry; and
 - (c) that the Joint Standing Committee on Migration report back no later than the first sitting week of Parliament in 2011; and
- (3) calls on the Government to postpone commissioning the detention facility for 400 people including family groups at Inverbrackie, until such time as the Committee has reported and the Government has provided a response to that report to the Parliament.

Mr Neumann to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes with deep concern the ongoing human rights violations in Iran, including the:
 - (a) use of the death penalty, especially the use of stoning as a method of execution;
 - (b) violations of the rights of women;
 - (c) repeated violations of due process of law;
 - (d) use of violence, intimidation and arbitrary arrest to suppress peaceful opposition activity and the impact this has on the ability of Iranians to exercise their freedom of expression, association and assembly;
 - (e) reported arbitrary arrest and detention, and torture of opposition protestors;
 - (f) discrimination against and failure to protect the rights of minorities, including the Baha'f, Sufi, Baluch, and Kurdish communities; and
 - (g) trial and reported sentencing of seven Baha'f leaders—Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm—for insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic Republic; and
- (2) calls upon the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to:
 - (a) ensure that the rights of all individuals are fully protected, without discrimination, and that it fulfils its obligations to its own citizens as set out in the Iranian constitution;
 - (b) abide by its international human rights obligations, including the rights to freedom of religion or belief as set out in Article 18 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights; and
 - (c) ensure that all trials, including the case of the seven Baha'f leaders, are fair and transparent and conducted in accordance with Iran's international obligations.

Mr Neumann to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:

- (a) South East Queensland is one of Australia's fastest growing regions with 1 in 7 Australians living there;
 - (b) South East Queensland will be home to over 4.4 million people by 2031;
 - (c) the Federal Government has cooperated with the Queensland State Government in managing and planning for growth in South East Queensland ;
 - (d) the Queensland State Government's South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-31 has identified vital infrastructure to sustain communities in South East Queensland;
 - (e) the Federal Government has embarked upon an unprecedented Nation Building Infrastructure Investment Program concerning South East Queensland for 2008-09 to 2013-14; and
 - (f) the Federal Government proposes, through its Regional Infrastructure Fund, to invest in South East Queensland in road and rail; and
- (2) supports the Federal Government's efforts to address capacity constraints, improve road safety, enhance transport connections and assist the various communities of South East Queensland.

Ms Parke to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) on 17 December 2010 Australia will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
 - (b) the Convention on the Rights of the Child is an attempt to ensure that children everywhere have the best opportunity in life regardless of where they live, their race or gender, including the right to go to school, to have access to shelter and food, to play and to have their opinions heard and respected; and
 - (c) there has been significant progress in that 10 000 fewer children die per day than they did twenty years ago but there are still 8 million children dying each

- year before their fifth birthdays of causes that are easily preventable through such simple and inexpensive measures as insecticide-treated mosquito nets, vaccinations, breast-feeding for six months, clean water and sanitation;
- (2) applauds the work done for the benefit of children internationally by United Nations agencies, in particular UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund), and Non Government Organisations, such as World Vision, Save the Children and Marie Stopes International;
 - (3) notes that while on the whole children in Australia fare better than children in other parts of the world, there remains significant issues to be tackled in Australia including child abuse and neglect, youth homelessness and the disadvantage suffered by indigenous children;
 - (4) applauds the work done for the benefit of Australian children by the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, as well as the Australian Human Rights Commission and Child Commissioners in the States and Territories;
 - (5) welcomes the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 as endorsed at the Council of Australian Governments meeting on 30 April 2009; and
 - (6) calls upon the federal government to further consider:
 - (a) incorporating the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Federal legislation; and
 - (b) appointing a National Commissioner for Children.

Ms Owens to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes:
 - (a) that during October and November Australian Hindus celebrate the Deepavali Festival;
 - (b) Deepavali, is the most widely celebrated festival of people of Indian sub-continental heritage, and:

- (i) Deepavali means rows of lights, and is the festival symbolising the dispelling of darkness, myths and perceptions; and
 - (ii) darkness represents ignorance and light is a metaphor for knowledge, therefore, lighting a lamp represents the destruction of all negative forces such as, wickedness, violence, lust, anger, greed, bigotry, fear, injustice and oppression, with knowledge; and
 - (c) that Deepavali celebrations are being held in all capital cities around the country with the largest event, at Parramatta Stadium, growing from strength to strength; and
- (2) recognises:
- (a) the contribution of Hindu Australians and Australians of Indian Sub-Continent heritage to Australian society as a story of hard work and determination for a better life; and
 - (b) thanks Australian Hindus and Australian's of sub-continent heritage for sharing, with us, their rich and vibrant cultural traditions.

Ms Owens to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes:
 - (a) every year, on 11 November at 11 am—the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month—we pause to remember those men and women who have died or suffered in all wars conflicts and peace operations;
 - (b) by this act of remembrance, we remind ourselves that this special place that we live in, and the way of life we enjoy, has been hard won, through the commitment and sacrifice of those who served—paid for with lives cut off, with hopes and aspirations destroyed; and
 - (c) it is a precious inheritance willed to us by the men and women who served, and continue to serve; and

(2) honours and thanks:

- (a) the great gift given to us by those who serve our country;
- (b) those that gave their lives;
- (c) those whose loved ones lie in foreign soil; and
- (d) all those that lived through the mud and the horror and continue to stand with us today.

Ms Owens to move:

That this House:

(1) notes:

- (a) that 8 to 14 November is National Recycling Week;
- (b) now in its 15th year, National Recycling Week is an established and highly regarded annual education and behaviour change campaign, aimed at improving the environmental benefits of kerbside, industrial and community recycling programs;
- (2) congratulates all Australians who take part in National Recycling Week by attending a Big Aussie Swap or a Friday File Fling; and
- (3) encourages all Australians to access accurate recycling information through the Recycling Near You Website—<http://www.recyclingnearyou.com.au>, or by calling the Hotline on 1300 733 712.

Mr Bandt to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that there is:

- (a) a growing list of countries that allow same-sex couples to marry including the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Spain, Canada and South Africa; and
- (b) widespread support for equal marriage in the Australian community; and
- (2) calls on all parliamentarians to gauge their constituents' views on the issue of marriage equality.

Ms Hall to move:

That this House:

(1) notes:

- (a) that Australia is one of the most obese nations in the developed world;
- (b) that obesity is a growing problem in Australia;
- (c) the recommendations of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing tabled on 1 June 2009;
- (d) the findings and research of the George Institute and the Baker IDI Foundation;
- (e) the findings and strategies developed by the National Preventative Health Taskforce in relation to obesity; and
- (f) that the cost of the obesity epidemic to government at all levels is enormous and urgently needs to be addressed;

(2) calls on all:

- (a) levels of government to recognise the severity of the obesity problem in Australia and its cost;
- (b) levels of government to continue to develop strategies to address Australia's obesity epidemic; and
- (c) communities, and those living in them, adopt healthy lifestyles which include healthy eating and exercise;

(3) acknowledge the contribution of the Minister for Health and Ageing in:

- (a) raising community awareness of the obesity epidemic; and
- (b) investing in preventative health programs.

Monday, 25 October 2010

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER** took the chair at 10.30 am.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Ryan Electorate: Sir Denis James 'Jim' Killen

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (10.30 am)—Sir James 'Jim' Killen was a politician beloved of both sides of politics—colourful, witty and erudite. He was a man who crossed political boundaries, a Liberal who included Labor greats like Fred Daly, Gough Whitlam and Barry Cohen among his close friends. So why then is a Labor councillor in Brisbane, Gail MacPherson, seeking to diminish his name by trying to prevent a small park in South Brisbane from being named in his honour? Is this the new Labor paradigm we have heard so much about, a paradigm where our history is rewritten or even erased and where mean-spirited gestures such as this are allowed to flourish?

The naming of a small reserve is surely a small enough gesture for a man who devoted his life to public service for his country. Jim Killen, formerly a jackaroo and a lawyer, was elected to the House of Representatives in the seat of Moreton in 1955. He was a talented orator. He was outspoken and he was committed. In 1961 his narrow majority enabled the Menzies government to be returned to power. He served in government as a minister for defence and he served in opposition until he resigned his seat in 1983. In 1982 he was made a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George, becoming Sir James Killen KCMG, and was made a Companion of the Order of Australia in 2004.

Sir James Killen's story can still inspire a new generation of politicians from both sides of the House. He understood the importance of the role of strong political parties in a democracy and rose above the minutiae and nitpicking we see today in the Labor Party in Brisbane. At Jim Killen's funeral, Gough Whitlam had this to say about him:

Only last May I was able to report to Jim that I had just opened the new electorate office in Morningside for Kevin Rudd, who said that he learned a priceless lesson from Jim about how to nurse a marginal seat into a healthy majority. He visited a shopping centre in his electorate every Saturday morning. What Jim Killen had done in Moreton, Kevin Rudd decided to do in Griffith.

Lessons and inspiration from this man can obviously still cross political boundaries. At the beginning of this month Campbell Newman's council in Brisbane decided to give recognition to Tom Burns, a former Labor Deputy Premier, and to Sir James Killen, both of whom were hardworking politicians and both of whom died in 2007, by renaming reserves in their honour. However, local Labor councillors last week, led by Councillor MacPherson, objected to the reserve being named after Sir James Killen. Interestingly they seem to have no objection to the naming of Tom Burns Place. Fortunately the vote was passed last week by 14 votes to 10 by the can-do Liberal council and Sir James's memory will live on.

I would like to place on record my strong support for the naming of this reserve in the recognition of a great Australian and I trust this parliament will agree with me that there are some things that must rise above politics. The memory and political legacy of Sir James are such things. (*Time expired*)

Chisholm Electorate: Caroline Chisholm Awards

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (10.33 am)—On 14 August at Sussex Heights Primary School I had the great pleasure of recognising outstanding contributions made by volunteers in my electorate of Chisholm at the ninth annual Caroline Chisholm Awards. I incepted the Caroline Chisholm awards following the International Year of the Volunteer. Year in, year out we have been conducting this wonderful ceremony, and each year I think we will not have anyone left to recognise. But again this year I was astounded by the quality and number of nominations that were received. Local residents are invited to nominate those who either live or perform voluntary work within the electorate of Chisholm.

Chisholm is named after one of Australia's great volunteers, Caroline Chisholm, for her unending work with newly arrived migrants back in the 19th century. I hope we continue to name seats after great Australians and not just politicians because I would really hate to see the name Chisholm disappear off the map altogether. The nominations are assessed by a selection panel so that they are not politically tainted and I would like to thank Norm Gibbs, Joy Bangeri and Keryer Keller for their support in running the selection panel and going through all the nominations. Again this year we had many nominations and we recognised 70 in the end. It is a fantastic opportunity to recognise those people who do so much for our community.

I would like to recognise two groups that were outstanding this year: first, the Wesley conversation group of Prue Field, Elaine Grant, Ruth Dickie, Stan Hubbard, Anita Nickoloff, Lina Agius, Gwen Holdsworth and Norm Hammon. The group was put together many years ago at the Wesley Church and has been teaching conversational English to the many migrants within the area for at least 10 years. Many of the people who were recognised on the day have been volunteering with the group for that entire time. They assist the newly arrived migrants with the tricky process of learning English, not just in a written sense but also in a conversational sense. This group started with a handful of people and today we have over 50 students who attend each week and the volunteers give their time. They are from the Whitehorse end of the electorate.

From the other end of my electorate, in Monash, I recognised Beverley Delaney, who has been volunteering for 30 years in and around the Monash community. Beverley's volunteering work is immense and includes significant contributions to the Waverley Historical Society and the High Street Road Uniting Church. The Waverley Historical Society would not function without Beverley and I had the pleasure of attending their 40th anniversary just the other day. She is the events coordinator and photographer and she has been responsible for a large and fantastic array of displays throughout the community recognising the history of the area. She put up a display at the Mount Waverley Branch Library and the Monash Federation Centre.

Beverley, like many of the people we recognised on the day, epitomises the true noble values of volunteering and what the Caroline Chisholm awards are all about, recognising people in our community who give their time not to be recognised or thanked. At every award ceremony I ask people why they do it and they do it because of what it gives back to them. I would like to thank them on behalf of our community. (*Time expired*)

Durack Electorate: Hot Rock Drilling

Mr HAASE (Durack) (10.36 am)—I rise this morning to bring to the attention of the House a breakthrough in petroleum exploration and hot rock, or geothermal, exploration. In the regional centre of Merredin in Western Australia the first attempt is being made to drill a three-kilometre-deep hole primarily through granite. In the past, drilling has gone down to approximately 20 metres, a minuscule depth in comparison to petroleum drilling these days. This attempt by Warren Strange of Globe Drill is to put down a three-kilometre hole, not in the interests or expectation of finding hot rock but to prove the capacity of a revolutionary design drill rig which is going to reduce by approximately two-thirds the cost of hot rock drilling. This three-kilometre-deep hole is additionally going to give us the first opportunity to analyse the geological strata of that particular area. In the first 300 metres achieved so far, incredible flows of potable water have been found. There are some problems, of course, with sealing off that incredible flow of water and that will be done progressively, as the hole progresses. But, along with the involvement of Karni Engineering, owned and run by Colin Crook in Merredin, this is revolutionary. The importance of it has been brought about by the fact that, right now, Merredin is going through a horrendous drought situation and crops have all but failed. This activity in Merredin will give another commercial string to the bow of activity in that area and is much required at this stage. When rainfall fails in these wheat belt areas, the whole economy contracts, and the more dimension you can have to that economy through diversity the more the likelihood of success and survival in that community.

Already one of the largest wind farms ever attempted in Western Australia is being installed in the area. It looks like being a revolutionary area in Western Australia for the development of alternative energy sources. So we give recognition to Globe Drill. We wish them luck in their venture to drill the three-kilometre hole, because a breakthrough in the cost of hot rock drilling will mean that the abundance of energy supply right across Australia in the deep granites will be revealed at a much, much lower cost.

Queensland Wild Rivers Act

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (10.39 am)—The Leader of the Opposition has vowed to introduce legislation into this place to overturn state laws that were put in place to protect the few remaining pristine waterways of Queensland. In government, the member for Warringah was transparent in his propensity to involve himself in state government matters, and it seems little has changed in the last three years. I have a message for the member for Warringah from my constituents: ‘Butt out of our Queensland wild rivers.’ The Queensland Wild Rivers Act is essentially a planning and management tool to ensure that development close to these virtually untouched rivers and waterways is environmentally sound. The Wild Rivers Act prevents highly destructive development, such as large dams and mining, by providing protective buffers around these natural wonders. Ten wild rivers areas have been declared already under the legislation—on Hinchinbrook and Fraser islands, four in the gulf region and four on Cape York, including the Wenlock River, which is the most recently protected river system—and there are more to come, particularly down in the south-west. This declaration ensures the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve on Cape York Peninsula is now protected from a proposed bauxite mine. Terri Irwin recently wrote to ask me to do my bit to ensure that the Wenlock River, an area she describes as ‘the most beautiful place on earth’, continues to receive wild river protection.

The member for Warringah has also created a few misconceptions about wild rivers, namely that it is an assault on native title and it prevents development. To the contrary, the Wild Rivers Act 2005 does not prevent new development. It simply ensures that development occurs in a way that does not impact on the overall health of the river system, and it certainly does not impact on native title. Rather, native title rights are actually enshrined in the Wild Rivers Act, and the act ensures that camping, hunting, fishing, gathering, ceremonies and harvesting of bush food and medicines are able to continue.

I am yet to hear any local wild river traditional owner speak against wild rivers. This is what Murrandoo Yanner, for the Carpentaria Land Council, had to say:

We are wild about wild rivers in a good way. We love it. If we had our way the lower gulf would be covered in wild river declarations.

And David Claudie from the Cape York Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation said:

It is clear that the motivation behind this bill is political and in no way reflects Mr Abbott's purposes for the advancement and protection of Australia's Indigenous people.

The opposition leader was a boxer once, and I have seen him give himself some pretty vicious upper cuts recently, but he lost this bout before it began. I suggest he throw in the towel when it comes to the Queensland Wild Rivers Act because he is fighting out of his class.

Health: Genetics

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (10.42 am)—Several months ago I was having a regular catch-up with the CEO of the local division of GPs when we stumbled upon an interesting topic: unintended marriages between siblings and the potential side effects for their children. Some say that the occurrence of this kind of extraordinary situation is on the rise, with the increasing uptake of IVF technologies as well as changing attitudes within our society about children and marriage. It sparked a debate within my office which was fuelled further by a letter from a local doctor who is concerned about the increasing number of patients he is seeing who do not know one or both of their parents and, as a result, have no knowledge of any genetic based illnesses they might be susceptible to. In particular, there are a significant number of women coming to an age where they are at risk of breast cancer and they do not know what genetic diseases their mother or father may have suffered from or died of. As any woman would know, these are the first questions asked when going for a mammogram or to a specialist. Basically, what we are talking about here is the right for a child to know who their father and mother are. There are basic physical, medical and psychological reasons to justify why this information should be available as outlined above, and I will discuss these further. But it should also be said that there are very valid emotional reasons for being able to know as well. After all, what value do we as a society place on a child's sense of who they are?

To return to the original point, some countries have tried to pre-empt the problem of half-brothers and half-sisters forming a relationship, unaware of their genetic similarity. In seven American states, for example, a marriage licence cannot be issued to a couple before a blood test is carried out to determine whether the couple are related or whether they have any diseases that could be passed on to children. Not all couples who have children are married, and a simple blood test certainly does not answer other questions about one's own origin either. It just seems to me that to leave the word 'unknown' on a child's birth certificate, or to deprive a child of seeing their original birth certificate prior to it being replaced by an adopted birth certificate, is unjust. I want to encourage anybody who has similar concerns or ideas to con-

tact my office. I do believe this is a very serious situation and it can be alleviated if we try to contact the people concerned. As I said, it is certainly an issue worth debating.

Disability Services

Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing and Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport (10.44 am)—Mr Deputy Speaker Slipper, I congratulate you on your appointment, this being the first time you have been in the chair when I have been speaking. In April this year, Minister Macklin and I met with a number of carers at Ballarat Health Services, and they are an extraordinary group of women who have been caring for their children—predominantly children with a mental health issue—for a long period of time. As many of these women hit retirement age, they are very concerned about the future financial security of their children. One of the issues raised was their capacity as carers to establish trusts for their children with disabilities and the penalties that their children then incur in relation to their disability support pensions. In particular, the rules as they currently apply act as a disincentive for carers to establish such trusts and for people with a disability to participate in the workforce. The carers that met with Minister Macklin and me outlined the importance of the government in making changes to the way special disability trusts are administered. They understood the important role that these trusts played in assisting carers to provide care for a family member with a disability but outlined the need for amendment to the rules. Minister Macklin came away from that meeting expressing the urgent need to fix this issue. Although the issue was already being explored, I think the impact that those carers had on Minister Macklin sparked the initiative being brought forward.

Last week, Minister Macklin introduced the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Budget and Other Measures) Bill 2010, and that bill contained a range of measures, including amending the special disability trust provision in the social security and veterans' entitlement legislation. With the introduction of this bill, we have addressed one of the core concerns of the carers at Ballarat Health Services. Under the current rules, people with a disability are unable to benefit from a special disability trust if they work for the minimum wage for as little as one hour. That is a disincentive for people with a disability to work and for carers to establish these trusts. We have introduced the bills to change the special disability trust rules. Under our new proposal, carers of people with a severe disability and their families have more flexibility to determine how best to utilise their trusts to assist their family members who have been impacted by disability. From January 2011, people with a disability who are the beneficiaries of a trust will be able to work up to seven hours a week in the open labour market and still qualify. The trusts will be able to pay for the beneficiaries' medical expenses and to spend up to \$10,000 in a financial year on discretionary items not related to the care and accommodation needs of the beneficiary of the trust.

The Gillard government is committed to people with a disability and to their families and carers. We have recognised the commitment through a range of initiatives in the past, and we continue our support with the introduction of this bill. I want to thank Minister Macklin for listening to the concerns of residents in the Ballarat electorate, and I commend her for her efforts in addressing these issues promptly. This is great news for the many carers that we met with in April, specifically those carers at Ballarat Health Services.

Endangered Species

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (10.47 am)—Today in parliament I want to launch the push for a national dugong and turtle protection plan. I want to deal with three elements in this. The first is the threat. We heard on 7 October in Abu Dhabi at the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals that the dugong is facing extinction globally within the next 40 years. We know that already, in areas such as Mauritius and Taiwan, in many of the straits of Indonesia and in many other parts of the world, the dugong has suffered from local extinction. It is facing local extinction in many other areas, and the threat and challenge around the world is that this magnificent, iconic species will not be available and will not be part of the world to be inherited by our grandchildren.

I want to acknowledge, secondly, the protectors, people such as: James Epong, the magnificent Indigenous leader and representative who has helped put together the plan and helped take the lead in his own community, south of Cairns, near Innisfail, to push for a national moratorium, led by the Indigenous community themselves, whilst we gather the data and information; Warren Entsch, the newly re-elected member for Leichhardt, who placed his career on the line when many people said that this was danger and folly and who believed in the power of the idea; and, in particular, my great friend Colin Riddell, who is a passionate advocate for the turtle and dugong protection plan and who has been one of the great motivators, along with Bob Irwin and the broadcaster Derryn Hinch, all of whom are among the many people committed to these species.

So what are the steps? This is the third element. Firstly, we must have a crackdown on illegal poaching. This poaching has been done in the name of Indigenous communities who are furious that their good name has been exploited by those who have no business pillaging their resources. Secondly, there must be an enforcement process. To that end, the coalition announced \$1.6 million during the course of the election campaign for Indigenous rangers and for Customs officials to enforce the law and make sure that there would be no quarter given. Thirdly, there would be \$1 million allocated to marine debris clearance and marine protection for these animals—so a \$2.6 million package. The last thing is to work towards a moratorium with the support of Indigenous communities while we gather the numbers and find out what is necessary to protect these majestic creatures. I commend to the parliament, on a bipartisan basis, the push for a national dugong and turtle protection plan.

Active After-school Communities Program

Ms COLLINS (Franklin—Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services) (10.50 am)—I want to talk in the House today about the Active After-school Communities program. The federal government announced just over a week ago that we will continue with the Active After-school Communities program for 2011 with \$43.5 million in funding. I know that in my home state of Tasmania the Active After-school Communities program is very well supported by local schools, by parents, by teachers and by local communities.

The program is intended to engage young children in sport, either through structured physical activity or to have a fun and positive experience and develop a love of sport and physical activity. Nationally there are over 3,000 primary schools that participate in the program from 3 pm to 5 pm each school day, and there are around 150,000 children that are benefiting from this physical activity. In my home state of Tasmania, there are more than 90 primary schools and more than 5,000 school students that participate in this important pro-

gram. There are more than 14 schools involved in my own electorate of Franklin, and I am really pleased to welcome the news that this program will indeed continue.

Just last week I went to Snug Primary School in the south of my electorate, where one of the coordinators, Brony, received an award for having been a coordinator at Snug Primary School for some time. The children had done a very special little notebook for her with some messages and some drawings about how much they much appreciated her coordinating their Active After-School programs. I also played hide and seek with some of the children. The children at South Arm Primary School showed me some dance and taught me how to DJ, which was great fun. I have played football with the students at Bellerive Primary School and I have been to St John's primary school with some local basketball champions, where we played some basketball. At Risdon Vale Primary School we did some bike riding with the former sports minister, Kate Ellis; they also do swimming there. So there is a huge range of activities that happen at the Active After-school program in Tasmania. There is AFL, soccer, surfing, dance and hockey, and I learnt the other day that they are going to introduce archery in one of the schools. There is a very wide range of activities and programs that some of these children would not otherwise be able to participate in that are happening in the Active After-school programs.

In Tasmania we also have excellent staff at Active After-School. The state manager, Blair Brownless, works tirelessly and is very well known and very well liked by the school communities. There is Aaron Markham, who is currently on leave. I think he is on his honeymoon, which I am sure is getting him well refreshed to come back into the program. The Active After-school coordinators and the state managers obviously work with local sporting clubs, volunteers, private providers, teachers, retirees and parents—(*Time expired*)

Endangered Species

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (10.53 am)—I rise to support the comments made earlier to this parliament by the Hon. Mr Greg Hunt in his and Warren Entsch's call for a dugong and turtle protection plan. We are very aware in South-East Queensland as well of the importance of the dugong to healthy waterways. Indeed, it is a symbol for the Moreton Bay regional area, and we are very conscious of the turtles and the dugongs being threatened by modern populations and the need to ensure that there is a protection plan. In fact, we were delighted when the coalition, during the election campaign, announced that it would allocate funding for a protection plan for dugongs and turtles. I do hope, as Mr Greg Hunt indicated, that there will be bipartisan support for this very important project.

It is very important that we work with the Indigenous communities on this particular program, and I know that we have had indications of support from them. As part of the important environmental and marine conservation task, the coalition previously indicated that it would maintain existing funding and provide a total of \$2.6 million, which was going to comprise \$1.6 million for specialised Indigenous ranger programs for marine conservation along the Far North Queensland coast and for strengthened enforcement and compliance through supporting additional officers on the water and on land to crack down on dugong and turtle poaching and the illegal trade in dugong and turtle meat. There was also to be \$1 million towards helping to clean up marine debris along the Far North Queensland coast, the Torres Strait islands and in the Coral Sea. Marine debris, especially ghost nets, as they are called,

provides significant risk to dugongs and turtles, and I know we all want to take steps to clean these threats up.

Obviously we would consult with and support the work of the Indigenous communities in dealing with these threats. These positive measures would build on the coalition's three-point plan for the protection of dugongs and turtles, through which we have already committed to work with the traditional owners to help them to put an end to poaching and the commercial sale of illegal dugong and turtle meat and to create jobs for local Indigenous people to preserve and protect dugongs and turtles. We would also ensure enforcement and prosecution of the illegal hunting and poaching of turtles and dugongs. The coalition's dugong and turtle protection plan would initially run for two years and be subject to extension based upon its success. These measures would be designed in conjunction with traditional owners and Indigenous communities. The members on this side of the chamber are in support—(*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Before calling the honourable member for Blair, I would remind all honourable members that, pursuant to standing order 64, members ought not be referred to by their names but by the name of their electorates.

Homelessness

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (10.57 am)—The federal Labor government has made tackling homelessness a national priority, and locally, in the Ipswich and West Moreton area, that has been expressed by the huge investment in social housing. People have been doing it tough in our area for some time with respect to access to affordable housing, and I am pleased that the Gillard Labor government has invested \$66.5 million in funding for social housing projects and Defence housing in the Ipswich area. Recently I attended, with the member for Ipswich West, Wayne Wendt, and the housing minister for Queensland, Karen Struthers, an inspection of a six one-bedroom unit complex at 53 Lowry Street at North Ipswich. Construction across the electorate of Mr Wendt, the state member for Ipswich West, totals \$22 million. There have been 130 jobs created in that state electorate alone. This project at 53 Lowry Street created 10 jobs in the Ipswich area. It is a combination of accommodation styles, with different aspects of the facilities available to people with different abilities. For example, two of the units are adapted to accommodate people with disabilities and another has been made fully wheelchair accessible.

All tenants come from a register of need, and they include pensioners and people on low incomes, who sometimes just need a hand to get back on their feet. One of these people was Allen Jones, a 24-year-old who spent most of his adult life relying on friends before he could get this kind of facility. He was pleased to go there, and he said this, which I think is worth recording:

Having my own place means I can concentrate on work and not have to worry about the next place I'm going to live.

What a great statement about what it means to him as an individual to be provided with social housing. The rollout across Queensland will see \$1.2 billion of social housing across the state and 7,800 jobs, and more than 6,000 people who have been doing it tough will find safe and secure accommodation for the first time in their lives. The building program through the nation building and stimulus funding is due to be completed by June 2012. This will make a big difference, both in my state of Queensland and locally in the electorate of Blair, particularly in

the Ipswich area. I warmly welcome the funding, which will make a difference in the lives of people like Allen.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (11.00 am)—I move:

That order of the day No. 1, private Members' business, be postponed until a later hour this day.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Broadband Committee

Appointment

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mr Turnbull**:

That:

- (1) a Joint Select Committee on Broadband be appointed to inquire into and report on all aspects of the business of the NBN Co. including its construction, operations, financing and any other matters related thereto;
- (2) the committee consist of 10 members, 2 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Government Whip or Whips, 2 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Opposition Whip or Whips and 1 by any non-aligned Member, 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, and 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and 1 Senator to be nominated by any minority group or groups or independent Senator or independent Senators;
- (3) every nomination of a member of the committee be notified in writing to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives;
- (4) the members of the committee hold office as a joint select committee until the House of Representatives is dissolved or expires by effluxion of time;
- (5) the committee will elect a chair;
- (6) the committee elect a member as its deputy chair who shall act as chair of the committee at any time when the chair is not present at a meeting of the committee, and at any time when the chair and deputy chair are not present at a meeting of the committee the members present shall elect another member to act as chair at that meeting;
- (7) the Chair and Deputy chair shall not both be from either the Government, Opposition or Cross-bench members;
- (8) in the event of an equally divided vote, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote;
- (9) 3 members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House;
- (10) the committee have power to appoint subcommittees consisting of 3 or more of its members and to refer to any subcommittee any matter which the committee is empowered to examine;
- (11) the committee appoint the chair of each subcommittee who shall have a casting vote only and at any time when the chair of a subcommittee is not present at a meeting of the subcommittee the members of the subcommittee present shall elect another member of that subcommittee to act as chair at that meeting;

- (12) 2 members of a subcommittee constitute the quorum of that subcommittee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House;
- (13) members of the committee who are not members of a subcommittee may participate in the proceedings of that subcommittee but shall not vote, move any motion or be counted for the purpose of a quorum;
- (14) the committee or any subcommittee have power to call for witnesses to attend and for documents to be produced;
- (15) the committee or any subcommittee may conduct proceedings at any place it sees fit;
- (16) the committee or any subcommittee have power to adjourn from time to time and to sit during any adjournment of the Senate and the House of Representatives;
- (17) the committee may report from time to time;
- (18) the provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders; and
- (19) a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting that it concur and take action accordingly.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (11.01 am)—If accepted by the House and the Senate, this motion would enable the creation of a joint standing committee to have continuing oversight of the National Broadband Network. Recognising the current makeup of both houses, in accordance with this motion neither the government nor the opposition would have a majority on the committee. There would be four members from each side of the House, plus two cross-benchers—one from each chamber.

The NBN is the largest single infrastructure investment in our country's history. It has been subject to no financial scrutiny at all. The government has set up a body called Infrastructure Australia, which it said was designed, and is designed, to analyse, prioritise and assess on a cost-benefit basis—rigorously—infrastructure projects. That is its job, and it has a very distinguished board, chaired by Rod Eddington. And yet the government has refused to let it anywhere near the National Broadband Network.

The government has said that it is committed to competition, and yet it is proposing to enter into an agreement with Telstra which will preclude Telstra not simply from competing with its copper network but from competing on a facilities basis with its HFC cable network. So it is essentially designed to eliminate all facilities based competition with the NBN.

The government would say, 'Well, that is in the public interest'—fair enough. The judge of whether monopolies and restrictions to competition are in the public interest is the ACCC, and yet the legislation that is before the parliament will actually exempt this new government owned monopoly from consideration by the ACCC.

We know that one of the objectives is to eliminate the vertical integration of Telstra. We know that is one of the objectives of the NBN, and that is one that has been welcomed by many people in the community—particularly in the telecommunications sector. And yet the achievement of structural separation does not depend on the destruction, the closing down and the cancelling out of Telstra's copper network. It does not depend on the elimination of any competition from the HFC network. If vertical integration is the problem, structural separation is the answer. Again, there is no assessment of why the NBN is needed to achieve that.

We are told that this is required to deliver affordable broadband across Australia. Unless it is suggested—and it is not—that nobody in Australia has access to broadband at acceptable standards then a clear alternative is to consider what it would cost and what the approach required would be to enable those parts of Australia, be they in cities or in regions, that do not have access to affordable broadband at acceptable speeds to do so. It is quite clear that there would need to be upgrades to network architecture in the cities to eliminate pair gains, RIMs and other features of historical network design; and, of course, substantial investment in fixed wireless and satellite facilities in regional Australia.

The truth is that both sides of politics have been in favour of that for some time. Indeed, if the coalition had won the 2007 election, a program—the OPEL program—would already now have provided broadband right across regional Australia. Because of the pending nature of the NBN nothing has been done. The NBN has been a real obstacle to any other investment in fixed line network infrastructure in Australia because people are saying, not unreasonably: ‘Why should I upgrade my network? Why should I invest in a new network, because the NBN is going to come and overbuild me?’

Right now the group of companies that presently provide fibre optic services in greenfields developments do not know what to do. They do not know whether their existing investments are going to be acquired by the NBN and whether they are going to be overbuilt. Developers do not know whether the NBN is going to provide connectivity to their greenfields developments and, if so, when. Telstra does not believe it has an obligation under the USO to connect new developments to the copper network, and instead is helpfully providing people with a mobile phone. This is a massive project that requires real scrutiny.

Another committee of this parliament that is under statute obliged to look at public works is, of course, the Public Works Committee. And yet the government has made a regulation to exempt the activities of the NBN from the Public Works Committee. The parliament will have to consider whether to disallow that regulation. The Public Works Committee’s scrutiny would considerably benefit the operation and the construction of the NBN. The nature of the Public Works Committee is to look at a proposed project and then report on it, but what we have here with the NBN is a project that will be built over a decade, so it is going to require continuing scrutiny over a very long period of time. The issues that the Public Works Committee look at on a continuing basis would be very appropriate for this joint select committee: the cost-effectiveness of the proposal, the stated purpose of the work and the suitability of its purposes.

But, above all, this is the biggest investment of Commonwealth money ever made in infrastructure in our country’s history, yet we do not have a business case and we do not have a cost-benefit analysis. We have a government that hangs its economic credibility on Ken Henry’s shoulders every day, and yet it was Ken Henry, the Secretary to the Treasury, who said that every major infrastructure project must pass an appropriately designed cost-benefit analysis and if it does not then it ‘necessarily detracts from Australia’s wellbeing’. There is nobody better suited to undertake the cost-benefit analysis than the Productivity Commission, and that is of course why just a few moments ago I introduced a private member’s bill in the House of Representatives.

This committee, however, will provide continuing scrutiny. There will be continuing issues, assuming this project is to go ahead, that will arise with the NBN. There will be major issues

about competition. We have seen for the last decade telecommunications prices come down year after year after year. If you cast your mind back 10 years, let alone 15 years, the change in the cost of telecommunications is really extraordinary, and we would hope that that decline in prices would continue—in other words, that telecommunications and access to the internet would become cheaper over time. What we have with the NBN, however, is a massive investment that will need to have some revenue generated to support it. Even if it is to achieve an anaemic return—any return—it is going to need to have strong revenues. How can that be achieved without driving up prices?

The McKinsey implementation study—which was not a cost-benefit analysis, which did not look at alternatives and which was precluded from doing so—recommended that wholesale prices for the NBN should increase in real terms, that is to say over and above inflation, every year for the next decade. In other words, in the NBN world we will see internet access prices going up whereas for the last decade or more they have been coming down. People might say, ‘Well, households will be prepared to pay higher prices for greater speeds.’ Anyone in the telecommunications business will tell you that there is no evidence that people will pay a premium for higher bandwidth. History has shown that as higher bandwidth has become available it has been made available to households and businesses at costs that are comparable to, if not lower than, the previous lower speed products. The NBN has been undertaken with little or no scrutiny. This committee is an essential part of the parliament doing its job. (*Time expired*)

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (11.11 am)—Why are we here? We are here because the member for Wentworth in his previous guise and those who sat with him in the Howard coalition cabinet failed to come up with an affordable and appropriate telecommunications policy. They left the legacy after privatising Telstra of Telstra owning the fixed line and copper network connecting almost every household, as well as the largest cable network, half of the largest pay-TV network and the largest mobile network. The member for Wentworth talked about OPEL. Before the 2007 election I got Geoscience Australia to provide me with a map of my electorate—which then took in the Lockyer Valley, about 60 per cent of Ipswich and the old Boonah shire—just to see what the coalition’s wonderful plan would look like. I asked them to put red where there were gaps—where broadband would not reach premises. This covered farms, businesses, schools and hospitals. Great swathes of Ipswich were not covered, parts of the Lockyer Valley were not covered, and most of the Boonah shire was not covered. That is the legacy of 18 failed plans.

Let us not kid ourselves about why we are here today. We are here today because the member for Wentworth was looking for a job. He was looking for the job of shadow Treasurer; he is looking for the job of shadow finance minister. He went in to meet with the opposition leader. He was looking for a job and the Leader of the Opposition said, ‘I’ll give you the job to demolish the NBN.’ Even if the cost-benefit analysis of the Productivity Commission report came down, in his public utterances he still would not commit himself to supporting the NBN.

We know it will connect over 1,000 cities and towns. Small towns in my electorate like Kilcoy, Toogoolawah, Lowood, Marburg and Rosewood are connected on the NBN. It is rolling out in Springfield Lakes next year. The NBN is vital infrastructure for this country and for regional and rural areas. The coalition’s legacy and what the coalition put up at the last elec-

tion failed. The 150 members that sit in the House of Representatives know that the failure of the coalition on telecommunications in the last election was the decisive factor that means they are not sitting on the treasury bench. All through the issue with respect to the NBN they have procrastinated. We have symbolism and semantics. Even the bill and the motion here today are all about the perpetration and perpetuation of procrastination. That is what this is about. They have no intention of supporting the NBN. They have every intention of wrecking the NBN. This private member's motion, and indeed the bill that the member for Wentworth put into the House of Representatives before, is all about wrecking.

They came up with some plan. It was a \$6.3 billion plan. The opposition leader did not have the integrity, grace and fortitude to stand up and say, 'I own it,' but let the now member for Casey, who is consigned to the shadow parliamentary secretary position, as the shadow minister, stand there and present it. Scorn was put upon that plan. We know it was just a patched-up attempt to come up with something because, on the first day of the last parliament, we had the shadow Treasurer asking about telecommunications. And he said, 'I think if we could get broadband across the country it'd be a good thing.' The coalition has simply failed time and time again.

The member for Wentworth talks about the implementation stuff. He talks about the independent advisers McKinsey and KPMG. We released that study on 6 May this year—eight months of detailed analysis. And guess what? It confirmed that, under a range of realistic hypothetical scenarios, NBN Co. would have a strong and viable business case. That is what it said.

There is no guarantee that, if the Productivity Commission looked at this and came up with a recommendation, those opposite would support it. We have had a \$25 million implementation study. Look at the motion put forward by the member for Wentworth. Apart from the first subparagraph, it is all about the methodology, operations and semantics of this committee. Everyone who sits in this place knows that that committee will take months and months and months. There will be submissions. They will take a long time to process.

We know—through what people like Access Economics have said in terms of the benefits of telehealth to Australia—that the National Broadband Network would benefit Australia to the tune of between \$2 billion and \$4 billion a year. Access Economics have also indicated that Australia could save between \$1.4 billion and \$1.9 billion a year if 10 per cent of the workforce teleworked half the time. This is what the National Broadband Network will do. It will make sure that whether you live in Toorak or Toogoolawah you will have the same access to fast-speed broadband. That is why it is important.

There have been so many occasions when this thing has been looked at. As to the record of those opposite: what about when we introduced our competition and consumer safeguards legislation in 2009? They did not want to debate it until we produced an ACCC report in the original NBN tender process. We did that. Then they would not debate the bill until the implementation study was released. We did that. Next they claimed the NBN legislation was bad for Telstra's shareholders, and when the chairperson and the CEO came to an agreement with us—guess what? There was no pat on the back from those opposite. They came up with this patchwork system and claimed it was better than ours. But the Independents did not think so, and the public did not think so. Now the coalition oppose the NBN and claim that we need a cost-benefit analysis. Last time, as I mentioned before, when the competition and consumer

safeguards were debated, we had what the Americans call a filibuster by those opposite. They put nearly 20 speakers on the list so we could not get to a vote. Now they want another parliamentary committee overseeing the NBN. But we have already seen Senate select committees look at this and produce reports. How many more?

The truth is: those opposite are wreckers, and this reeks of desperation. This is all about them attacking. This is all about them not accepting the outcome of the election. They claim they support regional and rural Australia. Well, I represent a regional and rural seat in South-East Queensland. I represent farmers, I represent small towns, I represent rural hospitals and rural schools, and I can tell you: they want the NBN. That is why the Somerset Regional Council, in my electorate, put forward, along with regional councils like those of Toowoomba and Ipswich and the Scenic Rim and the Lockyer Valley, an implementation proposal so they could get on to the NBN. They wanted it early. I have been there, at the Somerset Region Business Alliance meetings—and that is not exactly a body affiliated with the Australian Labor Party Queensland branch, I can assure you, because the people on the executive of that association in my electorate were there handing out how-to-vote cards for the LNP on election day. But they have said on numerous occasions how important the NBN is for the Somerset region and regional and rural areas in South-East Queensland.

The member for Wentworth is looking for an agenda. He is looking for a solution. He is looking for a job. And that is what this is all about. We talk about Lazarus rising. Well, he is looking for another resurrection—a resurrection from the political graveyard of opposition and irrelevance. He is looking to do that because that is what this bill and this motion are about: wrecking the NBN and trying to resurrect the career of the member for Wentworth.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (11.21 am)—I would like to reflect for a moment on that contribution, which was, I think, not much more than personal abuse. It was very low on facts, very low on vision and very low on the important concept that we should be accountable for the taxpayers' money that we spend. In the debate that we are going to have on this issue in this place, we have one side, the government, which is running from scrutiny. And it is absolutely important that when we spend one dollar of taxpayers' money we should be getting value for money for that dollar, because our taxpayers work hard to provide the funds which we spend on their behalf through this place. Yet we have a government that says: 'We are going to embark on the largest public infrastructure project in this nation's history. We're going to be visionary. We're going to be nation building. But we're not going to do a cost-benefit analysis.' And why is that?

If I were recommending a project to the Australian people, I would welcome a cost-benefit analysis because it would show that the assumptions I had made in putting the program together were correct. I would not welcome it if I had been fudging the figures, I would not welcome it if I had been gilding the lily, I would not welcome it if I had been overly optimistic and I would not welcome it if I had been dreaming. I say to the members opposite: which of the things I have just mentioned apply to you? Quite clearly, you are all about avoiding scrutiny. Quite clearly, you are not willing to put your project to the test; otherwise, you would welcome the cost-benefit analysis.

The opposition is not saying we should stop the bus; the opposition is saying we have got to make sure the bus is heading in the right direction, we have got to make sure the bus's engine is going to operate efficiently and we have got to make sure the bus is going to get us to

our destination efficiently and effectively. Governments deal in priorities. Quite clearly, high-speed communications are an important priority for this country, but they need to be judged on the basis of the alternative types of investments we can make. For the money that is proposed to be spent on this project we could complete the Pacific Highway. For the money that is proposed to be spent on this project we could upgrade our health system beyond our wildest dreams. Yet Senator Conroy and the government seem to be saying: 'It doesn't matter what the opportunity cost of capital is—I have a dream! Build it and they will come. But please don't do a cost-benefit analysis. Please don't establish a committee that is going to examine in great detail the progress of this project.'

I think it is very sad that the government is so hell-bent on pushing ahead without scrutiny. What would the committee that is the subject of this motion achieve? The proposed committee would be working in real time and looking at issues as they arise. It would be taking evidence from NBN Co. in real time and checking that the project is performing as they believe it should be and as the Australian people have the right to expect it to. We do not want to see a Building the Education Revolution disaster or a pink batts disaster and then be faced with having to clean up after the event. We want to build a fence at the top of the cliff, not send an ambulance to the bottom of the cliff to clean up the mess afterwards. And that is the real situation that we face here. We do not want to have an Auditor-General's report in X years' time saying \$43 billion was blown—was wasted. We want to make sure that this project is kept on track. Based on their performance with regard to the pink batts program, computers in schools and Building the Education Revolution, this government have a very poor record of keeping projects on track.

I remember that the member for Leichhardt used to have a T-shirt with a big crocodile on it. The crocodile was licking its lips and, at the top of the T-shirt, it said 'Trust me!' I really do not feel well disposed to trust the government based on their financial performance to date. The implementation report by McKinsey assumes that everything has to go right, that the take-up rate has to be around 90 per cent and that the costs need to be kept under control. Where is the contingency? Where is the provision for the things that are going to pop up? We do not know what they are but we sure do know that they are coming. Where is that prudent contingency that would allow for the almost inevitable cost overruns? We have seen discussions about labour force shortages. Where is the contingency for that? Where is the sensitivity analysis with regard to blowouts in labour costs, as opposed to the total cost for the completion of the project? Where is that? I have not seen it. It has not been published. The government give me no confidence that they can train the workforce, deliver the project on time and ensure that wages do not blow out to a point where the project becomes unviable. It is just like that crocodile: 'Trust me!' The coalition are about ensuring that this project is properly analysed. The government are about trying to sell a dream to the Australian people. It is a project that they are not willing to subject to scrutiny.

The Prime Minister is promising that all people will pay the same wholesale price for broadband. But counter that with the fact that there will be different costs in providing services to different parts of the country and the government's proposal to sell off a proportion of this project. Will a rational investor purchase it based on regulated prices? What is the likelihood that the government will be able to sell this project as a private-sector investment? We have already seen the government retreat from the original proposal that it should be an in-

vestment that would be attractive for the public to invest in; we are seeing a very rapid retreat from that.

I would also like to mention the very important issue of opt in, opt out. We had a pilot program in Tasmania—and it was so successful that the Tasmanian government has to adopt an opt-out model! We have not seen the people who were provided with this technology as a pilot for the whole of Australia racing to take it up and embrace it. We have seen what I would say is very much a reluctant take-up. What does that say to a prudent investor? A prudent government would look at the situation and perhaps alarm bells should be ringing. The take-up rate is not what they were expecting. What does the take-up rate in Tasmania say for the projections of the McKinsey report? It says to me that the projections are very much at risk. It says to me that a prudent investor would exercise caution. But the government do not believe that is so. Despite the risk, they want to push ahead. They do not want a cost-benefit analysis and they do not want to have an inquiry that could subject this project to scrutiny as it progresses. They do not want to see the Australian public informed of cost overruns or time delays in construction or low take-up rates. They want to be able to conceal that. The government's strategy on NBN Co. has been very much a strategy of concealment.

In estimates, we have seen Senator Conroy ducking and weaving, arguing and trying to avoid simple questions that were aimed at getting the sort of information that the Australian people have a right to receive. People in regional and rural Australia, quite clearly, want high-speed broadband. They believe the priority should be given first to those areas with the worst services. That is the coalition's point of view. Instead, this government is all about charging ahead, under a veil of secrecy, on a project that it cannot demonstrate is financially viable. They are, in fact, keeping the truth from the Australian people and concealing issues such as the take-up of broadband. Why are they not upfront with these sorts of issues? Getting information out of the government as to how this project is progressing is like getting blood out of a stone. This motion is a very important one, as this committee would go some distance toward providing the sort of transparency that Australian taxpayers want and deserve.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (11.31 am)—This motion comprises 18 points of procedure for a joint select committee to examine all aspects of the business of NBN Co. I note that there have been public statements by those opposite urging the independent members of the House to support this motion, as an adjunct to a separate private member's bill, introduced by the member for Wentworth today.

There is a clear contrast here between Labor's position and that of the Liberal-National Party. On this side, we are about getting on with the job of delivering high-quality broadband into people's homes without delay, whereas the implications of the coalition's position will reinforce the digital divide and the lack of decent broadband services in rural and regional areas.

I note the public rationale given for this proposal—that such a committee will oversee the rollout of the NBN. I know this from my research on the Liberal Party's website. I am therefore bemused by the slogan, on the same website, that preceded these great platitudes on why it is so imperative to establish such a committee. It says:

Fighting for less talk more action. The Liberals believe infrastructure is about getting things done, not just talking about it.

Well, obviously not. I went from bemused to amused when I clicked on the Liberals' broadband and telecommunications policy. It is exactly the same document that was universally lampooned at the federal election, and it still says—on its very first page—that the coalition will cancel the NBN.

So, in response to the member for Cowper, who is talking about his team not wanting to stop the bus, I suggest that he should get off that bus. He represents an electorate which has the 20th worst level of broadband penetration in the country—a measly 27.6 per cent. With 150 being the best and one being the worst, he is representing an electorate at number 20. So those opposite are not about transparency; they are about trashing. It is no wonder, then, that in telco circles they have been referring to the member for Wentworth as the shadow minister for dial-up.

Today, I want to present three factual and logical reasons why this proposal for yet another committee to examine NBN Co. should be rejected. I will also provide compelling data which demonstrates why this proposal is contrary to the interests of the constituents who are represented by the independent members in this place.

The first reason is the notion that NBN Co. is somehow lacking in its governance arrangements and oversight of the progress on its principal activity—to build and operate a national broadband network. Hence, there is the need for another layer of supervision of its operations and financing. Such assumptions are ill-conceived and they ignore one of the most basic facts about NBN Co. It is an entity which is subject to the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act. It is a Commonwealth company and is classified as a government business enterprise under regulation. What does this mean? As a Commonwealth company, NBN Co. bears a statutory requirement to submit financial reports, directors' reports and auditors' reports on its operations. It is subject to a series of other reporting obligations. The finance minister has the power to require interim reports from NBN Co. and those reports must be tabled in both houses of parliament.

But it does not stop there. The obligations on NBN Co. also require its directors to prepare a corporate plan, at least annually, for the responsible minister, and that plan must cover a minimum period of three years. The directors must keep the minister informed about changes to the plan and matters that arise that might significantly affect the achievements of its objectives. Other matters covered by the plan include assumptions about the business environment in which it operates; its investment and financing, including strategies for managing financial risk, financial targets and projections from the company; and an analysis of factors likely to affect achievement of those targets or create significant financial risk for the company or the Commonwealth.

I note the statements by the CEO of NBN Co. in Senate estimates last week, that its corporate plan and business model would be presented to the NBN Co. board, last Friday, and that its board recently signed-off on its annual report for the first full year of its operations—including an unqualified report by its external auditor, the ANAO. I also highlight the stringent reporting requirements prescribed in that act. NBN Co. must keep the responsible minister informed of its operations. It must give reports and documents in relation to those operations, as required by both the minister and the finance minister.

These are not merely issues of internal functioning. These are matters which go to the principal activities of NBN Co., which are stated as:

... to build and operate a new National Broadband Network to deliver telephony and high speed broadband to Australian homes, schools and businesses.

If anyone holds concerns about the operation of NBN Co. that are so grave as to warrant an even fuller degree of parliamentary scrutiny, then they should not beat around with a half-baked excuse for delay in yet another form of inquiry that conducts an unbounded series of reporting and produce a report or series of reports that end up as doorstops.

The existing statutory framework for an entity such as NBN Co. does not allow for anything less than full scrutiny and accountability of its activities. The member for Wentworth misses an important point. There are multiple pieces of legislation before the parliament, or about to come back, including the NBN companies bill and the access arrangements bill, which address many of the issues he has already raised. Against this backdrop, it is difficult to comprehend what this motion would achieve, other than to add an unnecessary distraction from the real debate. There should be a consensus in this place on the need to deliver the benefits of the digital economy to the Australian people, and the vital role of world-class broadband as part of that delivery.

This brings me to the second point of my argument. Whilst the proponents of this motion have couched their motivations in the alleged pursuit of transparency, I put it to those here that yet another parliamentary committee would in fact be the least effective mechanism to oversee its roll-out. NBN Co. already has the things that are needed to ensure that it has an effective roll-out and effective oversight. Far from holding a view that its operations are faultless, I believe that it is the combination of factors operating together, often in a state of tension, which keeps an entity like itself focused and in check. I therefore put to the proponents of this motion that if there is an aspect of NBN Co.'s operations which are deficient, they should be identified and dealt with directly and not couched in yet another referral to a committee, with the sole motivation of delay.

Finally, there has been much said about the realities of the timing of the Commonwealth parliamentary committee process, which, as a practitioner in this field I have observed. I have had cause to analyse and assist in the preparation of what seemed to be countless parliamentary inquiries into broadband, including that of the Senate Select Committee on the National Broadband Network and its five reports. We have a duty to the citizens of Australia to avoid political expediency and obstructionist tactics and to focus on an efficient delivery of this vital piece of national infrastructure.

But do not take my word for it; look at the evidence. As I mentioned earlier, one only needs to examine the ranking of Australian electorates in terms of households with a broadband connection. Out of 150 electorates the member for Cowper represents an electorate which has one of the worst penetration rates in the country, at 27.6 per cent. The member for Hinkler will speak next; only 32 electorates in Australia fare worse than his. For the member for New England, barely a quarter of his household constituency has a broadband connection. The member for Lyne has the 18th worst in the nation. The member for Denison has the 44th worst ranking out of 150. And I do not think my own electorate of Greenway is good enough; it is ranked around the top 30, at position 120, but there are still less than 50 per cent of households with a broadband connection. And this is after 12 years of coalition government, with 18 failed broadband plans. This is the best they could come up with.

I can go back to my constituents at the end of every sitting week, look them in the eye and tell them that I am doing my best in this place to fight for real high-speed broadband, but tactics like this motion stand against the residents I represent in Riverstone—the site of the first Sydney metro roll-out of the NBN—and the constituents of New England, Lyne and Denison, moving out of the mere 30-per-cent-and-below bracket for broadband penetration.

To those who think this is somehow a noble and justified motion I say this: show me that groundswell of 74.8 per cent of households in New England who do not have broadband who think it is a great idea to delay the NBN roll-out; show me the 72.6 per cent of households in Lyne who think they will get access to faster, more affordable broadband if the issue is shifted off to yet another parliamentary committee.

I am all in favour of oversight of the operations of NBN Co.—and the Australian public would expect nothing less—but at least I do not think the Australian public are so naive as to believe this motion is sincere in its motivations. Let's pass Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer Safeguards) Bill 2010, let's bring on the NBN companies bill and the access arrangements bill and let's finally give Australians the high-speed broadband they deserve.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (11.40 am)—It is a pleasure today to be supporting the motion by the member for Wentworth, who has articulated a very clear case. You will note the passion and the ridicule that was inherent in the two speeches we have heard so far from the government, but they are more concerned about trying to kill this in the cradle than they are about scrutiny.

There were always alternatives to spending \$43 billion of taxpayers' money to get high-speed broadband to Australia. The emotional appeals made by the government do not examine the real cost of the roll-out, nor are they capped, nor are the benefits comprehensively examined—especially if you are in that last seven per cent of Australians who may have to wait eight years or even longer before they enjoy some of the benefits of broadband.

This Turnbull motion gives an all-party joint committee the role of overseeing and reporting on aspects of the business of the NBN Co.—its composition, its constitution, its operations its financing and related matters. That is not an unreasonable proposition when you consider that we have embarked, at the government's instigation, on the largest single infrastructure spend of its type in Australia's history—spending, I might add, that is out of kilter with anything else going on in comparable countries around the world. As the member for Wentworth illustrated earlier in the main chamber, we will be spending 100 times, per capita, what the United States is outlaying on a similar endeavour. Then the government says that there is no need for scrutiny! What do you take the Australian public for—fools?

It is obvious from this passion and abuse that I spoke of before, that the government is lacking in any argument at all. It simply wants to kill the thing in the cradle. What about this paradigm that we were coming into with the opposition and the Independents—the cross-benchers? What about this new paradigm of clarity, even-handedness and bipartisanship? Why would you be frightened of an all-party committee?

This is a very comprehensive committee. It covers two members of the government and the opposition in each chamber: two government members in the House of Representatives and two in the Senate and, similarly, two opposition members from the House of Representatives

and two from the Senate, plus one each of the crossbenchers from both chambers. It is not a talk fest committee; it has the power to call witnesses. One thing I very much like about it is that it has the power to meet in any place that it sees fit. That means that it will go out to those country areas—that seven per cent of Australia that may not, under a Labor government, receive any sort of reasonable telecommunications—and hear what people have to say.

Diverting just slightly, I was on the inquiry into racing on radio. Racing is a big deal in the period from mid-October to mid-November. The ABC closed off its radio racing service without any reference to the people of Australia, especially rural people. Not even its own advisory committee was consulted. As part of the inquiry into that, we went to a little place called Barraba, near Tamworth. It was interesting to sit there and know that the ABC was the only form of connection to a lot of the information that made that race meeting possible. In this modern era of telecommunications, country people have a great need for good-quality communications, whether it is delivered by fibre, copper, wireless or satellite, but under Labor's plan the last seven per cent can just keep wishing.

The member for Blair was quite derogatory in his comments about OPEL. There is a funny thing about OPEL. In the last term of parliament I had an electorate that was even larger than the one I have now, and OPEL covered every corner of my electorate bar a small place called Didcot. I would have thought that, 3½ years on, the people of Hinkler would have been better served, with everyone in that electorate—whether they are in communities of fewer than 1,000 or in larger communities; whether they are in the heart of Bundaberg, Hervey Bay or Bargara—having access to wireless broadband, but that is not the case. Let me say that we were talking about \$2 billion and then, during the interregnum following the campaign, we had five telcos telling us that they could deliver broadband via wireless for \$3 billion. Let me take another step. Some years ago, Senator Nash, Senator Joyce and I formed a committee of the National Party to look at ways of getting broadband into the country. We had Baulderstone Hornibrook work with us, and Leighton at another stage. We came up with a plan of fibre arteries into the inland, followed by nodes of wireless, followed in turn in the most remote areas by satellite, and we could do that for \$7 billion. 'Shock, horror!' they said at the time. 'The wasteful, profligate National Party wants to spend \$7 billion!' Try \$43 billion, six times that number, and still not getting it to the bush!

Why would you not want oversight of this biggest spend in Australia's political history? You might like to have a look at the pink batts program. We did not have any oversight there to speak of, and of course the green audits did not even really get going. The roting was so profound so early that even the government had to get rid of it. If you are talking about the BER and, in particular, the school halls program, where we have seen some of the most flagrant overspends, if not rorts, in our country's educational history, why would you not be sceptical about a \$43 billion spend—

Mr Hartsuyker—With no scrutiny.

Mr NEVILLE—Yes, with no scrutiny. This is not meant to hold the thing up; this is meant to be ongoing oversight—

Mr Adams—Like hell!

Mr NEVILLE—Like hell, he says. You must have ongoing scrutiny. If the Labor Party and the crossbenchers are so sure of their case, why wouldn't they be part of it?

Mr Hartsuyker—They'd welcome it.

Mr NEVILLE—Why wouldn't they welcome it? Why wouldn't they be on that committee making sure that it justified what they had done—that it was bringing home the bacon, so to speak? But no. It was also interesting to hear the member for Blair saying what a marvellous thing the McKinsey report was. It cost \$25 million—\$46,000 a page, I think the member for Wentworth estimated. This little quote sums it all up:

The purpose of the Implementation Study is to advise Government on how best to implement its stated policy objectives—

and note this—

not to evaluate those objectives, given that the policies have already been agreed to by Government.

In other words, 'Let's go round and chase our tail because we did not get any clear direction from the government.' The member for Wentworth has come up with a very good plan that adds a level of probity that has been missing in all these government programs, particularly in telecommunications. I commend his motion to this House.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (11.50 am)—The motion in question purports to be about a cost-benefit analysis for the government's exciting proposal to roll out a National Broadband Network. Whenever the words 'cost', 'benefit' and 'analysis' are included in a proposal, they have a superficial sheen of credibility. Unfortunately, in this instance what undermines that superficial sheen of credibility is that the proponents of the motion spent most of their time in the last parliament criticising the government for conducting endless rounds of reviews and establishing committees on everything that we proposed to do and not getting on with the job of implementing our policies. Indeed, the members opposite have spent a great deal of their time over the last three years criticising our action on rolling out the National Broadband Network. In my own area, the member for Gilmore has gone to print on several occasions criticising the government for not yet having the suburbs of that electorate already wired up. Its credibility is undermined even further by the fact that it comes from a party whose leader has dedicated himself to the task of ensuring that this National Broadband Network never gets built.

We can see from all of this that it is not about the costs and the benefits but it is about opposition, it is about blocking, it is about sowing the seeds of doubt in the electorate. It is a tactic, because those opposite know that, if they were ever able to occupy the treasury bench and if they were to set themselves about their task of digging up the National Broadband Network and its kilometres of fibre-optic cable, the Australian people would criticise them and condemn them roundly, so their only choice is to stop it dead in its tracks.

We stand here opposing this plan and all the ruses and guises which are a part of the tactics to deliver that policy objective. We stand for rolling out broadband, and it matters a lot. The National Broadband Network is as important to the economic development of Australia in the 21st century as the railways were to the economic development of this country in the 19th and 20th centuries. Yes, the NBN is about entertainment and home users and residential users, but it is about much more than that. It is about enhancing productivity. It is about ensuring that we can deliver state-of-the-art health and medical procedures to those people who live in regional Australia—regions that are represented by many members opposite—people who live in regions such as mine in the electorate of Throsby, delivering first-class health and education

services to people who do not live in the capital cities of this country. Quite simply, it is critical for regional Australia.

In my own electorate each week about 20,000 people crowd the train platforms of the suburbs to make a daily journey to the CBD of Sydney in pursuit of work. The National Broadband Network is their opportunity to spend less time on those trains and less time on those freezing cold train platforms at five and six o'clock in the morning, and a little more time in their homes and in workplaces closer to their homes. It is critical for small businesses, which those opposite often purport to represent, but does little to ensure that small businesses have the infrastructure which makes them viable. In the electorate of Throsby, over 67 per cent of the small businesses are home based small businesses, and the National Broadband Network is critical to connecting those businesses to the markets of Australia and the world.

The National Broadband Network is already attracting exciting investment in the electorate of Throsby, on the South Coast and Southern Highlands of New South Wales. I was delighted this morning to read an article in the *Illawarra Mercury* where the journalist was reporting on an exciting investment by an Indian IT company, which is a subsidiary of Hewlett-Packard, which has announced that it will be establishing a new information and communications technology centre in the innovation campus of the University of Wollongong. This will employ around 250 people in an electorate like Throsby, which has a great university but does not always have the employment opportunities that will attract and retain the graduates. Investments like these will make an enormous difference to my electorate. I am very excited because the investors in this new facility specifically cited the National Broadband Network and the opportunities for early rollout of the National Broadband Network in the Illawarra region as one of their reasons for choosing the Illawarra and the University of Wollongong as their site for investment and development. This is a factor which is also reported in an article in the *Australian Financial Review* under the headline 'NBN stimulates investment in research'.

I support the continuation of these exciting investments and I know that the people of my electorate do as well. We have been advised by NBN Co. that in the areas which are identified for early rollout and where cable is currently being rolled out past the suburbs on the South Coast of New South Wales, in places like Minnamurra and Kiama Downs, over two-thirds of the eligible households have put their hand up and said, 'Yes, please, I want to be connected to this National Broadband Network.' So it is not only businesses but also individuals that see the enormous benefits of the NBN for a regional electorate like Throsby.

Australians have suffered and waited a long time for the NBN. Under the previous, coalition government there were something in the order of 18 failed plans for broadband. In fact, you could characterise the coalition's policy on broadband as a vacant field. They had only one policy, and that was a policy for privatising Telstra. They had no policy for dealing with the consequences of privatising such a large near-monopoly provider. So there were over 18 failed broadband plans over a 12-year period and now they have the temerity to come to this place and attempt to put more and more roadblocks in the way of us rolling out one of Australia's most important pieces of nation-building infrastructure.

They talk about the importance of a cost-benefit analysis. I just say this. We have had a cost analysis, the \$25 million McKinsey report which said that the National Broadband Network can be delivered within the cost envelope proposed by the government. As to the benefits of the NBN, the people of my electorate know them full well, and I believe the people of Australia

lia have got a pretty good eye for what the benefits of this proposal are too, because this proposal has gone before no fewer than two elections. We took a proposal to build a national broadband network to the 2007 election and the Australian people saw the benefits of it and voted for it. We took this specific proposal to the 2010 election and those opposite made it one of the foci of their opposition during that campaign, and once again they failed to win the support of the Australian people. So when it comes to the cost-benefit analysis, we have had enough of committees, enough of reviews. I think the people of Throsby and the people of Australia just want us to get on with the job.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Sidebottom)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Pensions and Benefits

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mr Adams**:

That this House:

- (1) notes that pensions must keep pace with the cost of living;
- (2) recognises the significance and importance of the Labor Government's \$14 billion reform of the pension system after over 11 years of Coalition inaction;
- (3) understands that when there is a Commonwealth pension rise, some of it is likely to be absorbed into pensioners' rising living costs, often as a result of States and Territories lifting housing rents and power costs;
- (4) notes the danger that pensioners are at risk of becoming impoverished if State and Territory governments do not allow the benefits of pension increases to flow through to pensioners; and
- (5) demands that all State and Territory Governments commit to permanently quarantining last September's pension rise, in the calculation of pensioners' public housing rent levels and other State and Territory government controlled costs.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (12.00 pm)—It is always good to be here where you are in the chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, knowing what a great influence you have over the Main Committee. First, I must correct the wording of the *Notice Paper* where it mentions a reform of \$1.4 billion. It is in fact \$14 billion, a very significant package to assist pensioners. I have been told that it has been changed in the electronic copy.

I raised this motion because I have been inundated with calls to my electorate office about the financial difficulties pensioners are still facing despite the fact that the federal government has given them increases of around \$115 per fortnight for singles and \$97 per fortnight for couples combined in pension payments as a result of the reforms delivered in September 2009. They also received higher indexation in March and September 2010. These are the most significant increases in the 100-year history of the pension scheme. The federal government is addressing the needs of pensioners after seven-plus years of inaction by the coalition.

Although pension reform has helped ensure that pensions are starting to keep pace with the cost of living, it seems that our state colleagues believe that it should be an excuse to put rent up. This is just unfair. I believe that it is the pensioners who should get the pension rise from last year and not state governments' public housing authorities. Any rises in the pension benefits should flow through to pensioners. I think we should ask our state counterparts to perma-

nently quarantine last September's pension rise when calculating pensioners' public housing rent levels and other costs that are controlled by state and territory governments.

The private sector needs to be responsive too as there is insufficient public housing to cater for all people on pensions and benefits. A pension rise should not mean there is a general rent hike. Organisations such as Shelter Tasmania and various local governments are working together to try and find solutions. The Hobart City Council and Shelter Tasmania point out the difficulties in their research in Tasmania which, like much of the rest of Australia, is experiencing a housing affordability crisis. Monitoring the average rental prices for a two-bedroom home in various suburbs around greater Hobart in the last five years reveals an average price increase of 40 per cent, with the lowest increase being in Glenorchy, 14 per cent, and the highest in my electorate of Bridgwater, 59 per cent. This means that many people on lower incomes are living with housing stress, paying over 30 per cent of their income in rent and many others unable to find or maintain affordable housing, leaving them homeless or at risk of homelessness. In the past rents were capped at 25 per cent of income and the need for that really has not changed. The growing list of people in less-than-adequate housing is being compounded by state governments not increasing the stock of public housing and by taking a component of any rises in pension. It is the famous catch-22 of Joseph Heller fame. People are in public housing because they have a lower-than-average income, yet if the federal government wants to increase their income the states want to charge more rent, leaving them back where they started from or even worse off because of general cost-of-living increases.

The pension increases went across the range of pensions including age pension, adult disability support pension, carer's pension, veteran's income support payments, wife pension and widow B and bereavement allowance. The parenting payment and rent assistance also went up in September, so on paper a lot of people should be better off, but the states are preventing this. The federal government also revised the indexation mechanism as part of the 2009 pension reform and now takes into account a basket of goods pensioners buy to better help maintain pensioners' purchasing power. This basket of goods is weighed to recognise that pensioners spend more of their income on essentials including food, health, clothing, telephone calls and postage. I believe this should have led to reflecting pensioners' actual expenses, yet we have social inclusion units around the nation expressing the need for more stable housing as part of including people in their communities while on the other hand the opportunity for them to help themselves has been taken away by increasing rents. Somewhere along the line the equation has gone off the road, it has gone haywire.

We have to stabilise people's incomes to ensure that they have access to reasonable housing. We need to provide adequate public housing and private rentals and then some of the other social inclusion issues can come into play. There has been quite a bit of debate lately on the adequacy of the public housing sector and whether the public housing model is still economic. This is a discussion we should hold, but I believe we are getting further and further away from affordable rent for public housing. Most public housing tenants are on benefits and not working. Any variables in the private sector immediately impact those on the lowest incomes and drive them to try and find cheaper alternatives. Public housing is becoming less and less of an option for many low-income people, so there needs to be another major look at how the rental sector is operating. Funding should be allocated to such groups as Shelter and TasCOSS in Tasmania to undertake this work. We need to get back to where 25 per cent of an

income is the rental component—any more than that means that it is dragging you down in terms of affordability.

In the meantime, I believe the federal government should insist on the states quarantining pension rises and seek other ways of supplementing the severe lack of resources to provide affordable housing. It is a major issue for us to deal with in this nation. Our federal Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, has already written to the New South Wales government to delay any rent increases, and I believe that that request was considered. I hope the same process will be applied to all states and territories in Australia.

This government has brought in the most significant changes in pensions in 100 years—after 11 years-plus of neglect by the coalition. The coalition failed to increase the pensions. They failed to do anything for pensioners other than try to take their votes. We addressed it, but trying to improve the life of pensioners has been difficult, because, if their rents are increased, their costs of power and electricity go up—the cost of living is always going up. You talk to pensioners like I do, Member for Gippsland, and they tell you that they go to the supermarket and find that there are increases in different costs. A lot of them are pretty smart at buying specials and knowing where the good markets are so they try to do that.

I have put forward this motion, and I thank those members who are here to speak on it. It is an issue that we need to take up in our communities and we need to make it public here in the parliament. I hope the motion will help to further delay rent increases, and I hope that we can do something about energy increases in the future as well. This is of major significance for many people on the basic pension and therefore their quality of life in our country. I thank members for supporting the motion.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (12.10 pm)—I am pleased to join the debate on pensions and to speak on the motion by the member for Lyons. I will begin by acknowledging Mr Adams's long-running interest in the issue of pension reform and his passion for making sure that older Australians, particularly older Tasmanians, are well supported in their retirement. I would also like to congratulate him on his re-election. He is one of the great characters of the parliament and a 5.4 per cent swing towards him gives credit to the work he has been doing. At the risk of driving your primary vote down, though, member for Lyons, let me say that I always appreciate your contributions; they are very thoughtful. I have a lot of respect for the issues you raise, because they are issues that are very consistent with my community in regional Victoria.

Mr Adams—They're not that far apart.

Mr CHESTER—There is only a small swim between us. While I do not necessarily agree with every part of the motion before the House, we do have some common ground when it comes to our shared passion for ensuring that the men and women who have worked very hard to build the nation we have today have the opportunity to retire with dignity and to receive the support they need when required from our government. The cost of living increases that the member rightly referred to and the impact that is having on our pensioners is something that is very apparent in the electorate of Gippsland. In fact, it was one of the critical issues in the Gippsland by-election in 2008. In that by-election the topic of the need to increase the rate, particularly for the single age pension, was heavily debated, and I guaranteed older Gippslanders during that campaign that, if I were elected, I would come to Canberra and fight for a better deal on their behalf. I am very pleased that the Rudd government did take some

steps to increase the pension. It followed some strong lobbying by members, I believe, on both sides. In particular, the member for Bradfield, who was the Leader of the Opposition at the time, pushed very strongly for an increase in the age pension. I think there is a level of understanding—

Ms Hall—Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek to intervene.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Sidebottom)—Is the member for Gippsland willing to give way?

Mr CHESTER—Yes.

Ms Hall—Could the member please detail, in his contribution, the issues that he has brought to Canberra in relation to pensions and how they have been taken up by his party?

Mr CHESTER—I thank the member. I will take on board the new paradigm referred to in my presentation today. As I said, it was one of the biggest issues in the Gippsland by-election. I made representations to the minister at that time and spoke with the member for Bradfield, who was the opposition leader at the time, and he strongly advocated on behalf of the opposition and in fact proposed a private member's bill to increase the rate of the single pension, which was, I believe, voted down by the government, and I think that was a mistake. But I do acknowledge that, since that time has passed, the former Rudd government, in one of its better decisions, decided to increase the rate of pension, so I do take the member's question in the spirit in which it was intended.

One of the key issues for pensioners to understand this situation is that many older Australians have not had the benefit of compulsory superannuation, so their retirement incomes are very limited. They do not have access to large amounts of retirement income, and there is going to be an increased need for government support for those people who have not necessarily had the capacity to plan for their own retirement for a whole range of reasons. I acknowledge the importance of the package referred to by the member for Lyons and stress again that it is something I argued for in my by-election campaign and since that time.

In all this, we must not forget the self-funded retirees, who have been hit very badly by the global economic circumstances and are now facing a situation where their retirement income has been restricted as well. They are often left out of this debate when it comes to discussions of housing affordability. It would be a mistake to think that, just because they happen to own their own homes and have a modest amount of retirement income, they are doing it comfortably in these very difficult times.

Also, reflecting on the cost-of-living pressures which the previous member spoke about, there are some policy positions being adopted by the current government which I believe will add further pressure to retirement incomes—in particular, the government's proposed new carbon tax and the impact that is going to have on electricity prices. I believe that pensioners in particular will feel the pain the most. I am already hearing anecdotes in my electorate of older members of my community who are staying in bed longer in the mornings because they cannot afford to heat their own homes. If those stories are true, it is a real worry for us as a society when we have older people becoming more isolated in their communities, particularly in regional communities, because of cost-of-living pressures. Increases in water bills and other obviously essential services which have been a direct product of poor state government

decisions are also having a severe impact on our pensioners and their cost-of-living pressures, not to mention the food prices which the previous speaker referred to.

I do, however, take exception to the member for Lyons's assertion that there were 11 years of coalition inaction in relation to pensioners. I think the words he used were that the previous government failed to do anything. That simply lacks credibility on several fronts. Most notably, it lacks credibility on the electoral maths. Why did older Australians embrace Prime Minister John Howard and continue to re-elect the government he led if he treated pensioners as poorly as the member claims?

Government members interjecting—

Mr CHESTER—I notice the interjections from other members. The simple fact of the matter is that no government goes out of its way to do nothing in relation to any issue. It is a juvenile debate, and I think that when we as members wander off into this hyperbole and ignore the facts of the matter we do a great disservice to the Australian people. I do not think that even the failed Rudd government did nothing at all. It tried to do a few things, and unfortunately it was incompetent in its delivery. But the simple fact of the matter is that the previous Howard coalition government increased the real income of pensioners by 20 per cent during the term of that government—that is two per cent per year over the life of the Howard government. In addition to the increase in real income, the coalition delivered one-off bonuses paid to most pensioner categories, as well as a utilities allowance paid to pensioners for the first time. I believe that it was the good economic management of the Howard government that made the increase to real income and the provision of one-off benefits possible. Because of the growth of wages, which was far in advance of the cost of living, in September 1997 the Howard government legislated to index pensions using the male total average weekly earnings if that index was higher than the consumer price index, and this enabled pensioners to keep ahead of cost-of-living increases. I could go on, but I just want to make it clear to the House for the record that the previous Howard government, with the support of the Nationals in coalition, did some excellent work in relation to pensioners. But I accept that there is always more to be done. It is one of those areas of public policy where there is always going to be more work to be done.

As I said, during the Gippsland by-election the former member for Bradfield, in his role as opposition leader, was a strong advocate on behalf of older Australians and certainly made the case very strongly to the people of Gippsland that there was a need for more reform.

Mr Adams—He did that to get you elected.

Mr CHESTER—I missed that interjection from the member for Lyons. If he would like to make it more clearly, I might be able to take it up with him.

Mr Adams—He did that to get you elected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore)—Order! The member will be heard in silence.

Mr CHESTER—The interjection was not worth repeating after all, so I will just ignore it. But I would like to refer specifically to the final part of the motion, which the member spoke quite eloquently about. It demands that all state and territory governments commit to permanently quarantining last September's pension rise in the calculation of pensioners' public housing rent levels and other state and territory government controlled costs. That is one area

where the member for Lyons and I will be in furious agreement. Pensioners are telling me in calls, emails and correspondence to my office that they simply are not that much better off once the state government gets their hands on the money. That is a critical issue for us in this place: how do we protect future pension increases, arising from what I believe are good policy decisions, from the grubby hands of state treasurers?

It is a shameful situation when one level of government is giving with one hand and the other level of government is taking with the other. The member quite rightly referred to the situation of public housing rents, and it has been a very significant issue in my electorate, where I have been contacted by pensioners. These people are not mugs; they know when they are being ripped off. They know that, on the one hand, they have a federal government making some big announcements and getting credit—and deservedly so—for increasing the rate of the pension but, on the other hand, they are getting an increase in their public housing rents by their state governments. So I call on colleagues within the state administrations to have a real look into their own hearts when it comes to this issue. It is a very important issue. They are not fooling anyone. The state administrations have fleeced pensioners of at least some of the benefits that are included in the increased pension rates, and they have eroded the benefit of those increased pensions. As I said, I myself have had several letters on the issue, as the member for Lyons has, and I am happy to work with the member for Lyons and all other members of goodwill to achieve a better deal for pensioners in the future. We really need to keep the state treasurers away from any future increases.

More generally, this entire issue of retirement income reform is, I believe, one that the parliament is going to have to spend a lot more time considering in the months and years ahead. We are going to need to be more innovative in making policy reforms that do not penalise pensioners when they happen to get a bit of part-time work. They are not going to be turned into millionaires on the basis of the pension and some part-time work they get on the side. We are going to have to find ways to give them more dignity in their retirement and more control of their own financial futures. I think that is a critical issue of reform for this parliament and beyond. As I said previously, it is important that, when we talk about this issue of older Australians, we do not forget the self-funded retirees. It would be a mistake to think that they are not feeling the pain of the global economic situation at the moment. So I thank the member for raising this issue, and I believe it is a good debate to have.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (12.20 pm)—Madam Deputy Speaker Livermore, I congratulate you and acknowledge that this is your first time in the chair. I am sure you will do a splendid job, as you have done for your constituents in Capricornia, in Queensland. I promise that I will behave and not make your job very difficult. I will make it as easy as possible.

I also want to place on the record my thanks and congratulations to the member for Lyons for placing this very important motion on the agenda for people to debate, because I think that the issue of people's retirement is very important and that this parliament should work very, very hard and diligently to ensure that we protect people's pensions and retirement incomes and work on all of those very complex matters about people's financial security in their later years. I am also pleased to speak on this motion because it gives me the opportunity to acknowledge the very good work that has been done by this Labor government since it was first elected in 2007 in terms of the very broad pension reform that has taken place.

These are not easy matters to deal with. When we start looking at pension reform and the underlying cost to the federal budget, it is quite substantial. I can understand why governments in the past have always been very reluctant to move in these particular areas. I am sure this was the case in the Howard government years, where there would have been some will. I acknowledge that all governments of all persuasions would have truly wanted to make those big changes and reforms. But I think that, faced with the costs, and when they realised just how significant that cost of reform was, they got cold feet. It is probably the nicest way I could say it, rather than say that there was inaction or that the previous government in its 12 years in office did not want to do that. I do not believe that for a moment; I think they did want to do some reform.

I think it was a missed opportunity because they were good years. They were the years when the rivers of gold flowing into Canberra were quite commonly spoken about. The economy was thriving and there was all that opportunity—the best time to make those significant reforms. It did not happen, but that is okay. When we were elected in 2007 we made it a first order of priority for us, as a Labor government, to actually make these changes happen. I note that the member for Lyons said that these are the biggest reforms in 100 years. I have not done my research back that far, but I will take it on his word.

Mr Adams—Take it on my word!

Mr RIPOLL—I will take it on the member for Lyons's word that these are the biggest reforms in 100 years. I have been out in the community saying that at the very least they are the most significant reforms in terms of retirement incomes and pensions in at least three decades. They are very significant.

We took on board the view that at some point in time a government must step up to the plate and make these significant changes. The cost, while it is significant—and it is not something that should be looked at lightly—is something I see as an investment in the future of this country. In some small way it is a repayment for the years of service that many people now in their older years made to this country in a time when superannuation did not exist for them unless they were in a very few privileged positions either in the Commonwealth Public Service or, perhaps, in the military. It is quite significant. I will just place on the record the cost to the budget—it is about \$5 billion a year and about \$20 billion over the forward estimates. As I said, it is a good investment in the people of Australia

We went further, though; it was not just about a dollar amount increase, important as that was. It was also about indexation and about making sure that, whatever the rate was for pensioner incomes, that was matched to what was happening in reality: when they went shopping, had to pay their bills or had to meet any of the bills like those that everybody else has in their lives. It is also significant to say on indexation that the two indexes that we use, the CPI, the consumer price index, and the MTAW, the male total average weekly earnings, were not sufficient indexes to give a true reflection of the cost of living for pensioners. So we set about not only fixing the indexation issue in terms of the timing and how much was actually indexed but also creating a new index, which is the pensioner and beneficiary living cost index, the PBLCI. These are the appropriate three indexes to use for pensioners. With those three now in place, they truly reflect the real indexation needed and the cost of living that pensioners and others who receive some sort of other payment have.

I think there could be no further evidence than the last three increases. When we look at the last three times that these pensions were indexed, two of those three times used the pensioner and beneficiary living cost index. I will just put on the record how much of a significant difference there is. We can look at the highest percentage of price increase, in the area of food—which I would say represents the largest percentage of cost to any pensioner. It went up 20.55 per cent as compared to using the CPI, which was 15½ per cent. So it is a significant increase in difference.

The other most significant area was household contents and services, which increased under the PBLCI by 10.2 per cent, compared to the CPI, the consumer price index, at 9.6 per cent. Then, in descending order, health, clothing and footwear and communication were at substantially lower and closer indexes.

This means that this Labor government has taken on board the real issue of raising, once and for all, the base that pensioners get and the supplements, not playing games with the supplements as bonuses or treating them as some sort of small windfall every once in a while—particularly before elections—but actually setting them in concrete. It has the two pillars of pension income: a base rate, which was substantially lifted, and the supplements rates, which was substantially lifted. Then the total package—those two bases that form what pensioners receive—has been linked to proper indexation with the three indexes, taking whichever is highest. I think that those substantial reforms are quite well understood out in the community and have made an enormous change. What that represents today for people receiving pensions is that if they are single and on the pension they receive \$716.10 per fortnight, and couples receive a combined \$1,079.60 per fortnight. It is a lot of money, and at the same time it is barely enough.

From a federal government perspective, we want to make sure that pensioners do not end up being on the poverty line as a result of poor indexation or poor structures within the pension system. Where this kicks in hard is particularly for those people who are a pensioner, receiving some sort of pension, and who also have to pay public rent through a rental scheme where those rents are then increased by the states and territories in line with CPI. I can understand the requirements of states to keep pace with costs associated with that rental accommodation, but it is important that that does not have a bracket creep effect and minimise the increases that pensioners actually receive. I know that the minister is doing a very good job in this area and has written to the states and territories, asking them to become part of what we are trying to do for pensioners—that is, to raise their amount of their disposable income and to give them a little bit extra in their pockets at the end of the fortnight. We ask them to partner with us to make a commitment to ensure that they either quarantine the rental portion of their increases or that there is some sort of agreement about making sure that we do not have a bracket creep type scenario. I look forward to a positive working relationship with the states and territories in this particular area.

I also want to take the opportunity to say another thing about pensions more generally, and that is that there is great fear in the community that, at some point in time, a government—any government—might take away the pension. I assure all those either listening to or reading this that it certainly will not come from this side of government and it will not come from the other side of government either. In all fairness to everybody in this place, I think we all support and would protect the pension for everything that it does for people. But there are some

things to acknowledge, including the ageing population. The fact is that by 2050 there will be twice as many 65-year-olds, and half as many people in the workforce for every one of them to actually fund those, and four times as many 85-year-olds—some significant issues. With the lifting of the pension age, we need to look at increasing the ability and flexibility for people of retirement age to continue to work or to continue to provide for their own retirement, and ensure that the superannuation system also matches what we are trying to do in those areas, through lifting the superannuation guarantee from nine to 12 per cent. In all, this motion represents an acknowledgement of the continuing good work that has been done by this government but also an acknowledgement that we need partners in the states and territories to assist us. (*Time expired*)

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (12.31 pm)—I am delighted to speak to this motion put forward by Mr Adams, the member for Lyons. I may not agree with all the elements of the motion and some of the assertions it contains; however, the general sentiment of support for pensioners is an absolute verity. In relation to that, I want to set out three issues today. I want to, firstly, look at the role, status and position of pensioners within the seat of Flinders, which has the fifth oldest demographic in Australia of the 150 seats in the Commonwealth parliament; secondly, look at the great national trend of our ageing population; and, thirdly, address one of the specific elements contained in this motion, and that is the assault on electricity pricing which will drive up the price of power for pensioners within Flinders, within Victoria and within Australia more generally in such a way that it is a regressive taxation measure which hurts the poorest but leaves the wealthiest in our country largely free of any significant impact.

Let me deal first with pensioners in the electorate of Flinders. The latest figures that we have are that within the electorate of Flinders there are over 24½ thousand people beyond the age of 65. This demographic represents 26 per cent of the total number of voters enrolled in Flinders. The numbers of those on various forms of pension or income support are in the space of 20,000. So there are a very significant number of people who receive support, assistance or help from the government in some way, having given a lifetime of service and work to the country, the state and the electorate. We have a profound social responsibility to deal with the needs of pensioners and we have a critical economic duty to ensure that we do not have a society which is divided in such a way that there is extraordinary dependency.

There are two great issues for the pensioners of Flinders. For future pensioners, it is about ensuring that there is a superannuation system that gives them an opportunity that we therefore provision in ways which will ensure that they have guarantees, but not in a way which destroys the economic base of our society as we go. The other issue is for current pensioners. There are many members on both sides of this House who have worked towards trying to boost the standing of and support for the seniors community. Seniors need two things. They need to have an adequate living basis—what is sometimes called a living wage—so the pension needs to address their basic needs and their ability to prosper; and this needs to be coupled with rules that will provide incentives but not penalties for additional work to supplement the pension, so they can have a meal out or purchase presents for the grandchildren and they can take some time for themselves. It should not be a subsistence lifestyle which is mandated. With the basics that are provided, there should be an opportunity and incentive there for those who can acquire additional income to work and to have that choice without incur-

ring a penalty. That is of fundamental importance to the pensioners of Rye, Rosebud, Dromana, McCrae, Blairgowrie, Hastings, Somerville, Mount Martha and so many other parts of the Mornington Peninsula, not to mention the extraordinary population on Phillip Island in Cowes, Rhyll, Newhaven and Ventnor. All of those towns along the surf beach and nearby San Remo have very high numbers of seniors, as do Corinella and Coronet Bay. These towns rely on their seniors—they are the backbone of their society—so we need to do all that we can to help them.

At the national level we are witnessing an ageing society, so we need to have a balance between immigration and population growth, but it has to be a sustainable population. I remember putting this argument forward in the *Australian* in April and being criticised by many in the Labor Party—before they adopted it as a theme in the last election. I am not saying that is causation, but it is interesting that the ALP attacked what was, I think, a fairly non-controversial idea, particularly when it subsequently proved to be the basis of one of their election platforms.

That brings me to the third issue, that of power pricing. Today we see that there is a plan, proposal or idea that the government is putting forward which will drive power prices higher for pensioners. This will be most significant for pensioners because it is a regressive form of taxation.

We see that the emissions trading scheme and the carbon tax—they are different sides of the same coin—operate primarily by using electricity prices as the principal lever. This works by taxing the entire economy. Whether you fix the volume of emissions under an emissions trading scheme but keep the price fluid or you fix the price but keep the volume fluid under a carbon tax, either will drive up electricity prices dramatically.

Let us take not just my views on this but those found in official government documentation. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of New South Wales made provision for the impact of the government's emissions trading scheme on electricity prices. The tribunal said that without an ETS electricity prices would be allowed to rise over a three-year period by approximately 35 per cent. That is an enormous impact as it is. With an emissions trading scheme—or, by extension, under a carbon tax—the additional impact would be a further 25 per cent. That would take the total increase in electricity prices over three years to 60 per cent. That additional 60 per cent represents an extraordinary component of the income stream available to pensioners on limited resources. More significantly, it comes on top of what the IPA has recently found to be a 60 per cent increase in electricity prices to date.

I am a passionate advocate of genuine action on climate change such as cleaning up and converting power stations, including Hazelwood and Yallourn in Victoria—the brown coal power stations—from coal to gas on a competitive incentives basis. But this mechanism neither cleans up the power stations nor offers equity to pensioners. So we see that, under the New South Wales modelling, a 60 per cent increase to date will be met with a further 60 per cent increase in power prices. The result, of course, is that it does not have any significant impact on Australia's emissions. How do we know this? Because we have had a test run with a 60 per cent increase to date, and that has not had a major impact on electricity consumption, because electricity is an essential service. That is the point: electricity is an essential service. If you tax an essential service for which there is no ready alternative you will see a minimal impact on consumption of that inelastic good but a major substitution effect on the individuals

who have been hurt. They will not be able to buy schoolbooks for their grandchildren or swimming lessons for their grandchildren. They will not be able to go out to the cinema or a restaurant. It produces enormous pain without necessarily producing the intended outcome.

We think there is a better way for pensioners—that is, provide incentives to reduce emissions through a carbon buyback form of direct action. Let us clean up the power stations and do other things such as cleaning up our farms by providing incentives that will reduce emissions directly. All of this stands in stark contrast to a 60 per cent increase in electricity prices to date and a further 60 per cent increase in electricity prices as outlined and proposed by the government under its emissions trading scheme. (*Time expired*)

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (12.41 pm)—Madam Deputy Speaker Livermore, congratulations on your first time in the chair. The member for Flinders has been doing what he does best, which is to spend most of his time replicating the same speech and scaremongering. He has been doing it now for some time. He is trying to scare the pants off age pensioners by confusing what is going on in the states now—their electricity systems, supplies and costs—with a proposed, potential, emissions scheme that has not even come into being. That is the type of talk he goes on with to scare pensioners. Yet he refuses to recognise the record of a decade or more of neglect of pensioners in this place by the Howard government.

While I was sitting here, I thought about what this government has sought to do to assist the aged in our community, particularly age pensioners. All superannuation reforms of any merit, note or structural change have been brought about by Labor governments. Those on the other side said, ‘These are important reforms.’ The pension reforms introduced in 2009 were introduced under Labor; the other mob did nothing for 10 years. These were the most significant reforms since 1909. This government has put record amounts of investment into affordable housing of all types, not just into the stock itself but into trying to increase access to it. That is our record, but all we hear from the other side is the broken record of some potential power increases confused with a potential energy and emissions scheme. We have had the other mob trying to scare the pants off pensioners. They never did anything of note to assist pensioners but they come in here with their unctuousness and criticise us. I think it is bit rich of the member for Flinders—and I half suspect that he does not even believe what he is saying anyway, frankly, and nor do most of those on the other side.

To return to the positive: I thank the member for Lyons for raising this issue. We all, in our electorate offices, experience phone calls from pensioners telling us that, when they get a much-needed pension increase—never enough, and it will not be—state instrumentalities try to increase and in some instances succeed in increasing the rental charges for their housing stock, including for pensioners. What we are saying is: fair’s fair. We insist that there be a moratorium on increasing rental costs every time there is a pension increase. We do not believe it is fair.

But that is not the only thing that affects pensioners—and we have to put the facts on the record; we cannot hide from them. These are just some of the issues raised by pensioners in my office: the rent increases in public housing with every pension increase; the increase in the cost of living—grocery and petrol price increases et cetera—which we try to take into account with the three indexation methods that we use; the cost of medicines not on the PBS, which is a constant; the fact that the Medicare scheduled rebate for medical services does not increase with increases in the cost of services of health providers—for example, pathology; and, of

course, the issue of electricity cost increases, which should not be confused with a yet to be brought in emissions trading scheme. So there we have it.

As is the case for the member for Flinders, my electorate has one of the highest proportions of aged persons in Australia. In fact, it has the highest proportion in Tasmania. When you look at the issue of pensions nationally, it is pretty scary. We had to carry out a massive reform of the pension system in order to put it on a sustainable footing and we have done that. Whether that reform is enough will be an issue we will need to resolve by our advocacy and by continual monitoring.

Just for the record, the age pension was first paid in 1909, and the Commonwealth spends more on the program than on any other specific-purpose program. The Australian government spends around \$20 billion per annum on our aged population. It is also important that the figures are put into context. By 2047 it is estimated that some 7.2 million Australians will be aged 65-plus. That will represent 25 per cent of the expected population, which is almost double the current 13 percent. So unless we act—and we did, and we need to continue to do so—the financial pressure on this nation will be extraordinary.

Currently there are around five people of working age to support every person aged 65 and over, and this figure will be halved to 2.4 people by 2047. That has incredible implications socially and economically. Increasing longevity, whilst good in the main in a personal sense, means that people are receiving the age pension for far longer than in the present, and demographic change means that the cost of a given pension increase today will almost double as a share of gross domestic product by 2050. So we needed to act, and we did act. In addition to the measures I mentioned earlier, I would point out that in 2008 pensioners—and others—also received benefit from the economic stimulus to assist them to adjust to the increasing pressures of the financial crisis. So we have a good record and one that the government should be proud of. People should not be affected by the scaremongering of the member for Flinders.

Just recently more than four million Australians received a rise in their pensions and other income support payments and allowances due to indexation. Amongst these were two million aged-care payment recipients—and in my electorate alone there are some 13,170 aged-care payment recipients. For the record, pension payments increased by \$15 per fortnight for singles on the maximum rate and \$22.60 per fortnight for couples combined on the maximum rate. Following these increases, total pension payments for those on the maximum rate, including the base rate and pensions supplement, is \$716.10 per fortnight for singles and \$1,079.60 per fortnight for couples combined.

The September pension rise was, as other members have pointed out, due to an increase in the pensioner and beneficiary living cost index in the six months to June 2010, and it is worth noting that pensions are indexed twice a year to the highest increase of three measures: the consumer price index, the pensioner and beneficiary living cost index and the male total average weekly earnings. The pensioner and beneficiary living cost index was introduced as an additional index mechanism as part of our 2009 pension reforms. It takes into account a basket of goods pensioners buy to help maintain pensioners' purchasing power. The basket of goods is weighted to recognise that pensioners spend more of their income on essentials including food, health, clothing, telephone calls and post. Out of interest, the pension has been indexed to the PBLCI at two of the last three indexation points, demonstrating the success of this additional indexation mechanism at better reflecting pensioners' actual increases.

So the federal government sought to assist pensioners and we did so. We made it part of our commitment from 2007. We introduced and carried out our reforms in 2009—indeed, I spoke in June 2009 supporting those pension increases. We have sought to reform superannuation, we have tried to increase massive investment in affordable housing and we have supported pensioners through the economic stimulus. There is much more to do and we ask the state governments and territories to do their bit by not hiking up rental affordability for housing once the pension rate increases. (*Time expired*)

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (12.51 pm)—I congratulate the member for Lyons on his motion. In Forde we have a large number of retirees, and their questions and concerns to me are very much along the lines of what the other members have spoken about here today. So I have no concerns with the raising of the issue; much more work needs to be done in this area. It is important to note that a recent report from Mercer, an Australian centre for financial studies—which ranks pension systems based on adequacy, sustainability and integrity—rates our pension system as still the fourth best in the world.

The report notes that the provision of financial security in retirement is critical for both individuals and societies, as most countries—as has been acknowledged here today—grapple with the social and economic effects of ageing populations. The question that then needs to be asked is: what part of that retirement income is going to be funded by governments and how much is going to be funded privately? It is necessary for governments at present to fund a significant component of a retiree's income as the superannuation system is a relatively recent alternative, with certain exceptions. We have not really started to see the long-term benefit of that.

The ability of people to save for retirement, or for those in retirement to have their income keep pace with rising living costs, is an increasingly difficult problem, both from the perspective that a lot of people are not contributing themselves and from the perspective that the government does not have the ability to constantly increase pensions to keep pace with living costs. In my view, it is not appreciated that this problem is in part or largely created by government monetary and economic policies. For governments to constantly increase pensions to keep pace with cost-of-living or rent increases they have to do one of two things: either increase their taxes, which is a primary source of revenue, or go further into deficit to solve those issues. Those two issues are important in discussing pension increases. The reason for that is that the increase in supply of money is a true indicator of what inflation really is. If inflation is the increase in the supply of money, the CPI or other measures are only really a measure of those effects of inflation. It is therefore necessary to identify the true causes of this issue for pensioners struggling to maintain their lifestyle.

It not only applies to pensioners but also applies to families in relation to housing affordability. We have talked about rental affordability for pensioners. It also applies to families. It also applies to governments in trying to rein in or manage the costs of building infrastructure or maintaining health and education systems. The problem is not only local but also global. We have however been somewhat insulated in Australia due to the previous coalition government running budget surpluses and accumulating capital. We have also had a robust banking system, although it still has its concerns as well. Therefore, until governments are prepared to deal with those underlying fundamental issues of those massive increases in costs based on an increasing supply of money, we are not going to deal with the issues of keeping pace with the

costs of living. In addition, if governments are going to continue to increase their deficits or their spending to fund these increased pension payments, we will have an ongoing problem because deficits by their nature create more money in the system and that creates that inflationary problem. So it becomes a cycle of the dog chasing its tail.

Seeking to pass this problem off to the state governments, as the motion proposes, is not the solution, because the state governments are suffering from the same issues. It is an acknowledgment by the federal government that they either do not understand the cause of the problem or, if they do understand, have no desire to really fix the problem. They would rather pass it off to someone else.

Pensioners are facing issues on a number of fronts. This is irrespective of whether they are solely reliant on the age pension, receive a part age pension and some investment or private pension income or are fully self-funded retirees. They are facing increasing electricity prices, in part as a result of chasing expansive green power as an offset to the supposed man-made climate change problem. They are facing increased local government rates, fees and charges as local governments struggle to deal with issues of keeping pace with infrastructure and the stuff they have to do. They are facing increased water prices as councils seek to recoup the costs of massive capital expenditure incurred in seeking to drought-proof towns and cities. That is a particularly relevant discussion in Forde and Queensland. They are facing increased food and grocery costs as businesses seek to pass on the increasing costs they face due to increasing input costs, including electricity, raw materials, interest rates, wages, rents et cetera.

The member's motion seeks to link the state increases in rents and power costs with any rises in pension payments to limit state increases in rents in particular. This is also applicable to residents in nursing homes and retirement villages, where they determine fees on a percentage of the age pension received. It is also far-fetched to accuse utility companies—in this case, electricity companies—of increasing power costs as a result of pension increases. The motion seeks to pass the buck to the states for the federal government's inability to manage its finances in a manner that maintains downward pressure on inflation and therefore cost-of-living increases. Pensioners do risk becoming impoverished, however—not through the actions of the state and territory governments but through the actions of the federal government and its management of finances, as noted previously. In order to deal with these issues on a long-term basis we need to encourage those currently in the workforce to save more for retirement via the superannuation system.

Whilst a number of speakers have mentioned the need to deal with that as well, the current government has recently reduced contribution limits, so it is reducing the incentive for people to save. It is also a longer term issue, because the superannuation system has not been in place long enough to see the flow-through effects of that savings capacity. There was a report in today's media saying that a lot of people and even businesses do not fully understand our superannuation system. So we need to do a lot more work to educate them to accumulate that capital that is necessary for them to fund an adequate retirement. As all members here have touched on, the ageing population problem is going to result in a continuing greater impost on governments if we do not start to accumulate a larger level of funds through our superannuation system.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Surf Life Saving Australia

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mr Lyons**:

That this House:

- (1) acknowledges and congratulates the over 153 000 volunteer members and staff of Surf Life Saving Australia;
- (2) notes that:
 - (a) Surf Life Saving Australia faces many challenges in looking after the nation's largest and most popular playground, our beaches, with over 100 million beach visitations each year; and
 - (b) in its 103 years of service, Surf Life Saving Australia is defying trends by increasing volunteer numbers, which is a great reflection of an organisation strongly connected to unique Aussie lifestyle, culture and adaptability;
- (3) supports Surf Life Saving Australia's efforts in advocating for nationally consistent standards for coastal safety services, systems and signage;
- (4) acknowledges Surf Life Saving Australia's international aid and development programs in 25 countries, mainly in the Asia Pacific region, playing its part in showcasing the nation's global goodwill; and
- (5) supports the establishment of bi-partisan 'Friends of Surf Life Saving' amongst Members of Parliament and Senators, providing the opportunity for Surf Life Saving Australia to keep the country's leaders informed about the humanitarian, social and economic value of Surf Life Saving Australia to the Australian community.

Mr LYONS (Bass) (1.01 pm)—Madam Deputy Speaker Livermore, I acknowledge that this is your first time in the chair and I congratulate you on that appointment. It was with great pleasure that I moved this motion. I am actively involved in surf-lifesaving and have been lucky enough to have assisted in running state, national and international events for surf-lifesaving. Surf-lifesaving has been a large part of my life, providing me with the opportunity to serve as a club secretary at 17 and a club captain at 18 and to have continuous membership since.

Surf-lifesaving experienced continued growth in 2009-10, with a two per cent increase in membership, to just over 153,000 members nationally. Significantly, there were growths in male, female and junior memberships, indicating the growing popularity of surf-lifesaving throughout all demographics. On the beach, surf-lifesaving clubs and the support operations once again performed their service with outstanding success. Surf-lifesavers and Surf Life Saving Australia lifeguards performed an impressive 11,912 rescues and 53,799 cases of first aid and undertook 658,397 preventative actions in 2009-10, exemplifying the challenging role they face in keeping Australia's largest and most popular playground—our beaches—the safest in the world. The training by surf-lifesaving club members around the country for nippers and juniors provides risk management for Australia's future.

Surf Life Saving Australia's service to the Australian people is not without personal risk. In March 2010, Saxon Bird, of Queenscliff Surf Life Saving Club, tragically passed away while competing at the Australian Surf Life Saving Championships on the Gold Coast. Saxon was an extremely talented athlete and a committed surf-lifesaver who represented the very best of

what the surf-lifesaving movement is about. Our thoughts will always remain with Saxon's family and friends and the Queenscliff Surf Life Saving Club.

Competition in surf-lifesaving is one method of developing the skills needed when surf-lifesavers put their lives on the line in the service of others to ensure the safest environment for every man, woman and child that uses our wonderful beaches for recreational purposes. Surf Life Saving Australia has continued to fulfil its role as the peak body for coastal safety in Australia, contributing to a wide range of government reviews on matters as diverse as water safety, emergency management, volunteerism and climate change. It also maintained our standing as a world leader in coastal safety, both through the International Life Saving Federation and directly with many national lifesaving federations around the world.

Surf Life Saving Australia's contribution to international lifesaving and global drowning prevention continued during 2009-10 with the rollout of several aid programs, primarily in the Asia-Pacific region, thanks to the valued support of the Kevin Weldon AM international aid program. Currently there is some level of Surf Life Saving Australia activity or aid being delivered in 25 countries. Surf Life Saving Australia has adopted a more coordinated approach to its aid programs. This will give greater justification and substance to the aid provided and will look at the future sustainability of these programs. Surf Life Saving Australia has been selected to host the World Lifesaving Championships in Adelaide in 2012 and in the 2009-10 period saw a comprehensive plan developed to deliver this event for the International Life Saving Federation.

The Australian government has continued to be a major supporter of Surf Life Saving Australia's core business, with increased funding throughout the year. As reported in the last annual report, Surf Life Saving Australia was the recipient of a \$4.4 million grant from the government to fund a significant portion of their new information and communications technology system. This technology, once the project is finalised, will have a significant effect on the organisation's delivery of services. The government's support of water safety initiatives continued via the recreation and safety program as well as the Saving Lives in the Water program. These significant funds are vital to the service that Surf Life Saving Australia provides. In the 2010 federal government budget, the government announced a significant injection of funds into Australian sport. As a result, Surf Life Saving Australia, like many other sporting bodies, was asked to lodge a submission to the Australian Sports Commission, requesting access to some of these additional resources to support the growth of sport.

In 2010 the *National coastal safety report* identified that in 2009-10 there were 82 coastal drownings in Australia, below the past five-year average of 88 and a welcome trend reversal from the previous two years. Surf Life Saving Australia acknowledges that there is a lot more to do to achieve the goal of halving drowning deaths by 2020. Surf Life Saving Australia should be congratulated for its efforts to advocate for nationally consistent standards for coastal safety services, systems and signage.

Forty-nine per cent of drownings during 2009-10 occurred over 50 km from the place of residence of the drowning victim and this indicates that unfamiliarity with local conditions was a cause. Additionally, five people, or six per cent of the victims, were confirmed as being international tourists and 32 per cent were confirmed as having foreign ethnicity. The call of Surf Life Saving Australia for national standards should be supported by all states and territories and the federal government. Whilst Surf Lifesaving Australia's magnificent activities in

patrolling our beaches and protecting Australians should be acknowledged and lauded by members of this House, there is more we, as elected members of this place, can offer Surf Life Saving Australia. The establishment of a bipartisan Friends of Surf Life Saving among MPs and senators would provide the opportunity to keep members of parliament and senators informed about the humanitarian, social and economic value of Surf Life Saving Australia to the Australian community.

There are a number of members in this place and in the Senate who have been or who are currently involved in surf life saving clubs and activities. I look forward to being involved, together with other members and senators, in establishing the Friends of Surf Life Saving. It is with immense pleasure and pride that I commend the motion to the House.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (1.08 pm)—Madam Deputy Speaker Livermore, I join with the member for Bass in recognising your new role as a deputy speaker and wish you well in that role. I am pleased to join the debate today on the motion put forward by the member for Bass on surf-lifesaving. In doing so, I acknowledge that the member for Bass is a life member of both Surf Life Saving Tasmania and Surf Life Saving Australia. His modesty prevented him from telling us that. I understand you do not get that in a box of NutriGrain. I believe the member has served his community and served the surf-lifesaving movement with great distinction over a period of many years. I commend the member for his dedication to what I believe is one of the most worthy causes in the Australian community. In doing so I also congratulate him on his win at the recent election; he had a very strong result.

My personal involvement in the surf-lifesaving movement is far more modest. I have been involved for the past five years in my children's nippers program. This year all four of my children are enrolled in the nippers program at the Lakes Entrance Surf Life Saving Club and I will continue my role as a bronze medallion holder and water safety officer. It goes without saying that without the volunteer parents to support our young nippers on the beach the program would collapse, but at Lakes Entrance we have more than 100 nippers taking to the beach every weekend and the parents do a magnificent job. Some of us have had to rediscover the ability to swim as water safety officers in order to support the nippers and sometimes you wonder whether the kids will save us or we will save them. Having said that, we do take safety very seriously and there have not been any problems in recent years.

The importance of the surf-lifesaving movement flows beyond the safety issues on our beaches raised by the member for Bass to the critical role of surf-lifesaving in the local economy of many regional communities. Without patrolled beaches, the tourism industry would collapse in many parts of regional Victoria. Parents demand that when they come for a beachside holiday their children are safe. The provision of a patrolled beach is of critical importance to towns like mine, Lakes Entrance, and also to other beaches which are patrolled in East Gippsland at Seaspray and Woodside.

It would be remiss of me today in the nature of this motion not to reflect on some efforts of some of the young people in my own community who quite recently were recognised with Pride of Australia nominations for outstanding bravery in their efforts to try and save two men who got into great difficulty on Ninety Mile Beach last summer. In doing so I would like to recognise some teenage boys who are members of our club, in Oden Shepherd, Connor Dostine, Lucas Webb and also an older gentleman of about my vintage who goes by the name of 'Surf Shack Phil'. He runs a surf supply business but his real name is Phil McEntee. Phil

and the three boys attempted the rescue of two people in quite atrocious conditions last summer on Ninety Mile Beach. Tragically they were not able to resuscitate one of the gentlemen, whom they were able to retrieve. The other fellow could not be located in the surf in the conditions of the day and he also died. But their bravery in the circumstances and the training they put into practice on that day was extraordinary. I commend all three of the young men and also Phil for their efforts on that day.

The member for Bass did touch on what is an important issue in the context of international visitors to our shores and the role the surf-lifesaving clubs play in helping to minimise the drowning risk as much as possible. It is also a significant issue for us with our migrant population. We have more and more people coming to our beaches during the summer season who do not necessarily have the background in understanding conditions and the capacity of beaches to change at a moment's notice. We need within our surf-lifesaving clubs to broaden our message to people of different cultures who may not necessarily have English as a first language and who may not necessarily recognise some of the symbols we have taken for granted as kids growing up on the beach. For example, the surf-lifesaving movement's important key message of swimming between the flags may not necessarily be understood by people from different cultural backgrounds. The Gold Coast deals with the issue well by using different languages on their signs. But in some of our regional communities we assume everyone understands what the flags are all about. It is a challenge for us to educate people in that regard and to make sure they understand the need not to enter the water alone, how to understand the surf conditions and the fact that the conditions may change quite dramatically.

I mentioned the role of young people in my own surf club at Lakes Entrance and it always amused me that the local police would say that the young people from the surf-lifesaving club have never caused any trouble. I do not know if that is because we work them so hard on the beach all day and they are that tired by the end of the day that they cannot get out and cause much mischief, but I would like to think it is more positive. They are learning a culture of community service and learning that they can have an important role in our community. As the member for Bass indicated, as a 17-or 18-year-old he was taking on senior roles in his own club with leadership responsibilities as secretary and as club captain. We have that today in Lakes Entrance where we have young people stepping up to the plate and taking on very senior roles within the organisation.

The young people are not only participating in community service but also participating in a healthy lifestyle and they are learning skills that will serve them well for the rest of their lives, whether it is learning how to use the surf craft and inflatable rescue boats or whether it is first aid or simple surf safety techniques. They are not only learning skills for life but also learning the importance of being a part of a team and of being a part of something that is bigger than themselves. They are able to look outside their own particular interests and work as part of a team to achieve great things in the community. One of the great things about the surf-lifesaving movement is what it does for young people in boosting their confidence and giving them the self-esteem they so desperately need to then take on other challenges outside the beach environment. I have no hesitation in saying that many of the Australian leaders of tomorrow are on our beaches now enrolled in nippers programs. It is that important to us.

My home club has been around for 50 years. I note that in the member's motion he reflects upon the fact that the surf-lifesaving movement is defying the trend of getting more members

involved. It is a similar experience in Gippsland where the Lakes Entrance club, the Woodside club, and the Seaspray club are all growing their memberships and getting a new breed of younger people involved. And it is not just in the nippers program; they are keeping youth involved in the 13- to 17- and 18-year-old mark, and it is often really difficult to keep those young people involved in the community. I think the surf club environment is a very healthy one and because it challenges kids it is managing to keep them involved for a lot longer. I think it is one of the great things about the surf-lifesaving movement.

The Lakes Entrance club in particular has had a lot to celebrate in recent years. In 2009 it was recognised as the Australian Surf-Lifesaving Club of the Year. It also hosted the Victorian junior titles in 2008 and both the senior and junior titles in 2010, and we are looking forward next summer to hosting both the senior and junior titles again on our beach in March. One day we aspire to perhaps host the Australian titles, and maybe with a bit of home beach advantage we may be able to pick up a few medals. It is always very difficult to win those medals at the Australian level.

The government, to its credit—and in particular I refer to the state government—this week is opening new facilities at the Lakes Entrance Surf Life Saving Club. A grant in the order of \$400,000 was given to help provide the second stage of the development of the clubhouse. Unfortunately, I will be here in parliament on that occasion, but I am sure that there will be time to celebrate with the members over the summer months.

I will not name the individuals who have been involved in that program because there is always a risk with surf-lifesaving clubs where there are so many people doing so much behind the scenes. But I will give genuine credit to the committee that has worked very hard to achieve that redevelopment and also the members who will be putting on their caps this summer and supporting not only their own children in the nippers program but also the touring public and the local residents who have come to expect safe beaches at Lakes Entrance and Seaspray and Woodside.

I think it is worth noting, in the time that I have left, that to the best of my knowledge there has never been a drowning on a beach in Victoria when a person has been swimming between the flags. I am almost positive that is a fact, and it is a very proud record that the surf-lifesaving movement has. The safest place to be on any beach is where our volunteers are patrolling. It is not just my club at Lakes Entrance; the Seaspray club and the Woodside club are also gearing up for a busy season. Even though we are only about an hour apart, there is a great spirit of competition, and the kids all compete quite fiercely. But at the end of the day there is a barbecue and the social environment and I think it is a really positive environment for young people to be in.

The plan that the member has put forward here for the establishment of a bipartisan Friends of Surf-Lifesaving association amongst members of parliament and senators is, I think, a great idea. I am not sure where the idea came from but, if it was the member for Bass's idea, I think it is a great idea and I congratulate you for that. I look forward to being a part of that association in the months and years ahead. Our surf-lifesaving volunteers right across our nation do such an extraordinary job. It is a task that is often dangerous—and you referred to the death of the young fellow at the Australian titles this year. While it is a task that can be dangerous, the members are always up to the challenge. When given the training and support by governments in terms of new facilities, new infrastructure and new equipment when required, I think it is

such an important task they fulfil. As governments, by supporting our surf-lifesaving clubs, we are also sending a very positive message to our young people again that their role in those clubs is valued—and that is something I will never argue against in this place; that is for sure. Any funding that can be made available to Surf Life Saving Australia and its member clubs, I think, will be unanimously supported on both sides of the House. So I congratulate the member on bringing the motion to the House. (*Time expired*)

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (1.18 pm)—I too rise in support of this motion today. Like the member for Bass, I too come from a coastal electorate where surf-lifesavers are the lifeblood of the community. I think it is also particularly fitting that we acknowledge the contribution of surf-lifesavers in the lead-up to summer when clubs are preparing for a busy beach season.

We are lucky here in Australia to have a magnificent coastline, great beaches, beautiful sand et cetera that we can enjoy and call, as we heard earlier, ‘our playground’. But that also means many thousands of kilometres of coastline for surf-lifesavers to patrol and hundreds of thousands of beachgoers who need to be kept safe and who may need assistance when they encounter a problem.

I would like to share with the House a surf-lifesaving story from my own electorate of Hindmarsh, an incident which happened at Henley Beach in November 2009. Henley Surf Life Saving Club is one of six different surf-lifesaving clubs in my electorate, which is bordered by the coast on its western side, stretching from Semaphore South right down to Somerton Park. It was on a warm November Saturday around lunchtime at Henley Beach in November 2009 that four of the Henley Surf Life Saving Club’s nippers, who were aged nine and ten at the time, spotted a woman struggling in the surf. Even though as nippers they had not yet begun learning official surf-lifesaving skills, they thought very quickly and went to help. Three of the boys managed to keep the woman afloat and her head above water while another went to shore for help. The woman was then attended to by senior surf-lifesavers and made a full recovery. The story was broadcast everywhere from the ABC to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Adelaide Advertiser* and the local papers. The nippers’ bravery and intelligence at such a young age is testament to the culture of Surf Life Saving Australia, and it reinforces the notion that everyone can be a contributor to water safety with a little bit of know-how.

This rescue at Henley Beach was just one of the thousands of rescues performed by surf-lifesavers across Australia. In the first half of 2010 surf-lifesavers performed 9,420 rescues. Each rescue, like the story I just told, was quite literally the saving of a life. Imagine if there had been no-one there to help on those 9,420 occasions. Unfortunately, not everyone was so lucky as to be among them. Surf Life Saving’s 2010 coastal safety report tells us that in 2009-10 there were 82 coastal drowning deaths in Australia. Eighty per cent of the victims were male and the most common time of the day was the late afternoon or early evening.

Around one-third of the deaths were of foreign citizens, so we know there is more work to do in terms of water safety for migrants and refugees, as well as short-term visitors from overseas. One of the most successful programs helping to address the problem of high risk among newly arrived migrants and refugees is the Department of Immigration and Citizenship’s program On the Same Wave, which has been run in partnership with Surf Life Saving Australia. The On the Same Wave program is aimed at culturally and linguistically diverse

communities, especially new arrivals, urging them to become surf-lifesavers and to learn surf safety. This program has been a great success in South Australia where communities have embraced the opportunity to participate in the program, and Surf Life Saving have been able to ensure maximum participation by making culturally appropriate adjustments to their program.

It is programs like these that now enable every Australian to participate in surf-lifesaving, whether it be through fundraising activities, joining a club, learning first aid or just swimming between the flags. The output of the organisation is astounding. In 2009-10 more than 1.3 million preventive actions were conducted by lifesavers. There were over 117,000 first aid cases, 21,622 rescues and 97 people resuscitated. Those 97 people would not be with us today if we did not have surf-lifesaving.

This is only possible through the strong membership of surf-lifesaving clubs around Australia. The number of which is growing every year, as we heard from the member for Bass. For several years now in my electorate Surf Life Saving Australia have been trying to secure funding to build new headquarters, Surf Central. Elaine Farmer and Shane Daw, the CEOs, have come up against several brick walls. Having lobbied very hard for months, I was extremely proud when the Gillard Labor government committed the necessary \$1.5 million to build the facility in my electorate. (*Time expired*)

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (1.23 pm)—Obviously five minutes is not long enough to talk about surf-lifesaving in Australia, as each member has found out to their own detriment. I commend the member for Bass for this motion. I also recognise his own record in surf-lifesaving. Having absolutely none myself but being a swimmer of some note in my own mind, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the surf-lifesaving community in my electorate, which I pay very careful attention to.

Having some 300 kilometres of coastline in my electorate and four surf-lifesaving clubs patrolling those beaches, conservatively close to 100,000 people come to enjoy the activities that our coastline has to offer at Waratah, Venus Bay, Cape Paterson and Inverloch.

Waratah Beach Surf Life Saving Club situated at Sandy Point overlooks the beautiful Wilsons Promontory, the prominent piece of land on the south coast of Australia to Tasmania. I think the member for Bass is my neighbour across the water. Of course, it is the most southerly surf-lifesaving club on the Australian mainland.

Venus Bay faces directly onto Bass Strait. Standing on the beach at Venus Bay you can see for miles in either direction. There for as far as you can see are kilometres of rolling and roaring surf.

I try to attend the AGM of the Cape Paterson Surf Life Saving Club each year. This group of people show such great honesty, dedication and interest. They are a good group of people. I endeavour every year to go to their annual meeting. This club has served the people of South Gippsland for many years. As you stand on the cliff face and look down you see the waves break evenly between two rocky outcrops. That view is enhanced by the sight of hundreds of families with boogie boards, flippers, umbrellas and the whole lot.

The most exciting development along our coast, however, is the building of the clubhouse for the Inverloch Surf Life Saving Club. Since its inception some years ago the club has operated out of three shipping containers situated in the car park at the surf beach. After years of

fundraising under the presidency of Mr Philippe du Plessis construction on the new purpose-built facility is expected to be completed prior to the busy summer period.

This club has 150 volunteers who patrol the surf beach at Inverloch, where it is estimated some 45,000 visitors come to enjoy their summer holidays. Most exciting is that there are 140 young people aged between six and 13 who are taught water awareness and swimming and who will form the basis of the next generation of surf-lifesavers. It is an absolute delight to see these little nippers early on a summer's morning on the beach, learning the skills they need to be in the club.

Mr du Plessis pointed out recently that the club has a volunteer group that performs many vital roles, including providing a safe beach environment and rescue services for the local community and visitors, as well as providing training and leadership skills for young people. I congratulate the club and its membership for the wonderful work they have done in providing this facility for the community. I would also like to extend my congratulations to the new president, Mr Alan Bolton, as he, along with other members of the executive Trevor Dando and Barry Hughes, take the club forward. Special wishes go to Nicholas Leman, the club captain, and instructors Chris and Angela Malan.

Australia is known worldwide and is the envy of the world for its image of sun and surf—which we all suffer from, as we have bits cut out of us when we get to this age. It is endowed with thousands of kilometres of coastline. The work that is done right across the country around our coastline is really important. In the building of the new surf-lifesaving club down at Inverloch the state government has put in some \$500,000. I think it is important that we recognise that state governments have a role to play here. The local government has also put in money. As the previous speaker mentioned, the federal government put in money. That must have been because of something about the electorate, because that does not happen in every electorate. I am sure the electorate of Bass did not get that amount of money thrown in to build a facility. If there is a chance where the federal government can have an input through the political process then I am not going to knock that. But basically the responsibility goes back to the community that supports the surf-lifesaving club. I have always said to my lifesaving clubs, 'If you are supported by Woolworths, Coles or Safeway then go back into Woolworths, Coles or Safeway and say, "I'm buying my stuff here because you support my lifesaving club."' (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Sitting suspended from 1.29 pm to 4.00 pm

CONDOLENCES

Hon. Kenneth Shaw Wriedt

Debate resumed from 20 October, on motion by **Ms Gillard**:

That the House record its deep regret at the death on 17 October 2010 of The Honourable Kenneth Shaw Wriedt, former federal minister and senator for Tasmania, and place on record its appreciation of his long and meritorious service, and tender its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (4.00 pm)—It may come as a surprise that someone like me from the other end of the continent, from a different era, from a differ-

ent chamber and from a different side of politics would seek to speak on the condolence motion for Ken Wriedt. Ken Wriedt was one of the people who helped me to establish an interest in federal politics—although I suspect unwittingly so. Ken Wriedt entered the Senate on 1 July 1968 as a senator for Tasmania. In 1972 he was elected to the Labor ministry, and Prime Minister Whitlam appointed him to be the Minister for Primary Industry. It would be fair to say that farmers were outraged by his appointment. He was a sailor-cum-insurance salesman, and he was appointed Minister for Agriculture. Farmers were used to having an agriculture minister who was steeped in the traditions of farming and probably a farmer himself. So to have someone coming completely from outside the industry and, what is more, a senator from Tasmania—in fact, he was the lowest ranked minister in that first ministry—certainly provided a shock to the farmers of Australia. It was seen as a snub by the Whitlam government to agriculture. It was seen as the beginning of a whole series of insults by the Whitlam government towards Australia's agricultural sector.

However, Ken Wriedt had a moderate temperament, he was personable and he won a lot of respect from Australia's farmers. He was seen to be easy to get on with. Indeed, his appointment became something of a model for Labor Party agriculture ministers in the future. He was undoubtedly a left-field choice but, because his term as agriculture minister was perceived to be somewhat successful from a political perspective, I think subsequent Labor appointments of agriculture minister have come out of the same mould. They have been people with whom farmers have been able to identify, and they used a strategy of saying, 'I stuck up for you in the cabinet, but all those city members would not back me and, therefore, I wasn't able to achieve everything that you would have wanted.'

In fact, one of his successors as an agriculture minister from the Labor Party once said to me—and I will not identify who it was—that it was always easier for Labor Party ministers for agriculture because no-one ever expected them to do anything. So if in fact nothing much happened there was a degree of forgiveness. He sympathised with me as an agriculture minister from which everything was expected because our side was expected to be friendly to farmers. On the other hand, he suggested that the position of industrial relations minister in the Labor government was perhaps a similar type of role. It is almost impossible to be a popular industrial relations minister if you are from the Labor Party because you are expected to achieve all sorts of things which you simply cannot deliver. I am not saying that Liberal industrial relations ministers were popular, but at least not much was expected of them, so there was not so much disappointment.

This was quite a turbulent era. The Whitlam era activated many people to join a political party or become politically active. Country Australians were outraged at the way they were treated by the Whitlam government, and they mobilised to protest that treatment. Many of them joined farm bodies and political parties. The National Farmers Federation became strong. There were farmers' rallies. The government itself hosted a major rural summit in Canberra.

Now I get to the story about how I actually got to know Ken Wriedt over subsequent years. I was one of the delegates invited to attend the rural summit in my role at the time as Australian president of the Rural Youth Organisation. I made a contribution to that summit which attracted a lot of attention. Shortly thereafter Ken Wriedt appointed me to the National Rural Advisory Council, which was set up to provide advice to the government on matters affecting

agriculture. I think he did this for two reasons: firstly, he wanted there to be some people to give him some alternative advice to that of the National Farmers Federation so that there would be some independent thought coming forward and, secondly, he wanted to have a body that was seen to be independent to be able to back him when he was taking arguments to the federal cabinet to try to achieve some results for regional Australia.

I found the National Rural Advisory Council to be a really challenging experience. I was only about 25 years of age at the time. It taught me a lot about 'small p' politics in agriculture and the way in which the political system worked in Canberra. The opportunities that were given to me at that time to meet and to be involved with people certainly encouraged me to take an ongoing interest in primary industry affairs and then, ultimately, to have the privilege of being a member of this parliament.

Ken Wriedt's achievements in a relatively unpopular portfolio were recognised. He was quickly promoted through the Labor Party and became Leader of the Government in the Senate and then Leader of the Opposition in the Senate. I have no doubt that the way in which he handled what was perceived to be a difficult portfolio like agriculture led his colleagues to the view that this was a man who could rightly be trusted with more substantial responsibilities.

In his farewell speech to the Senate, Senator Wriedt commented about the loss of country seats and how that had in fact led to the demise of the Whitlam government. Indeed, in 1974 at the midterm election the seat of Wide Bay, which had been held by the Labor Party for quite a number of years by a very capable and well-liked local member, was lost. I am pleased to say that it has been lost permanently by Labor since that time. But there was a revolt within the rural and regional communities during the period of the Whitlam but Ken Wriedt always managed to maintain his respect, dignity and acceptance within the regional community.

In particular, he spoke about some of the decisions that were made during that time, such as the decision by the Whitlam government to abolish the super phosphate bounty. He let it be known that he considered the decision to be foolish and that it showed government insensitivity. He was also taken aback in September 1974 when Prime Minister Whitlam announced the devaluation of the currency without even telling him. As he was the agriculture minister, he could have obtained some political credit for something that would be seen as a major advantage. But it all happened without him knowing about it. At that stage, he was rising through the ranks of the party. He found some of those things quite difficult. But he made a significant contribution.

Later, he decided that he would seek a seat in the lower house. That was unsuccessful. But he then had eight years in the Tasmanian parliament. Among his achievements in agriculture he named the reserve price for wool. Some look back on that critically now, but there is no doubt that at that time it was well received by the industry. He also presided over the end of support for butter production. That was somewhat more controversial, bearing in mind that the reason why support was provided for butter production in Australia was that the UK had entered the Common Market and refused to take any more of Australia's butter. So there was a crisis way beyond anything that the industry had ever seen before or since that had to be addressed.

I join today in paying tribute to Senator Ken Wriedt and his contribution, particularly his contribution to agriculture. I extend my sympathy to his family. His wife predeceased him by only a few weeks. His two daughters will grieve their father and recognise the political con-

tribution that he made in their lives and mine. I acknowledge the privilege of having met and worked with him in that period between 1972 and 1975.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (4.10 pm)—I thank the Leader of the National Party for his good words. Ken Shaw Wriedt died peacefully on 18 October 2010 at a Hobart private hospital with his daughters by his side. His wife of 51 years, Helga, died a month previously, which saddened him greatly, as they had been close all their married lives. Helga was a very large, outgoing lady who was always joyful as I remember her. He is survived by his two daughters, Paula and Sonja; his son-in-law Damien; and his grandchildren, Jack, Ella, Damien and Amy. He was 83 years old.

Ken was born 11 July 1927 in Fitzroy in Melbourne. He joined the merchant navy after leaving school at the age of 16. His father was a fitter and turner on the left-wing side of politics. As an apprentice seaman and later ship's officer he worked on iron ore and phosphate carriers—which is a bit ironic—among others, travelling the world as well as serving coastal routes. He learnt a lot in his travels and that prepared him well for his turbulent life in politics. He enjoyed the sea and sailing all through his life and was passionate about maritime history. He spent time contributing to the Tasmanian and Sydney maritime museums. He was a life member of the Sydney Maritime Museum and a life member of the Maritime Museum of Tasmania. He was also a life member of the Vintage Boat Club of Tasmania and vice-president of the Bellerive Regatta Association. I remember his fishing boat, which was converted to a river boat in which he sailed the Derwent. He enjoyed his boats and the sea. He did all sorts of sailing in boats.

I remember great debates at Labor Party conferences between him and Justin O'Byrne, another senator from Tasmania who went on to become President of the Senate and who was a great friend of a mentor of mine, Leo Brown. It was two sides of the Labor conference tit-for-tattling, with Ken on one side and Justin on the other, with the young members of the Labor Party such as me listening intently to the great battles of minds as they tried to win arguments at Labor conferences—that usually comes down to the numbers.

He met his good wife, Helga, in Hobart. She was a migrant who had endured Hitler's Germany. Ken had established himself as an insurance inspector in Hobart. The couple married on 26 December 1959 and settled on the eastern shore at Howrah.

Ken's political life was long and eventful. He joined the ALP in 1959 and soon became secretary of his local branch. He attempted to gain preselection in 1963 and 1964 for the seat of Franklin in the House of Assembly. He was finally preselected for the Senate elections in 1967 and when the Whitlam government was elected in December in 1972, Ken was appointed Minister for Primary Industry, later renamed Minister for Agriculture.

He was a good minister. I remember him opening the Longford Show, my local agricultural show in my hometown, where it had rained the week before, after a dry period. Ken claimed to be a good agricultural minister and that the rain had come when he was coming to open the show. Those were good times. Ken was well respected in agriculture in Tasmania because he listened and he tried to achieve things. In his first speech, Ken declaimed:

We cannot achieve perfection, we cannot change the course of history just as we would like, but we must constantly be mindful of the ideals and the hopes of those who have sent us here.

That can still be a timely reminder for us all as we try and do our best in this place because we have the responsibility of representing our constituents. Ken was a very decent and fair man.

On 14 October 1975, Rex Connor was obliged to resign as Minister for Minerals and Energy as a result of the loans affair, and Ken Wriedt was appointed in his place. Later he was elected as Leader of the Government in the Senate during the Whitlam term of government, and he was in that position in the Senate, attempting to pass appropriation bills for the government, when Prime Minister Gough Whitlam was sacked. He was to play a part in that historical event. If he had been aware of what was going on in the other house he may have been in a position to delay the bills when the Liberal senators came back and supported those appropriation bills through the Senate. But that was not to be. So he lost his position as Leader of the Government in the Senate and became Leader of the Opposition in the Senate within a few minutes.

Then, of course, there was a disastrous election for the Labor Party. The whole media in this country turned against the Whitlam government very unfairly after the government was dismissed on 11 November 1975. Ken was returned and won the position of Leader of the Opposition in the Senate. Really he was against Whitlam's preferred candidate. By that time, he was having some differences of opinion with Gough. Wriedt remained in the Senate until his resignation in September 1980.

Politics were still very much a part of his life, and, although he became Chairman of the State Grants Commission and was a member of the state executive of the Bicentennial Authority, he decided to contest Franklin after losing a stint at the federal seat of Denison. In the 1982 state election, he won a seat. That was the election in which I lost a seat in the state parliament. It was a pretty turbulent time in Tasmanian politics, with the Franklin River decisions about. It was a time of great change in Tasmania. The environment was becoming a big issue and, while Labor had attempted to take the middle line, the conservatives under Robin Gray beat Labor by taking a strong line in supporting the Hydro-Electric Commission to build another dam on either the Gordon River or the Franklin River.

Wriedt won a seat representing Franklin in the Tasmanian House of Assembly. While he polled strongly, Labor lost government and he became Leader of the Opposition from 1982 to 1986, when he lost the leadership because of internal issues within the party and took on the position of a member of the front bench. However, in 1989 he was part of the more incredible events of Tasmanian politics when Michael Field took government after an election and formed government with an accord with the Greens. Ken then became Minister for Roads and Transport from 1989 to 1990 in the minority government led by Michael Field. He resigned from parliament in October 1990 due to ill health. Ken continued to take a keen interest in politics and was always there to support his daughter Paula, who was elected to state parliament in 1996 and went on to serve as a minister in the Lennon government and then the Bartlett government.

He was well liked in the Senate and was held in high esteem, especially by new senators, whom he mentored through many sessions. Tasmanian Senator Michael Tate said of Ken during a speech he made at Ken's valedictory:

Wriedt is held in the very highest regard within the walls of this Parliament. His quality of calmness and his grasp of many subjects are also known to many outside; what is not known is how that calmness and

that confidence are constantly put at the disposal of other Senators and in particular, as I say, at the disposal of those fledgling senators who look to his leadership for the guidance he so generously gives.

I think that summed up Ken very well. He was keen. He was seen as a gentle, kind man by most who knew him, and it was only when he believed that an injustice was being done that he could become very scathing and very loud and earthy in his vocabulary. Ken was very approachable and was happy to help new members and new branch members in the ALP to understand the whys and wherefores of public office, and I know he mentored many in Tasmania.

In his later years, he suffered from Parkinson's disease but still liked to keep in touch with politics, and he still had a great love of the sea and anything maritime—and, of course, his beloved wife, Helga. I think her death hastened Ken's end. He led a full and eventful life and is still seen as very much a part of Tasmanian political history. He will be sadly missed by his family, his old colleagues and many others in the community and by those of us who knew him for a long period of time. I am sorry that the opposition has disallowed my pair for me to attend his funeral. I think it is a sign of ugliness and is very disrespectful to people. I do not think there are any political gains in it, just bloody-minded nonsense, and I think it reflects badly on the conservative parties of the House and the parliament. I would like to offer my deep sympathies to both Sonja and Paula and their families and say to them: your father was a truly good man. I will miss him and I know many Tasmanians will do so too.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (4.22 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the motion. Senator Ken Wriedt and my father were good mates, going back to their careers as senators. They continued their friendship long after their Senate careers, and indeed until very recent times made regular phone calls to each other. When the political history of the 1960s through to the 1990s is written, Ken Wriedt's name is going to be up there with the best of them. He was a big man, in every sense of the word. He was well-built, he was fine looking and indeed it was reported that Senator Ron McAuliffe, in those days, dubbed him 'Cary Grant without the horse'. That followed him throughout his career. But despite his presence he was an unpretentious man. As we have heard, he was quiet, unassuming, polite and courteous—and, present company excepted, I would think we would like those qualities to be among those of modern politicians, which those present have.

My father says of him that he was strong and persuasive in the presentation of his own case, but he was always tolerant and understanding of another person's view. He was a deeply spiritual man, as we have all heard, but in a very self-contained and thoughtful way, without the piousness or self-righteousness that that can often involve. He was good humoured and appreciated the humour of others. He learnt his values from his parents. His mother, as we have heard, was a teacher, who taught him the importance of education and learning; and his father was a fitter and turner, who taught him the importance of industry and people having a job but also the protection that organised labour could give workers. In that context he was brought up during the period of the Depression in Melbourne and saw what devastation unemployment could bring.

Ken won his Senate seat for the state of Tasmania in 1967. He took up that position on 1 July 1968 and he remained in the Senate until September 1980, until he went into state politics—and we have heard the former speakers speak of that. We have also heard of his maiden speech, which I will not recount, but the member for Lyons aptly referred to a passage that

spoke about his values and the obligations on members to represent the values of their constituents.

He was a keen sportsman. He loved cricket. Indeed, my father said that Senator Wriedt carried him in a regular match that he played, the Senate against the House of Representatives—invariably, Ken Wriedt and my father against Bill Hayden and Manfred Cross. Ken usually carried the day.

He became, as we heard, the Minister for Primary Industry in the Whitlam government. Despite the challenges of the period he was respected for the difficult issues that were in his portfolio at the time. After Lionel Murphy was appointed to the High Court in February 1975 he became Leader of the Government in the Senate, and indeed for a time my father served as his deputy leader.

Mention is made of the fact that Ken Wriedt, and indeed my father, as Manager of Government Business in the Senate at the time, were not advised of the fact that the Whitlam government had been dismissed, resulting in the Senate moving a resolution to guarantee supply to the Fraser government. As has been speculated, if notice of that dismissal had come through to Senator Wriedt and my father then perhaps that bill would not have been introduced, meaning that the then caretaker Prime Minister would conceivably have had to return to the Governor-General to advise that he was not able to guarantee supply, which had been a request, as history shows, of the Governor-General. But that is history, and history has of course moved on.

As has been mentioned, Ken Wriedt maintained a strong interest in politics even after his state career. I recall receiving a phone call from him shortly before the 2007 election. I had created some controversy, as one does from time to time, making comments with respect to capital punishment. I received a call, which I appreciated, from Ken, who in his very calm and analytical way went through the issues and persuaded me to proceed with my values and goals, and indeed in the last parliament the parliament unanimously supported legislation to prevent capital punishment from being reintroduced in a state or territory. I would like to think that Ken Wriedt, who encouraged me to do that, had some credit for that occurring.

My father has said—and I think he is absolutely right—that Senator Ken Wriedt made an enormous contribution to the Australian parliament and to the political life of the nation. He had an enormous wealth of natural experience: the horrors of Depression, his long service in the merchant marine as a seaman and also an officer—as we have heard—and his experiences as a sportsman and as a lover of fine music. He also had an amazing knowledge and understanding of humanity. As a people we are certainly lucky that Australia has had the benefit of that vast worldly experience in this parliament. On behalf of those who served him in Canberra, and on behalf of the present generation of parliamentarians, I express our admiration and gratitude for his immeasurable contribution to the political life of our country. I would also like to convey my deepest sympathy, and that of my father, Doug, and my mother, Lorna, to his two daughters and their families and to his close friends.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (4.29 pm)—I rise as a proud Tasmanian because I think it is important that I support the motion and acknowledge the significant contribution of a passionate adopted son of Tasmania, Kenneth Shaw Wriedt, better known as Ken Wriedt. Through his efforts both in this place and in the Tasmanian parliament, he has indeed earned himself a prominent position in the history books of this nation.

Like my late father, Ken Wriedt was born in Melbourne and came to Tasmania following wartime service, as has been mentioned by several of the condolence speakers, with a career in the merchant marine. Indeed, he had a passion for all things maritime and pursued these throughout his life. It was not that long afterwards that his more than half a century of association with politics began when he joined the Labor Party. This was also the time he struck up another longstanding partnership, with his wife, Helga, which also lasted half a century till very recently when she too, sadly, passed away—a passing that grieved Ken greatly.

Ken's rise through the Labor Party was hardly swift, with three attempts before he was pre-selected to run for the Senate. In 1967 he was elected as part of a new Whitlam team and entered what is still one of the most memorable—indeed, some would regard it as infamous—periods of politics in Australian history. It was a time that shaped the political aspirations of many in this House today, including my own.

By the early 1970s his talents saw him made the Minister for Primary Industry from 1970 to 1975 and Minister for Minerals and Energy, also in 1975. Ken also became the government leader in the Senate and later Leader of the Opposition in the Senate from 1975 to 1980. He played an important role in the reformist agenda of the Whitlam years, seeking to bring Australia's agricultural sector forward to a new global future which is still today being realised. I know Ken would have been very honoured to have the current leader of the Nationals pay tribute to his significance both as the minister and also as a mentor to him and someone who gave him the inspiration to continue his political career.

He was well known for admitting that as a merchant seaman he could not tell a merino from a Corriedale but he proved his worth, as we have had testified today, and gained the respect of the agricultural sector by listening and consulting—something that is not amiss at any stage when dealing with that very important sector. Ken's federal ministerial career came to an abrupt halt, along with others, in November 1975 and one really does wonder what he might have achieved had fate not taken such a twist. As Senate leader he was one of the key players in the famous dismissal of the Whitlam government, something that the current Attorney-General attested to with some personal information in relation to his father, who was a friend of Ken Wriedt. It is something that political historians will discuss and debate for many years to come.

He finished his term in the Senate in 1980 but his contribution was not over. He turned his focus to Tasmania and won a seat in Franklin in the Tasmanian parliament in 1982. It is great to have the current federal member for Franklin in the chamber today and I know that she will be paying special tribute to Ken Wriedt very soon after me. He became Leader of the Opposition soon after, from 1982 to 1986, and was a minister from 1989 till 1990 in the Michael Field government as Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for Roads and Transport. His links to parliament continued until recently, with his daughter Paula also a significant contributor to Tasmanian political life. She was a minister and successful member for Franklin from 1996 to 2009.

Ken Wriedt is survived by his daughters, Paula and Sonia, and four grandchildren. I join with others in this place and extend my deepest sympathies to Ken's family and friends and also thank them for his fantastic and considerable contribution to his state and nation. I note also that the state funeral for the Hon. Ken Wriedt will be held at the Federation Concert Hall in Davey Street, Hobart at 11 am on Wednesday, 27 October 2010. Unfortunately, not every-

one in this place who sought a pair to be able to attend the state funeral of this very significant contributor to Tasmanian life will be able to attend, so I ask those who are attending to please pass on my deepest sympathies to those of Ken Wriedt's family who will be there.

Ms COLLINS (Franklin—Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services) (4.35 pm)—It is with sadness that I speak on this condolence motion for Kenneth Shaw Wriedt, or Ken Wriedt for those who knew him, who passed away last week at age 83. As we have heard, Ken was born in Victoria on 11 July 1927, another great Cancerian. But Ken considered Tasmania his home and was adopted by Tasmanians. He worked as a merchant seaman and in insurance until his move into the federal parliament. He really was a member of state and federal parliaments from the 1960s until 1990 and he was a passionate advocate for those he represented—that is, Tasmanians.

He was elected as a senator for Tasmania in 1967 and served until 1980, when he ran unsuccessfully for the federal seat of Denison. We have heard what a well-regarded minister he was in various portfolios, including primary industry, agriculture and minerals and energy, during the Whitlam government. He also served as the Leader of the Government in the Senate and then as the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate for five years. We have heard about the role he played in the dismissal of the Whitlam government. One of the things about Ken I want to talk about specifically today is what a passionate advocate he was for the people of Franklin, the seat I represent in the federal parliament.

Ken was always held in high esteem by both sides of parliament. He was not averse to speaking out against his own in a gentle and considered way when he thought it was the right thing to do. I recall that during the pilots dispute he had some things to say to the then Labor government about Tasmania and how we were being affected. He has certainly been on the record with some comments in relation to state Labor governments and some of the issues that have been raised regarding minority governments in Tasmania and our position with the Tasmanian Greens.

So Ken was a really strong advocate for the people of Franklin and the people of Tasmania. He was elected to the House of Assembly in 1982 to represent the people of Franklin and he was there until 1990, when he retired, and I am sure that the communities in Franklin remember him fondly and well. He was Leader of the Opposition from 1982 to 1986 and, as we have heard, served as a minister in the Field minority government. When he retired from state parliament he remained active in the Labor Party. In fact, he was the local branch member I met at a couple of branch meetings when I was state secretary, and it was there that I learned about Ken's fierce loyalty and defence of his own family members, particularly Paula, his daughter who he was very proud of—as I am sure he is of both of his daughters—for following in his footsteps. She became a state member for Franklin from 1996 until 2009. Ken was certainly very clear with me on one occasion when I said something that disagreed with what his daughter Paula was trying to do, and I admired him for that. We had a very frank and honest discussion in which Ken very loyally supported his daughter and her point of view, as you would expect.

He was made a life member of the ALP Tasmanian branch in 2003 for his services to the party. One of my great memories of Ken Wriedt is in a photo of Labor stalwarts: Lance Barnard, Eric Reece, Don Dunstan, Harry Holgate, Ken Wriedt, Michael Field and Gough Whitlam. There are not many of those people in that photo still alive today, and it is with great

sadness that we talk about Ken here today. He will certainly be remembered as a true gentleman of Australian and Tasmanian politics. He was a giant in the Tasmanian Labor Party, and it is very sad to hear of his passing. I pass on my condolences to his daughters, Paula and Sonja, and his grandchildren. As we have heard, his wife, Helga, mother and grandmother, passed away not that long ago, and I am sure this is a very difficult period for them. I am very pleased to be able to attend the state funeral for him this Wednesday in Hobart.

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (4.39 pm)—Briefly, I wish to associate myself with the remarks of all of those who have spoken. Ken had a wonderful career here and in Tasmania. As we have heard in the contributions from the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and again from those speaking here today, he was at the centre of critical events here in Canberra in 1975 as Leader of the Government in the Senate. Following a strong career here, he went on, of course, to replicate that in the Tasmanian parliament. I take the brief opportunity to associate myself with those who have spoken.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I understand it is the wish of honourable members to signify at this stage their respect and sympathy by rising in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

Ms COLLINS (Franklin—Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services) (4.41 pm)—I move:

That further proceedings be conducted in the House.

Question agreed to.

CORPORATIONS AMENDMENT (No. 1) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 29 September, on motion by **Mr Bradbury**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (4.41 pm)—I rise on behalf of the coalition to speak on the Corporations Amendment (No. 1) Bill 2010, a bill that was introduced into the House just in the last sitting week. In doing so I represent the shadow assistant treasurer, Senator Cormann, in the other place. The coalition, as you know, has taken a long interest in improving Australia's corporate legal framework. The previous government initiated the consolidation and clarification of Australia's corporate framework in the 2001 Corporations Act. Of course, also during the period of the Howard government the coalition oversaw the Corporate Law Economic Reform Program, otherwise known as CLERP, which was an ongoing program of reform to further clarify and strengthen Australia's law in this area.

This bill aims to move Australia further along the road to stronger and clearer law in this important area. In summary, the bill proposes changes in three main areas. Firstly, it will make it more difficult to obtain access to private information kept on company registers. For instance, the measures will require persons seeking a copy of the company register to apply to the company, stating the purpose for which they will use the register. At the moment, anyone can demand a company's register, which contains shareholders' names and contact details. This information can be used to target vulnerable shareholders and purchase their shares at significantly below market prices. So the intent of this bill is to make this predatory pricing practice far more difficult.

Secondly, the bill will increase the criminal penalties associated with the breaches of the insider trading and market misconduct provisions in part 7.10 of the Corporations Act. Increasing the maximum fines is designed to further provide a disincentive for individuals and companies to engage in this activity. The maximum fine for individuals found to have breached the provisions will be increased to 4½ thousand penalty units. The maximum term of imprisonment will be increased to 10 years.

Finally, this bill aims to improve ASIC's ability to detect market offences such as insider trading. The Australian Federal Police, on behalf of ASIC, will have the power to obtain direct evidence of these offences, having obtained a judge issued warrant. The bill will also permit ASIC to apply for a search warrant without first having to issue a notice to produce the material sought by the warrant. The current arrangements provide those under investigation with an opportunity to destroy incriminating material before a search warrant can be issued. The coalition always promoted any active reforms to improve the law in this area and we strongly support the aim of further improving the Corporations Law. In particular, we support the changes in access to company registers. They will not impede commerce, but they will provide a reasonable protection for vulnerable people. We recognise the aims of increasing penalties and powers, but wherever powers are increased it is important, as I am sure you would agree, Mr Deputy Speaker, that there be very strong scrutiny of those.

We note that the Senate Economics Legislation Committee is currently inquiring into this bill. It is due to report on, I think, 16 November. I am sure my friend and colleague opposite the member for Oxley knows the exact date, having spent a lot of time working in this area. We will await the advice, the findings and the evidence of that committee, because increasing powers always requires the level of scrutiny that we wish to see. We leave open the possibility of amendments and the like in this regard. We want to see the work of that committee, but here in this House we do not oppose this bill.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (4.46 pm)—It is a pleasure for me to speak on the Corporations Amendment (No. 1) Bill 2010 as I have some interest in Corporations Law and other such pieces of legislation and regulation in this place, as do many others. I thank the member for Casey for his contribution and his placing on the record his support, and I assume that of his party, for this very good amendment bill. It does a number of things, based on maintaining trust and confidence in our regulatory system and markets of ordinary investors and people in the marketplace and ensuring that, when they make an investment their investment, as far as possible, is protected from unscrupulous people.

It does this in a number of ways. This bill contains two separate but related sets of measures, both aimed squarely at protecting investors and ensuring they can have trust and confidence in our share market. It also sends out a clear signal that the regulator and the government are doing everything they can to ensure that we have a credible and strong system of governance around our markets. It also ensures that we will target misconduct and ensures that the necessary regulations, powers and so forth are in place to deal with those who cheat our system. Interestingly, the member opposite, the member for Casey, commented on supporting this bill but wanting to make sure there were checks and balances in place. I agree and I think we all would agree that while we want to ensure that the regulator, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, has all of the necessary powers at its disposal—as do other regulators in these areas—those powers are checked against abuse or the wilful nature

of their application in any particular way. It is important and we all ought to be conscious of it. But I do not think that in itself ought to detract this parliament or the regulator from the good work it is doing in terms of monitoring market manipulation, ensuring that we have a fair and equitable, properly managed and monitored marketplace—a proper system of regulation.

It is a really difficult market and there is no question about that. Australia has over 1.6 million corporations and it is mostly a self-regulatory system. All the checks and balances you put in place are really there for those that follow the rules and do the right thing. They act as a guide and a regulatory base for all of these things to take place. Where people willingly break the rules, manipulate the market or, for that matter, are involved in a range of other offences there needs to be the right system in place not only to deter them in the first place by having the right penalties and breaches as part of our regulatory system but also there needs to be the correct monitoring and powers for the regulator to deal with these manipulations or this misconduct before they take place. I think it is as important to make sure that the regulator has sufficient powers—regulatory, monitoring and intervention powers—and that those powers span right across the regulatory board to ensure that ASIC and others can do their job properly.

I do not think anyone would disagree with that. I do not think that there is any argument against making sure there is no abuse of that power by the regulator itself, but I will be listening closely and monitoring what the opposition do in this area to ensure they do not abuse their role in this place and use either the bureaucracy, the regulator itself or public servants as scapegoats for poor policy on their own behalf. Only just recently I have detected a small tinge of this coming through and it seems that after 12 years of government—some would say that is plenty of opportunity to get some things right—

Mr Robert—Bernie, don't be like that!

Mr RIPOLL—I can see some eyes rolling back in their heads, but the reality is that there was ample opportunity to make some of these necessary reforms. I do not mind that some of these things take some time. I acknowledge the good work of all the committee members of the Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services. In fact, some of these changes came directly out of that committee's inquiry, so I thank the members for their work in this area, but note that it is still our responsibility to get the regulations right, which I believe we are doing. It is then the responsibility of the regulator to apply them in the right way, but we need to be conscious that with the realities of the market—1.6 million corporations, basically a self-regulatory system—there will be abuse. Our job is to ensure that we provide the framework to minimise that abuse and to reduce it to, we all hope, zero. Where that cannot be the case we have to make sure the regulator has sufficient powers.

An honourable member—And they use them.

Mr RIPOLL—And that they use those powers, absolutely—that those powers are used fully but correctly. I think we will all monitor that. We will all make sure that that is the case, and certainly the Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services will have oversight, in its work, of ASIC in terms of how those powers are actually monitored. But I do not see it—and this is where we may have a point of difference—as a political opportunity. The regulator and other agencies are independent. They should do their work independently. They should have ample scope and be free from fear of the parliament. They should know that the

work they do is actually in the national interest and not on behalf of one political party or another. It is not in any political interest; it is in the national interest. It is about the markets. It is about doing the right thing.

I just want to get that on the record in terms of the broader intent of this amending legislation. It does do some very important things, and I will come to those. It is about making sure, firstly, that certain practices need to cease. In the past, unscrupulous operators would very unfairly and unjustifiably seek a listed company's register and misuse that register of people's details to write to them. We have all read many articles about the abuse that goes on of vulnerable and ordinary people. Somebody writes to that vulnerable person asking them to sell their shares, often at well below market rates. That practice needs to cease, and these amendments will go a long way to doing that. The bill will change the law and make it improper for someone to obtain a corporate register list for improper purposes. There is now a test, and what it means is that the company can refuse to hand over the list if it is not for proper purposes, and there are a range of penalties associated with that.

In terms of market manipulation, there are a range of activities that this amending legislation will increase the maximum criminal penalty for—from a, let us say, reasonably low basis to quite a substantial position. The bill increases the criminal penalty to a maximum of 10 years imprisonment and/or the greater of 4½ thousand penalty units, which equals about \$495,000 or three times the profit gained or loss avoided, for things such as insider trading; market manipulation; false trading and market rigging, which is creating a false or misleading appearance of active trading; false trading and market rigging in artificially maintaining a trading price; the dissemination of information about illegal transactions; false or misleading statements; inducing persons to deal in financial products; and dishonest conduct in relation to a financial service or product. It is, really, the whole gamut of misconduct and misuse of information in what is a very complex market. With technology, with the way that people operate and with the ability for people to understand our rules and work around those rules, it is very necessary to send out very strong signals, not only for individuals with regard to the maximum criminal penalties involved, which are quite substantial, but also for body corporates that breach those same principles of market manipulation, insider trading and so on. Those increased penalties will now be 45,000 penalty units, or \$4.95 million, or three times the profit made or loss avoided, or 10 per cent of annual turnover during the relevant period.

This bill enhances Australia's very good pillars of corporate governance of market regulation and continues the good work that we in government have done since 2007, since being elected. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (4.56 pm)—by leave—I will begin by thanking the honourable members who have participated in the debate on the Corporations Amendment (No. 1) Bill 2010. I acknowledge the contributions of the member for Casey and the member for Oxley, who is well known around this place and in broader circles for his contribution to matters relating to corporate law.

This bill will protect vulnerable investors through reform to the ways in which people can have access to information contained on company registers. It will strengthen the deterrent effect of market offences in the Corporations Act and will enhance the investigative powers of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. The bill will improve the enforcement capability of ASIC and will ensure that the penalties for breaches of serious market related

offences are commensurate with the potential benefits of contravening the law. The bill will also ensure that vulnerable investors are protected from businesses seeking to profit by purchasing their shares for less than their value. On behalf of the government, I would like to thank the stakeholders for their contributions at the various stages of the debate.

In conclusion, this bill will improve the enforcement powers of ASIC, enable the courts to impose more appropriate penalties on persons who breach the market manipulation provisions in the Corporations Act and will increase the protection of investors in public companies and registered schemes.

Ordered that the bill be reported to the House without amendment.

**DEFENCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (SECURITY OF DEFENCE PREMISES)
BILL 2010**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 29 September, on motion by **Mr Stephen Smith**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (4.58 pm)—If anyone is unsure that the world has changed since September 11, the Defence Legislation Amendment (Security of Defence Premises) Bill 2010 should dispense any misconceptions about that. This bill has been developed in direct response to a foiled terrorist attack on the Holsworthy Army Barracks, the home of my old unit, the 3rd Battalion, RAR. It was a foiled terrorist attack that had been planned around August 2009. The terrorists were part of a group called al-Shabab. The terrorists are currently before the Supreme Court on trial for their acts of terrorism. This was a group of extreme Islamic individuals who sought to use violence on the orders of an Islamic leader from, of all places, Somalia.

In response, the government has moved, quite rightly, in many areas to enforce and strengthen the base security we have around our Defence Force. It has been done, in part, due to the widely accepted fact that the six accused men were planning on entering the base and killing as many military and civilian people as possible before they were caught or killed. They believed this act was justified by the mullah in Somalia giving his concurrence.

This case demonstrates that the threat of terrorism within Australia is both real and current. Following the foiling of the attack, the security of defence bases came under close scrutiny by the media and the wider public, with some members of the media highlighting the physical deficiencies in base security. There was, of course, that wonderful incident when a *Daily Telegraph* reporter and photographer were arrested for gaining access to Holsworthy soon after the foiled plot was made public, all in an attempt to press home the journalists' point that base security was reasonably lax. At the time, the coalition sought briefings from the government and Defence officials as to the current range of security measures for Australia's military bases. These briefings, of course, were classified. However, it is fair to say that the introduction of this bill justifies the coalition's concerns with current defence security arrangements.

Defence currently employs private contractors to man the gates and entrances to defence establishments around Australia. These contractors administer the right of entrance to the bases. This involves, obviously, ensuring that identification is provided and that that identification is checked. Such a system has worked well. I fully remember in 1993 being part of the military-manned guard at the base of 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment, with nine

soldiers heavily armed with pickaxe handles, ready to deter any would be bad-doer from entering the home of the parachute battalion. We have obviously moved on, with defence contractors now administering that right of entry to bases. Defence also utilises a range of physical and personnel security measures, including the use of intelligence, to form a layered approach to base security.

However, since 9/11 the world has changed. As we have seen with this group of Islamic terrorists that sought to gain access to Holsworthy with the sole purpose of indiscriminately and randomly killing, the current global security climate requires us to be ever vigilant. Given the changing nature of this environment, it is therefore necessary, as I concur with the government, to strengthen security measures at defence establishments. I think these planned attacks by those people that would seek to do incredible violence to those who are completely innocent have brought home the very real threat that Australia's military personnel face at home, besides those facing perils in combat operations overseas. Therefore, strengthening the legislative base in order to protect those who protect us simply makes sense.

The review of defence protective security arrangements that followed on from the Holsworthy incident recommended a range of policy and physical security initiatives to complement and strengthen existing security at defence establishments. Given the changing nature of the security environment, this bill seeks to strengthen the security measures across a range of areas, particularly to enhance the security of defence bases, facilities and assets and, most importantly, the security of our personnel.

Accordingly, the bill will insert a new part VIA into the Defence Act 1903 and make associated amendments to the Australian Federal Police Act 1979. Broadly, the bill will do a range of things. Firstly, it will strengthen the legal regime for appropriately authorised ADF members who may be required to use reasonable and necessary force—including, it is important to articulate here, lethal force—to prevent the death of or serious injury to a person in connection with an attack on defence premises. Secondly, it establishes a statutory regime of search and seizure powers, including for those who do not actually submit to that, in order to reduce the risk of unauthorised or dangerous items entering defence facilities or restricted material or information being unlawfully removed. Thirdly, it updates the existing trespass offence and associated arrest power in the act to clarify that Defence has adequate powers to deal with unauthorised entry to defence premises. Fourthly, it will allow Defence to use overt optical surveillance devices to monitor the security of defence premises. Defence will also be able to disclose the information captured by this equipment to law enforcement agencies and Commonwealth, state and territory public prosecution authorities.

In detail, under the new part VIA of the Defence Act there are several divisions that need to be amended. Briefly, division 1 is simply an overview. Division 2 sets out three classes of persons—defence security officials—the bill refers to, who will be empowered to exercise some or all of these powers aforementioned. Firstly, contracted defence security guards, who include subcontractors or their employees, will be authorised to ask to see a person's identification—similar to what they do now—conduct consensual searches and, in defined circumstances, restrain and detain a person for the purposes of placing them in the custody of a law enforcement officer. Secondly, security authorised members of the Defence Force—uniformed personnel—will be authorised to use the full range of powers proposed in the bill including, when necessary, the use of lethal force. Thirdly, defence security screening em-

ployees—Defence public servants, ostensibly—may exercise the non-consensual identification, search and seizure powers only if it is not reasonably practical in all the circumstances for a security authorised member of the Defence Force to do so. Furthermore, they are not authorised to seize an item or use force likely to cause death or grievous bodily harm.

Division 3 sets out the measures relating to the prevention or reduction of risk from authorised entry to defence premises, to detect and deal with trespassers and to prevent or reduce the risk of dangerous items entering defence premises or material being unlawfully removed. This section, importantly, sets out the conditions in which a defence security official can exercise their consensual search or seizure powers. This includes when they may request identification and under what grounds consensual searches may indeed take place. It also establishes special provisions that apply to declared explosive ordnance depots given the inherent risk to public safety from the unlawful removal of weapons, munitions and explosives.

Division 4 sets out the non-consensual identification and search powers which will be exercised as a matter of defence policy by special defence security officials during higher threat levels on any defence premises and at all times on sensitive sites. This section also outlines the circumstances which enable authorised members of the ADF to protect persons on defence premises if an attack is imminent or intended and would result in the death or serious injury of persons.

Division 5 sets out the special Defence security officials and the provisions under which they may seize an item, including a vehicle, vessel, aircraft or anything unattended on Defence premises or found during a search if, indeed, the official reasonably believes that the item constitutes a threat to security of persons on the premises or relates to a criminal offence that has or may be committed on the premises.

Division 6, importantly, establishes the limitations and safeguards on the exercise of the powers of Defence security officials conferred by this part. This section includes provision for Defence security officials to provide identification, for persons to be informed of the substance of the offence for which they have been detained and limits the use of reasonable force.

Division 7, the final area, covers other matters and includes provisions for a member of the Defence Force, a civil police officer or an Australian Federal Protective Service officer to arrest without warrant a person for unauthorised entry on Defence premises or accommodation. This section preserves the areas that were previously covered in the trespass offence in section 82 of the Defence Act. In addition, it clarifies that Defence has the power to deal with trespassers on naval vessels.

The coalition regards the welfare, safety and security of our Defence personnel and their families a top priority. Therefore, we have said, and we clearly maintain, that these changes should be implemented as quickly as possible. Indeed, I was critical in the last parliament that it took from August 2009 to the proroguing of the parliament for an investigation and for legislation like this to actually come to the floor of the House. It is time that those personnel who serve and protect us are themselves afforded proper protection at home.

We support these measures; we support the bill as drafted. However, the bill has been referred to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for inquiry and report. It is due to report back on 16 November 2010. There are a range of questions that remain outstanding with respect to the orders for opening fire in heightened threat levels,

when the Defence Force personnel are actually required to use lethal force or when there is the potential for it to save life, limb or property on Defence bases. What do orders for opening fire actually look like for those Defence personnel on a base? What are the rules by which they must abide, and how will that actually work out? There are a range of fundamental questions like that where we honour our men and women by providing precise and detailed answers to them as to the level of the powers and how and when they can be used.

The coalition has reserved its right to make further amendments once the bill has passed through the Senate committee and when it is debated in the Senate so that we can actually make sure that soldiers, sailors and airmen—those men and women in uniform—will not be put in a position that may become untenable upon further investigation later on. However, we view the legislation as important and, quite frankly, we view it as overdue.

We look forward to receiving the report on this bill by the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. We view its passage through the committee as an important step in fully understanding all of the issues that this bill would bring for members of the Defence Force. We believe that passage through the committee is important to understand the considerable legal complexities of the bill, and how the powers that the bill confers will be used and how they will play out. We look forward to all of those questions being answered, and we look forward to the bill receiving full and frank support on the floor of the Senate and becoming law.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (5.11 pm)—I speak in support of the Defence Legislation Amendment (Security of Defence Premises) Bill 2010. The Minister for Defence said in his second reading speech on 29 September that Defence is the largest Commonwealth landholder, and one of the largest landholders in Australia. He made the point that the department manages an estate consisting of in excess of three million hectares of land around 88 major bases or facilities and has approximately 370 owned properties and a further 350 under lease.

During the last campaign, and for some months prior thereto, I had a map of my electorate on the wall, and more than one person asked me what a grey little area in my electorate was. It was a very large area inside my electorate, and I had to explain on each and every occasion that it was the RAAF base at Amberley. This is a very large part of my electorate of Blair. Indeed, there are about 3½ thousand personnel and civilians working at the RAAF base at Amberley. It is the home to C17s and F111s, which will retire in early December this year. The Super Hornets are also currently located there, and we will get additional Super Hornets in the future. It is the home to 9FSB and the construction squadron, which will arrive very shortly.

There are many people who work on that base, civilian as well as military. There are men and women, young and old, some who have been trained in defence hand-to-hand combat and many in how to use a weapon. But, still, despite every attempt that we undertake to ensure that our Defence bases are as ready as possible with security and to be as vigilant as we can be in the protection of those bases, the Holsworthy incident clearly demonstrates that the review was timely and that acting on the review is the appropriate thing for the federal government to do.

I am not going to comment on the litigation and charges that are currently before the Supreme Court in Victoria but, clearly—and this is the reason I support our troops in Afghanistan—we must resist all forms of fundamentalist fascism, narco-terrorism and Islamic extremism, which were clearly evident in what we saw at the Holsworthy base. Innocent people

would have been slaughtered if these people had been able to carry out their plans. Defence bases are clearly attractive targets for enemies of our state and our nation. Making sure that they are protected is crucial, not just for the economic wellbeing of our country—the bottom line for the approximately \$26 billion that we spend on defence every year—but for making sure that men and women, our fellow citizens, are protected.

The Review of Defence Protective Security Arrangements was carried out subsequent to the Holsworthy incident in August 2009. A number of individuals were arrested, as I said, for allegedly planning an attack on that army base. There is no proposal to change the fact that civilian police and security personnel who are civilians will still have the primary responsibility for responding to security incidents at Defence premises. That is appropriate, and it has been a bipartisan approach taken regardless of which side of politics has been in government. But I warmly welcome this legislation, because it clarifies that appropriately trained and authorised members of the Australian Defence Force can use force—indeed, lethal force—to protect life or prevent serious injury to themselves or others in the event of an actual attack on Defence premises or people on those premises. I think that clarification is the appropriate word for it because, if you asked the Australian public or asked any judicial officer in this land, I am sure they would think it appropriate to defend yourself against an attack if you were military or civilian personnel on a military base.

Of course, the key recommendation here was to clarify the legal issues surrounding ADF members acting in self-defence in the event of a no-warning attack. We have legislation in criminal codes dealing with circumstances where someone has the right to self-defence. We have provocation listed as a defence or partial defence in the event of someone who is a civilian being attacked. For example, if the member for Oxley were to get up here and start attacking me, it would be appropriate—and I think most people would think so—for me to defend myself against him.

Mr Ripoll—I'm pretty fast—you wouldn't see me coming!

Mr NEUMANN—But, seriously, to make sure that the legal framework is as well-defined with respect to military bases as we have it in the states and territories of this country for civilians is the appropriate thing to do. The member for Fadden went through, at length, how this legislation operates, and I do not intend to duplicate what he had to say. Former Defence minister Senator John Faulkner said it pretty well when he said that the general right of self-defence provides the current legal basis for ADF personnel resorting to force. The legislation before us makes it crystal clear that those military personnel on the base would have every right to defend themselves and others until, for example, the police could take control of the situation and anyone arrested could then be charged.

One thing that the member for Fadden did not outline in detail was the inadequacy of the penalty for trespass on Defence premises. A \$40 fine is grossly inadequate—\$40 can hardly buy you a decent meal at a restaurant these days—so increasing the fine to \$5,500 is appropriate in the circumstances. The importance of the Defence assets we have at our military bases can be summed up best by the fact that is quite commonly stated in my community, the Ipswich and West Moreton area: that the RAAF base at Amberley adds about a billion dollars a year to the benefit of the Ipswich economy and to those across the western corridor. Defence housing is created for the number of military personnel and civilians who work on the base, who spend money in the community, who worship in the churches, whose kids play in the

sporting teams and who are involved in community life. They are people who come into and are part of the community. So it is an economic argument as well as an argument to protect the lives, liberty and property of Defence and civilian personnel on the base. Also, we have weaponry which we purchase at tremendous cost to the Australian taxpayer. For example, there are the C17s, which are massive transport planes, located at the RAAF base at Amberley. The F111s, which have served us wonderfully well for 40 years, are being retired and another lot of Super Hornets are arriving. As the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel said in answer to a question I put to him in question time last week, we will have 11 more come into Australia, many of them based at the RAAF base at Amberley in my electorate of Blair. We want to make sure that the military personnel there have the power to use lethal force if those military assets are at risk.

I welcome other parts of the legislation that deal with Defence security, particularly those giving the power to require identification, to conduct consensual and non-consensual searches and the right to detain a person until the arrival of the appropriate state or territory police. That is appropriate as well. The legislation has importance for my community in Blair and for communities across the country for the reason the Minister for Defence outlined in his second reading speech. He outlined just how many bases there are, how many assets there are, how many communities across Australia are affected by military personnel and how many bases there are which provide an economic driver in communities across the country. We are protecting not just our military assets but the economies of the communities across Australia with this legislation. And for that I am very pleased to support the legislation.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (5.21 pm)—I welcome the opportunity this afternoon to make some comments on the Defence Legislation Amendment (Security of Defence Premises) Bill 2010. We all remember where we were on the night—it was night here in Australia—of 11 September 2001. That was the night we saw the vision of aircraft being flown into the World Trade Center towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington. It demonstrated the extent to which our enemies will go. It demonstrated that, in the pursuit of terrorist objectives, attacks on the defenceless will occur. And it demonstrated the evil nature of Islamic extremists.

On the night of September 11 I was serving as the brigade major, or G3, of 13 Brigade in Perth. That evening was parade night at the Army Reserve, so it was somewhat fortunate, from our perspective in Perth, that everybody was on base. That assisted us to immediately comply with the orders that came very quickly out of Canberra to lock down the base—to lock the gates and start patrolling. From that night on, security changed markedly. The system of base security alerts was modified and remained high for a very long time.

The level of security has been greatly enhanced in the years since. We have come to know that we face threats not just from external organisations such as al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah but also from within. There is, you might say, a fifth column in this country. There are people who do not wish us well. Unfortunately, some of those who do not wish us well have benefited from the refugee, immigration and welfare systems in this country and yet try to tear down the majority culture that created the very systems that assisted them. If it were not such a deadly serious matter we might laugh at the irony of it all.

We recall the Sydney terrorist plot in 2005, when five men were arrested and then charged with planning terrorist attacks in Sydney. Their trials commenced in late 2008 and concluded in mid-2009 with sentences of between 23 and 28 years. In 2005, a number of men were also

arrested in Melbourne. Among those now-convicted terrorists was Abdul Benbrika, who was a person who had eluded and worked the immigration system to avoid deportation before finally obtaining authority to stay by marrying an Australian Islamic woman of Lebanese descent. It has been widely reported that for the 19 years leading up to his arrest in 2005 he received welfare payments and did not ever work. Together with government payments for his family of seven children, that enabled him to devote his time to studying the Quran and then teaching others. He was an increasingly radical Islamic cleric. He was drawing others to him to assist in his plans for terrorism. Fortunately, this was recognised by some in the Melbourne Islamic community, which resulted in the police and security agencies being tipped off and the initiation of Operation Pendennis. Operation Pendennis resulted in a total of 17 arrests in Melbourne and Sydney and the closing down of Benbrika's plans to attack the MCG.

In August 2009, five people were arrested for allegedly planning an armed attack on Holsworthy army base. Three were of Somali origin and two of Lebanese. It has been said that they were members of the Somali based Islamic terrorist group al-Shabaab. It has been said that they planned to attack the base and kill as many soldiers as they could. For those who are not of military background I can say that there would not normally be any soldiers wandering around Holsworthy Barracks with loaded weapons with which they could defend themselves. Therefore, the vast majority of service personnel, whether they were in uniform or not, would have been greatly vulnerable to such an attack. The fact that the police and security agencies under Operation Neath were able to thwart this plan was greatly welcomed.

It is in the context of our very recent history that this bill is now before the House. This bill will put in place a legal basis for upgraded security at bases, in particular at the entrances and around the perimeters. In the case of future attack or of action being taken against a base or personnel on a base, this legislation will allow the reasonable and necessary force to be applied. As a former Army officer I have a good recollection of how base security used to operate and I therefore looked very carefully through this legislation. I was looking for amendments that would facilitate the sort of security that could oppose the attacks that were planned by the sorts of home-grown terrorists that have been detected in recent years. Before speaking on the specifics of the amendments, I will relate an experience from 1992 which demonstrates one way to conduct security at military bases.

In 1992 I was fortunate to be selected to go to the United Kingdom to participate in a command post exercise named Exercise Duang Rat. Apparently, it was named after a Hanoi restaurant where this command post exercise was originally devised by some planners. It was a combined exercise that included American, British, Canadian, Australian and even New Zealand personnel and was conducted at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, in England. In 1992 the threat from the IRA still existed. The CPX was not like most command post exercises. It was not 24 hours a day for several days; it was nine to five. That gave us the opportunity to visit the local culture, which I appreciated—I would remind members that I was not the older, mature person that you see before you but was in my 20s at the time. However, the British Army decided that they would put on a bus for all these officers visiting from overseas. They did not want these people from the base, who were visiting the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, out in the local pubs because they considered that the IRA could very easily have sympathisers and agents locally who would take advantage of the situation in whatever way they could. So they put on a bus and took us out to a more distant pub to enjoy

the cultural experience. When they faced exactly that sort of situation they came up with a specialised plan.

Although we do not face that sort of situation—the organised terrorism that the IRA waged upon the United Kingdom—we nevertheless face certain levels of threat. There was quite a difference in the approach to base security from that in Australia. Here, contract security manned the gates at our bases—at that point I was close to Enoggera in Queensland. But when we came back through the gate at Sandhurst later that evening, armed Gurkha soldiers were on the gate. As we wandered along the dark paths between the front gate and our accommodation at Victory College it was not uncommon to come face to face with a couple of fully armed Gurkhas patrolling the grounds. That was a different set of circumstances, there is no doubt about it. Yet it does therefore pose the question: had the plot to attack Holsworthy Barracks had got to the point of these people turning up with weapons, what could actually have been done to counter that attack with the amendments to the Defence Act that have been put forward in this legislation? With that thought I would like to turn to the legislation more specifically.

Firstly, the three types of defence security officials are now clearly defined: under section 71B, again, the contract defence security guards; 71C, security authorised members of the Defence Force, who are actually uniform members of the defence; and 71D, defence security screening employees or, in other words, contractors, uniform military personnel and members of the Australian Public Service. All three have certain amounts of responsibility but it is only the uniform security authorised members of the Defence Force that have the full range of responsibilities under the legislation.

Section 71H—the power to request evidence of identification and the authority to pass an access control point and to undergo a limited search—has a certain appeal. It is held by all defence security officials. Under 71H a person may be refused access and, if actually on defence premises, restrained and detained if they have refused to identify themselves or submit to a search or if they have complied and they are deemed to be a threat if allowed access or likely to commit an offence, and in those cases they can be restrained and detained.

As the minister has already said in his second reading speech, in practice the normal application of consensual identification and search powers will be applied by the contract security guards, normally at low and medium threat levels. I do particularly appreciate the provisions of sections 71R, 71S and 71T which provide for non-consensual search for persons about to pass a defence access control point, vehicles about to pass defence access control points and persons already on defence premises in circumstances of risk and reasonable belief. Although these provisions would more frequently be applied in responding to high levels of threat, this is nevertheless good as these powers are clearly defined, and that is appreciated. And to pick up on a point that has been raised as well, the increase in the penalty for trespassing from \$40 up to a maximum of \$5½ thousand is certainly appropriate.

In the limited time I have left to speak, I make mention of the four principles of security. These are to deter, detect, delay and respond. This bill, as the minister has said, rightly serves to deter, detect and respond. Increased and better defined powers will provide a disincentive to those who seek to wrongly enter or attack defence premises or defence personnel. The better use and control of identification will shore up the shortcomings regarding defence. The ability of defence security officials to refuse access, to identify and to search all provide an

accurate image of bases and defence facilities that are harder to access and where a more focused culture of security will put those up to no good under more pressure. The legislation will provide additional deterrence in making our bases more secure and safer and, with regard to the principles of detection, should those who have criminal plans not be deterred by the increased security regime then their attempts to actually access or attack on defence premises will face an increased likelihood of being detected. This will come either through the identification search or the authority the defence will have to use CCTV, and then that can be passed on to enable prosecution.

Although the security principle of delay is not covered in this legislation, I believe in the past 10 years there has been an increased appreciation of base security by the base commanders. I believe that increased physical security arrangements to do with fencing, lighting and surveillance would be a basic responsibility of base commanders. It is certainly the case that there are officers who are held up with administration for base security and it is their responsibility to identify the shortcomings and then raise those shortcomings through the chain of command. If they do not do that then they are deficient in their responsibilities. If they make practice of doing that then obviously the chain of command has to address those issues because if the physical security needs of the base are deficient then a lot of what is proposed here can be undone so very easily.

In conclusion, let us look at what could have happened in August 2009 when those men were arrested in planning their attack. What would have happened if they had turned up with weapons ready to attack? The reality is that there would likely have been almost no-one available with live ammunition who could have responded and so, in the future—not that we need to go into it here because these are matters of security on base—there has to be access to weapons and live ammunition so that a response can be generated. I think that is the case regardless of whether there is a high-level threat at the time, because, as we know, these threats can come at short notice. There has to be a willingness to respond. So we look forward to what the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee can come up with and we look forward to the passage of this bill at some point in the future when any problems have been fixed. (*Time expired*)

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (5.36 pm)—I rise today to speak on the Defence Legislation Amendment (Security of Defence Premises) Bill 2010. I, like all members in this House, indeed people across Australia, was absolutely shocked and mortified to hear in media reports that there was a planned terrorist attack by al-Shabaab on Holsworthy Army base, that there was an intention by six accused men to enter the base, killing as many military and civilian personnel as possible—indeed, allowing themselves to be killed. At the time, it forced us to ask the question as to whether our bases were being adequately protected. Were the men and women who defend our nation's rights and freedoms being adequately protected at the base gate?

I remember at the time, as the shadow minister for defence science and personnel and assisting shadow minister for defence, examining the call on whether it was time to re-institute uniformed personnel on the parameters and at the gates of our defence bases. That after this the *Daily Telegraph* and media crews were also able to gain deep access inside Holsworthy raised further concerns about whether the government was serious about protecting these de-

fence interests. I raise that again today because this incident occurred in August 2009 and here we are in October 2010 and we are only starting to address this bill.

This bill now attempts to do three things. Firstly, it strengthens the legal regime for ADF members who may be required to use reasonable and necessary force in the event of a terrorist attack on a defence base. Secondly, it establishes a statutory regime of search-and-seizure powers in order to reduce the risk of unauthorised items entering defence facilities or restricted items being improperly removed. Finally, it updates the existing trespass offence and associated arrest powers in the act to clarify that defence has certain adequate powers to deal with unauthorised entry to all defence facilities.

What needs to be first and foremost put into position is the protection of the people who service our nation and our military assets through the Australian Defence Force. In my electorate of Paterson I actually have no military bases now, but literally across the road there is RAAF Base Williamtown. Many of the personnel at that base and their families reside within my electorate of Paterson. I know the assets we have at RAAF Base Williamtown. We are home to the premier F18 squadron in Australia. We are home to the Hawk lead-in fighter. The Wedgetail is now being based there. But that is only a small part of what we do. We also have the eastern regional operation and command centre. There are many things at Williamtown that serve our nation well. But first and foremost they need to be protected.

It would worry me if a terrorist organisation sought to breach the parameters of Williamtown RAAF base and inflict damage upon the personnel—we still have single persons accommodation at Williamtown RAAF base. It would worry me if they sought to destroy the military assets we have there and render us incapable by destroying our F18s. It would worry me if they were able to launch an attack on the eastern regional operation and command centre and then basically put Australia, in part, out of action for a while. These are the things that concern me and concern the Australian public. The security risk at Williamtown is amplified by the fact that on the other side of the base is the lease to the Newcastle Airport Corporation. That in itself provides security risks for our base. Having officers of the public, contracted personnel, providing security for our base without the opportunity to stop, using lethal means if necessary, a terrorist attack on our base worries me.

In other words, before this bill came through, in a threat situation our security officers might have acted with a great deal of courage and determination to deter it but, at the end of the day, were they leaving themselves legally liable for any action that they took? The question still remains: should our defence bases be secured by defence personnel covered by the Defence Act? This expansion of the Defence Act to allow security of temperament in the knowledge that if contracted personnel apply lethal force or measures they will have a level of protection is applauded. But I have to question this government's attitude and determination—and I admit that there have been a few months out for an election—because here we are 14 months after the fact. There was an inquiry and the upgrading of the security details of bases. They were subject to a security classification.

Mr Ripoll—Six years you had.

Mr BALDWIN—I note that the member for Oxley is so wound up on this issue that he is not even speaking on it. He is not even going to contribute except for interjections. That is because he cares very little about the defence of our nation and the people who defend it. The member for Oxley would have put his name down to speak on the bill if he were indeed con-

cerned about the people who serve our nation. But he is not. So he seeks to add by interjection rather than by real contribution to this debate.

I say this to the people of Australia: the coalition is committed to the people in the Australian Defence Force. This was the first time, as is publicly known, that there was ever a planned terrorist attack—and this time by al-Shabaab—on the defence of our nation on Australian soil. The delays in the response worry me greatly. There needs to be further examination of opportunities. I welcome the fact that on 30 September the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade took a reference for further inquiry. We await their report on 16 November. It will be encouraging if there are any modifications. The coalition's position on this is that we have an open mind, even though we are supporting this legislation because it is good for the support of our defence personnel. But if further improvements to this legislation can be made, then I think that in a bipartisan manner we need to make sure that we examine and then adopt any strong recommendations because, as I say, at the forefront is our need to support the men and women in uniform. We ask so much of them and, in relative terms, we give so little. I think it is incumbent on any side of government of any political persuasion to make sure we support the men and women of our defence forces.

We will support this legislation because we do not want to see any repeats. We do not want to see what could happen if indeed terrorists do breach the front gate. I think we need to take security within Australia and our defence forces a little more seriously than they have been taken in the past. I think we had become a little bit slack—perhaps it was the Australian way of 'she'll be right'. In this case, when the issue was identified through investigative means, it was able to be stopped. But if this were a single person inflicting damage, who left no trail by which they could be picked up—without any telephone calls, without any information going out—then what would the result have been? That is what we need to consider. So, in supporting this legislation, I say that the coalition is 100 per cent committed to our Australian Defence Force men and women, and we need to make sure that they and the assets they work with are fully and adequately protected.

Mr Ripoll interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—The question is that the bill be now read a second time.

Mr Baldwin—Madam Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order. I note that, despite the interjections, the member for Oxley, given the opportunity for government members to speak, has not risen to speak on this bill.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I think the member for Paterson has made his point.

Mr Ripoll interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Gentlemen, we will continue with the debate. The question is that the bill be now read a second time. The member for Macquarie has the call.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (5.46 pm)—I rise to speak on the Defence Legislation Amendment (Security of Defence Premises) Bill 2010, which sets out specific actions that can be taken to ensure the security of defence bases, facilities, assets and personnel within Australia in response to the changing nature of security threats. This amendment bill will insert part VIA into the Defence Act 1903 and make associated amendments to the Australian Federal Police Act 1979. The bill will protect, by legal means, the actions taken to defend Defence

Force facilities. The bill will also give some comfort to families of defence personnel and to local communities living and working near Defence Force facilities.

The need for such a bill became apparent when, in August 2009, four men were arrested for allegedly planning an armed attack against Holsworthy army base. In a newspaper report from the *Daily Telegraph* dated 27 October 2009, one of the men allegedly made a chilling pledge to 'take out as many victims as possible'. The ABC news of 14 September 2009 reported that the man had told his co-conspirators, 'The work was easy and the base was a suitable target.' These events brought home the reality that the threat of terrorism in Australia is real and current and that defence facilities and personnel are potentially attractive targets for such groups. A subsequent review of defence protective security arrangements recommended a number of policy and physical security initiatives to complement and strengthen existing security at defence bases.

At present Defence employs private contractors to man the gates and entrances to defence bases around Australia. These contractors administer the right of entrance to the bases based upon the production of the necessary identification and security clearances to enter a base. Additionally, Defence also maintains a range of physical and personnel security measures coupled with intelligence to provide a layered response to mitigate threats. But in view of the changing security environment and specifically the increased risk of terrorism, it has become necessary to upgrade the security measures, to both guard the entrances to the base and to effectively secure the perimeters of such bases.

A primary concern following the attempted attacks on the Holsworthy Barracks army base was that defence personnel did not have a clear legal right to defend themselves. The coalition and, I must note also, the Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Houston, had indeed expressed concern at the time that under the current laws Defence Force personnel could be facing legal action if they used force to defend themselves. We need to do all we can to protect those who are serving our nation, their families and our communities.

The amendments in this bill ensure that authorised personnel securing a defence base will have the powers to use reasonable and necessary force, including lethal force, in connection with an attack on defence premises. The amendments also establish a statutory regime of search and seizure powers to reduce the risk of dangerous items entering defence facilities, or material and classified information being unlawfully removed. The bill will amend section 82 of the Defence Act 1903 to update and relocate the trespass offence and related arrest powers. These powers will include the use of overt optical surveillance devices to monitor the security of defence premises. Under the changes, the information captured by these devices can be disclosed to law enforcement agencies and Commonwealth, state and territory public prosecution authorities.

This bill is a response to the challenge of the changing nature of security threats. I am particularly interested in this bill because the Richmond RAAF Base and Glenbrook Air Command RAAF Base are both located in the electorate of Macquarie. It is in the nation's interest to put measures in place that protect and secure the people and infrastructure of this and other Defence Force establishments.

The Richmond RAAF Base holds a unique place in Australia's aviation history, being the first Air Force base established in New South Wales and the second within Australia. Sir Charles Kingsford Smith landed the *Southern Cross* there after his historic trans-Pacific flight

in 1928, and Miss Jean Batten landed there after her solo flight from England in 1935. During World War II the base became vitally important to Australia's defence, with several squadrons based there and its use as an aircraft depot. Since that time, the Richmond RAAF has evolved from a primarily combat centre to providing logistical support and airlift fleet. The RAAF Glenbrook has been the base of Air Command since 1953. The base was established at Glenbrook after World War II, when the RAAF east command was moved there from Bradfield Park, Sydney, because Bradfield Park was within the eight kilometres of a possible Sydney nuclear attack zone. The base at Glenbrook was operational by the end of 1949.

My interest in this bill is not just about security measures for the base. I have had an affiliation with the base for over 30 years, where I have formed many lifelong friends. In recent years as a local member I have come to know more of the men and women working there as I am out and about in an official capacity on the base. Last year I spent a week on the base as part of the Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program, which gave me a much deeper appreciation of their unique service.

Certainly, in all my contact both here and with members of the Defence Force generally, I have been impressed by the integrity, commitment, compassion and professionalism of our men and women. That is why I, along with many other Australians, was deeply concerned when the thwarted terrorist attack on Holsworthy Army base was reported. It was a serious and sobering reminder of the world that we live in today. All would agree that after the Holsworthy incident there needed to be further steps taken to enhance security arrangements and protocols. There will be costs associated with the bill's measures and the coalition will be questioning the government and holding it to account on what that expenditure will be and how it specifically relates to the existing cost cap of \$329 million, allocated over the forward estimates from within the defence budget provision for the base security improvement program.

The proposed amendments are divided into seven divisions. The first and second divisions deal with terminology defining who does what and what the levels of security responsibility are. The third division deals with the powers that authorised defence security officials may exercise with consent. Importantly, there are measures in place to penalise any security official taking action not authorised under division 3—for example, conducting a limited search of a person who did not consent.

Division 4 relates to the exercise of powers without consent. It is important to note that this power only relates to qualified personnel covered under the generic term 'special defence security official', which excludes a contracted defence security guard. Division 4 gives additional powers to special defence security officials to remove a person from the premises if they refuse a request to leave. Division 5 relates to powers of seizure. This provision relates only to special defence security officials and provides them with the power to seize an item, such as a vehicle, vessel, aircraft or unattended item, if they believe, on reasonable grounds, that the item constitutes a threat.

Division 6 addresses the need for security authorised contractors and special defence security officials to prominently display ID cards at all times. Division 6 also provides for the exercise of powers by a defence security screening officer, given consent, when it is not practicable for that power to be exercised by a security authorised member of the Defence Force.

Division 7 makes it an offence for persons to enter defence premises or accommodation without authorisation.

Specific subclauses are also useful for wider scrutiny. Proposed section 71X addresses the key concerns that many members of the public had following the incident at Holsworthy Army base. Under this section, security authorised members of the Defence Force may respond if an attack on defence premises is occurring or is imminent and the attack is likely to result in the death of or serious injury to one or more persons on the defence premises. While this power allows use of force, including a lethal use of force, it only applies to security authorised members of the Defence Force. Under proposed section 72A, a defence security screening officer may exercise the powers of a special defence security official in the event that it is not reasonably practicable to wait. Proposed section 72G allows a defence security official to exercise a reasonable use of force and limits defence security guards and defence security screening employees from using lethal force or causing grievous bodily harm.

The bill contains a range of allowable actions, appropriate to each level of authorised security personnel. The bill also protects the rights of visitors to the Defence Force base if they have a legitimate right to be there. These amendments needed to be made after the attempted plot at the Holsworthy Army base. We need to ensure that our defence facilities have the highest level of protection against all threats. We owe it to the nation, the members of the Defence Force, their families and indeed the communities who live and work near Defence Force facilities to support members of the Defence Force in the exercise of their duty of protecting us. It is a mutual obligation of the highest order and this bill sets out measures that will provide that support. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr STEPHEN SMITH (Perth—Minister for Defence) (5.56 pm)—in reply—I thank the members who have contributed to this debate. I respectively thank the members for Blair, Cowan, Fadden, Macquarie and Paterson. The government is very pleased that we have been able to bring the Defence Legislation Amendment (Security of Defence Premises) Bill 2010 back before the House after the election. A comparable bill, of course, was presented to the parliament before the last election and the proroguing of the parliament. As I thank individual members for their contribution, I make the point that I have not had the opportunity of listening to all of those contributions. I will, of course, consider all of the contributions in detail and respond to members in writing if appropriate or required.

If I see anything in those contributions, or anything in the pending report of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, which might require some technical or other amendment then I am very happy to consider or progress that. The security of our defence facilities is, of course, very important. This is why the government has responded in the aftermath of the incident at Holsworthy. We very much look forward to further parliamentary consideration of this matter in the other place. I thank members for their contribution and, if required, I will respond to them in detail in the future.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

FISHERIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2) 2010**Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 29 September, on motion by **Dr Mike Kelly**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (5.59 pm)—I rise to speak to the Fisheries Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2010. The coalition recognise the important role that fishing plays in hundreds of coastal and river communities, and in bringing enjoyment to millions of Australians as well as to the national economy. The commercial fishing sector has a value of more than \$2.1 billion, making it Australia's sixth largest primary producing sector. In addition, it is estimated that 3½ million Australians participate in recreational fishing, spending over \$3 billion each year on charter hire fishing, boating equipment, travel accommodation and bait.

The coalition are keeping a close eye on the fisheries portfolio, as we are concerned that Labor continues to threaten the sector with massive new no-take marine parks around Australia and has allowed fringe environmental groups to unilaterally influence policy on this matter. The fear of no-take zones has caused great uncertainty for businesses both directly and indirectly reliant on access to fishing resources, be they commercial or recreational. This bill, however, will provide small and practical measures to improve fisheries management.

The bill will amend the Fisheries Management Act 1991, the Fisheries Administration Act 1991 and the Fishing Levy Act 1991 to enable greater efficiency, cost-effectiveness and more suitable fisheries for the fishing industry. The bill amends these acts to achieve four outcomes. Firstly, it facilitates co-management arrangements with various stakeholders. To enable the co-management arrangements to be fully implemented, the amendments will provide the Australian Fisheries Management Authority with the capacity to delegate powers and functions under the Fisheries Management Act to primary stakeholders in a fishery in which there is a co-management arrangement. The exercise of those functions and powers by delegates will still be subject to the directions of the AFMA Chief Executive Officer. The CEO will have the power to revoke a delegation. The power to delegate to primary stakeholders will also be subject to other requirements of the Acts Interpretation Act 1901. Appropriately enough, some powers and functions will be delegated to primary stakeholders, but AFMA will still have oversight capabilities to ensure governance and sustainability requirements under the Commonwealth fisheries harvest strategy policy, and reporting under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

Secondly, this bill simplifies the regulatory regime administered by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority by enabling the regulations to prescribe common conditions that apply to the holders of fishing concessions across different fisheries and by simplifying the requirements for amending fisheries plans of management to remove conditions that have been prescribed by the regulations or which are otherwise redundant, thereby removing unnecessary costs that are passed on to the holders of fishing concessions.

These changes remove the requirement that a plan of management for a fishery contains measures that duplicate administrative processes, in particular with regard to reporting and accountability; consolidate the power in the Fisheries Management Act to direct the closure or partial closure of a fishery; and simplify the procedures for making minor amendments to

fisheries management plans, such as the correction of errors or changes in format. These are probably some of the bigger issues that are dealt with by the changes.

The bill will also simplify the consultation process for amending a plan of management, particularly for minor amendments. In cases where an amendment is more than a minor modification of a plan of management, as a minimum consultation with the management advisory committee and the peak industry body representing holders of fishing concessions will be required.

Thirdly, the bill rationalises management advisory committees, or MACs, by removing the restriction in subsection 56(4) of the FA Act on abolishing a MAC that is provided for in a fishery management plan. Under the existing legislation, AFMA can abolish a MAC that is provided for in a plan, but only by amending the particular plan. This would be a more costly process, particularly where amendments are required to a number of plans. The amendment will therefore allow AFMA to complete restructure of the MACs. I understand industry and MAC members participated in and were supportive of the decision to reduce the MAC structure from 12 to six. I also understand that this decision was considered by all parties to be appropriate to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of advice to AFMA, with the added benefit of lowering the fisheries administrative costs borne by industry.

Fourthly, and finally, this bill will allow AFMA to provide its services to other agencies. The bill will allow AFMA to make its expertise in fisheries management available to Commonwealth, state, territory or overseas agencies by, for example, making trained fisheries observers available to state or territory fisheries management agencies or by sharing its technical expertise in the installation and use of vessel monitoring systems. This amendment will also allow AFMA to charge Commonwealth and state agencies for the provision of services under the existing section 94 of the FA Act.

To sum up, the co-management arrangements and MAC amendments will enable the industry to be given a more prominent and direct role in the management of fisheries and will improve the effectiveness of management advisory committees. The bill will enhance AFMA's ability to achieve efficient, cost-effective and sustainable fisheries management and to thereby meet its objectives under the FA Act by facilitating the implementation of co-management with various stakeholders in Commonwealth fisheries. I believe this bill does provide small and common sense changes to improve fisheries management. The bill is supported by the Commonwealth Fisheries Association. I will be monitoring this amendment bill, if passed, to ensure that the government delivers a reduction in the costs to industry that are proposed by these changes.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (6.06 pm)—I rise to speak on the Fisheries Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2010. I seem to be following the member for Calare, Mr Cobb, quite often as we speak about fisheries, agriculture and forestry—but not the fur or hunting trade these days. Australia works hard to have a good, sustainable fishing industry. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority has been the body working to manage Australian fisheries since its creation in 1992, if I remember correctly, and it has done a lot of hard work on improvements and establishing a connection between the managers of AFMA and industry leaders, the fisheries and the fishers out on the boats at sea.

We have this great seafood industry that we all love, especially in the state of Tasmania. We have been reasonably successful in bringing aquaculture organisations together. I think that in

the future wild fisheries will also continue to move forward in that area. Abalone is assured in Tasmania. There is a lot of work being done on rock lobster. We have Atlantic salmon in the southern parts of Tasmania and we hope that climate change does not heat up the oceans too much in our part of the world, which would destroy that industry because you need to have a certain level of cold.

This bill seeks to amend the fisheries legislation and it has four objectives: firstly, to broaden co-management arrangements in the Commonwealth fisheries; secondly, to simplify the regulatory process applying to the administrator and the fishers; thirdly, to facilitate the restructuring of AFMA's management advisory committees to have an effective dual advisory model; and, finally, to enable AFMA to charge for services to Commonwealth agencies utilising AFMA's expertise and skill base. They have an observer model as well, where people are put on boats and observe what is taking place at sea.

AFMA have advanced enormously over the period of time since 1992. I remember the report of a committee of which I was deputy chair, back in 1997, entitled *Managing Commonwealth fisheries: the last frontier*, where we dealt with AFMA and some of the issues at the time—and there were a few issues around at that time. The constitutional settlement arrangements were coming together. Some were held up because states were being a bit tough in signing it, and we made some recommendations along those lines.

This amendment bill is dealing with the issues of advisory committees. We made recommendations in the *Managing Commonwealth fisheries: the last frontier* report back then about our advisory committees. One of them was that only legitimate stakeholders participate in the management process. Broader public concerns over the management of fishery resources were addressed, as was ensuring that the concerns of individual industry operators could be taken into account during decision making. There was also some concern raised in evidence about people on those advisory committees, so we made a recommendation that the majority of industry members of a management advisory committee be selected through a democratic process, as determined by the minister. We also recommended that elected members of management advisory committees should be required to give the same undertakings about their participation as given by appointed members.

There were very strong recommendations in the *Managing Commonwealth fisheries: the last frontier* report and we are now moving, a few years later, to upgrade that process. We are moving to bring the number of MACs down and to bring together the issues of committees. Peak bodies are going to be brought into the fray and will become advisories to AFMA. The advisory committees will give information on community interest issues. I do not mind that. I can see how that will make savings and streamline administration, make things more efficient and bring down the costs of administration processes to the industry.

I hope everyone is in favour of this. There have been good discussions. People have worked to deal with that in a proper way. I think peak bodies could also play a role in some of the legislation dealing with advice regarding maritime parks. The issue of maritime parks—and the previous speaker mentioned it—always gains a lot of attention around the coast in my electorate when mentioned. There is a need to tell people, to discuss these issues in detail and to try to make sure that people are informed about what is being achieved so that everybody is well aware of what the goal is. In the past sometimes we have not always done that in the best possible way.

I remember that the last fisheries legislation before us, in 2009, was about the innovative way that AFMA came forward with electronic decision-making schemes known as e-licensing, where licence holders could log in via the internet and complete a range of licensing transactions. This was an innovative way to bring down costs and help the fishing industry. I am sure that that was well received at that time.

I want to go back a little bit to that report in 1997. I remember making the recommendation concerning the *Southern Surveyor* and her research work out of the Derwent River at Hobart about the need for upgrading her. We made that recommendation that she be upgraded and we started to look for that as a nation. I think it was in the 2008 budget that Minister Carr got that decision through the cabinet and through the budgetary processes, and we will be going forward with that decision in the future.

I welcome this legislation. I am glad that it has got bipartisan support. I hope it does not take away anything from people's input. We are reducing some of the advisory processes but industry seems to be giving strong support to it. I hope that AFMA is very pleased with it. I remember in the report where we made recommendations about by-catch. We were trying to build confidence between science, the fishermen and AFMA, hoping that with shared information in the logbook that could be taken on board, people would not just push the by-catch overboard but actually put the data in the logbook. We were trying to argue that people could take that back and at least get a payment at that stage. I think that we have moved on from those days. Hopefully, there is a lot more confidence in their decision making and that people do share information. We need to have a lot of confidence between AFMA, the science and the fishers out there. We need to make sure that we have a sustainable fishery into the future. I look forward to these amendments coming into place and I look forward to talking about them to the fishers in my electorate. I support the amendments.

Dr MIKE KELLY (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (6.17 pm)—I would like to acknowledge the comments of my colleague the member for Lyons. He is well known as a passionate advocate for the fishing industry, a wonderful spokesman and advocate for them. There are few in this building who know or understand more about it. He is truly the fisherman's friend.

It is very pleasing to be able to sum up now, for this legislation is so important for our industry. The Fisheries Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2010 amends the Fisheries Management Act 1991, the Fisheries Administration Act 1991 and the Fishing Levy Act 1991 to implement more effective, efficient and less costly fisheries management arrangements in four main ways.

The first group of amendments will enable AFMA to implement comanagement arrangements in Commonwealth fisheries. Comanagement arrangements will allow AFMA to share the responsibilities and obligations for sustainable management with the primary stakeholders involved in the fishery. Comanagement will provide more effective outcomes in fisheries management through collaborative industry arrangements with stakeholders. It will also acknowledge that fishers and other key stakeholders should be involved in the management of fisheries leading to better policy and management outcomes.

Madam Deputy Speaker D'Ath, it was my pleasure to see a practical example of this in operation at the state level when I recently visited the Spencer Gulf and West Coast Prawn Fishermen's Association in Port Lincoln in South Australia, a true model of how these arrange-

ments can work with a responsible association working cooperatively amongst its members, bringing to bear peer group pressure and providing the raw material, the data, and cooperation with the state authorities that allow comanagement to work beautifully because they understand that sustaining the industry is in their own interests. Also, they would like to hand down their businesses to their children. So it is a wonderful example of how this comanagement regime can work and we hope to now migrate that into the Commonwealth sphere.

The second set of amendments relates to the simplification of AFMA's regulatory processes. AFMA administers a complex regulatory framework that currently contains some duplication and inconsistency across Commonwealth fisheries. This bill will enable AFMA to reduce the complexity of the management rules that apply to each fishery by prescribing standard conditions in the subordinate regulations rather than in individual fishery management plans.

The third area of reform in the bill relates to management advisory committees, or MACs as they are commonly known. The bill will remove the limitation on AFMA to structure the MACs efficiently. The amendment is required to simplify the process for AFMA to reduce the number of MACs and to enable the implementation of a dual advisory model. This will separate the provision of advice to AFMA: MACs will continue to provide advice to AFMA on community interest issues, and advice on fishery operations will be provided by peak industry bodies.

The last group of amendments contained in this bill will allow AFMA to share its expertise and institutional knowledge with Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth agencies. The measures introduced by this bill are a further step in enabling AFMA to implement more efficient and effective fisheries management and to ensure that Australia's fishing industry remains viable for both this generation and generations to come.

In conclusion, I refer to the comments by the member for Calare in relation to the marine bioregional planning process that is currently underway. It is a shame to see references to that process still continuing—some of the misinformation and scaremongering that occurred during the election campaign—when in reality this process in no way differs from that which applied under the Howard government, which in fact initiated that process. We are engaged in a period now of extensive consultation with the stakeholders in the industry in the furtherance of those conservation measures that may or may not be necessary that will be revealed through the areas for further analysis that have been delineated under that process.

There will be no marine parks created under this further process. There may be marine protected areas created which will relate to management regimes that are revealed by the areas for further analysis, research and observations by the industry. There should be nothing to fear in this process. It in no way differs from the process that applied under the Howard government.

I thank members for their contributions. I look forward to the arrangements and improvements that will be instituted through this legislation. I know it will be greatly welcomed by the fishing industry.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

Sitting suspended from 6.23 pm to 6.41 pm**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS****National Carers Week**

Debate resumed, on motion by **Ms Owens**:

That this House:

- (1) recognises:
 - (a) that the week of 17 to 23 October was National Carers Week;
 - (b) that there are more than 2.6 million carers in Australia;
 - (c) the caring role is one of immense social and economic value, with carers being the foundation of our health, aged, palliative and community care systems;
 - (d) as health care increasingly moves away from 'institutional' settings into the home and community, family carers shoulder greater responsibility for managing complex conditions and providing the emotional and physical support for the person for whom they are caring;
 - (e) without carers, no future health or community care system will be able to respond to changing demographics and health needs, clinical practices and societal influences, in the long term;
 - (f) the Government's practical measures to improve the lives of carers through significant reforms across the disability, health, mental health and aged care service systems, including:
 - (i) delivering a \$60 a fortnight increase to the base pension plus an increase of \$5 a fortnight in the new Pension Supplement for carers receiving the maximum single rate of Carer Payment (a total increase of around \$100 per fortnight, after indexation increases from 20 March);
 - (ii) guaranteeing the certainty of an annual ongoing Carers Supplement of \$600 for each person cared for, benefiting around 500 000 carers;
 - (iii) overhauling the complex and restrictive eligibility requirements for Carer Payment (Child);
 - (iv) significantly boosting funding to the State and Territory governments for specialist disability services including supported accommodation, in-home care and respite; and
 - (v) commissioning the Productivity Commission to examine the feasibility, costs and benefits of a National Long Term Disability Care and Support Scheme; and
- (2) calls on the Government to renew its commitment to carers in this Parliament and to exercise all instruments of policy to support carers in their vital work.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (6.42 pm)—I rise to recognise the vital work of, and enormous contribution made by, Australian carers. No group deserves our support more than carers. Few make greater sacrifices or demonstrate a firmer commitment than carers. They provide the strongest support to some of the most disadvantaged in our community. As Minister Macklin said recently at the Carers Week launch:

It's a job where you don't knock off at five o'clock—or six or seven. No public holidays, no annual leave, no time off when you're sick.

Carers give a whole new meaning to the words—"soldiering on".

All of us in this House would have had the privilege of meeting some of the extraordinary people who dedicate literally every second of their lives to caring for someone they love. Over one in eight, or close to three million Australians, are estimated to be providing informal care to a person who needs assistance due to disability, chronic illness or old age. Nearly half

a million, 494,000, are primary carers, providing the majority of the recipients' care, and approximately 3,000 of those live in my electorate of Parramatta.

I am going to talk a bit about the numbers here, and particularly the dollars—what it costs people to do this extraordinary thing that they do. I know well and truly that I am talking about people, but for a few minutes I am going to talk about dollars. It is estimated that informal carers together provide a total of 1.2 billion hours of care per year. That is equivalent to each carer providing an average of 470 hours of care per year, or nine hours a week. However, in reality the hours are much more unevenly distributed, with primary carers providing 54 per cent of all care hours. That is about 700,000 hours of care per year. Access Economics has measured the opportunity cost of time devoted to informal care, measured as a reduction in paid employment due to caring, and provided a conservative estimate of \$4.9 billion. That is about 0.6 per cent of forecast GDP and 9.9 per cent of the value of formal health care. That is the amount that it costs our carers each year—\$4.9 billion—to essentially give up all or part of their earning capacity and care for people they love.

There are also substantial impacts of caring on the health and wellbeing of carers. Often the burden of pain and suffering associated with depression, musculoskeletal injuries and other problems dwarf the financial costs. Several studies suggest that the sleep impacts of caring alone may exceed \$1 billion per annum, including a financial estimate of the reduction in quality of life.

Governments are increasingly recognising the contribution of carers. The Gillard Labor government recognise the immense social, emotional and financial pressures that carers face in caring for their loved ones. We believe that carers deserve the same opportunities as other Australians to participate in work and in the community and to live a meaningful life. A very good report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth was tabled last year called *Who cares? Report on the inquiry into better support for carers*. Central to the government's response to this inquiry was the commitment from the Commonwealth to lead the development of a national carer recognition framework. The Carer Recognition Bill 2010, which we have discussed in this House in the past couple of days, is the first element of that framework. It sits alongside another important element, the National Carer Strategy.

The Australian government released a discussion paper to inform the development of a national carer strategy at the launch of the national Carers Week this year. The discussion paper outlines the government's commitment to deliver improved support and greater recognition for carers. As part of the process, the government is seeking the views of carers on how to achieve better opportunities for work and education, improve the health and wellbeing of carers and provide better access to information and support. Again, all of us in this House are well aware of some of the quite difficult circumstances of carers. We are well aware that families are more likely to break up when there is a caring role within it. We are well aware of the loss of earning capacity and sometimes the loneliness and isolation of carers. Providing a framework that allows people with this important role to participate more fully in life outside the home is incredibly important.

To ensure that we hear from carers across the country, the Australian government has provided \$175,000 to Carers Australia and Children with Disability Australia to run discussion forums with carers and to seek their views and ideas for the National Carer Strategy. We will

consult directly with carer organisations, advocates and service providers across all capital cities and selected rural and remote areas. The Carer Strategy will be a 10-year agenda to support carers, to drive reform and to guide policy development and delivery of services for carers.

We have also moved to make some improvements in the past three years of government. We have provided increased financial security for carers by delivering increases to the carer payment and more than \$100 a fortnight for single pensioners on the maximum rate. In addition, more than 500,000 carers each now receive a new annual carer supplement of \$600 for each person they care for, guaranteed in legislation. Carers most under financial pressure who receive both the carer payment and the carer allowance receive at least two payments of \$600.

As I said, to formally acknowledge the role of carers at a national level, the Gillard government has introduced national carer recognition legislation. The Gillard Labor government also recognises that carers want better support for their loved ones, whether they are frail, aged, a child with a disability or a partner with a mental illness. That is why the Gillard Labor government is committed to reforms to achieve a fairer Australia in the disability services system, aged care and better mental health. Labor will introduce A Better Start for Children with Disability to provide more families of children with disabilities with access to intensive early intervention therapies and treatments from expert health professionals.

From 1 July 2011, young children diagnosed with sight and hearing impairments, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome or fragile X syndrome will be eligible to receive up to \$12,000 for early intervention services. In addition, about 20,000 children up to the age of 13 years will be able to access new Medicare services for diagnosis and treatment under this program. The Gillard government will also establish a new \$60 million capital fund to build innovative, community based supported accommodation and respite places for people with disability, building on our \$100 million capital injection in 2008 to build over 300 supported accommodation places.

These announcements build on federal Labor's track record of delivering for people with disability and their carers. The Gillard Labor government is providing more than \$6 billion over five years under the new National Disability Agreement, including the highest ever level of indexation to improve and expand services for people with disability and their carers. This funding includes the highest ever level of indexation for disability services. In 2010-11 the indexation will be 6.8 per cent, compared with just 1.8 per cent in 2006-07 under the former coalition government. By 2012 the federal government's contribution will exceed \$1.3 billion—over double what it was in 2007. The new agreement also includes a commitment to deliver more than 24,000 additional disability places, including 10,000 respite places, 2,300 in-home care places and more supported accommodation.

The Gillard government has also increased incentives for families to establish special disability trusts, which assist immediate family members and carers who have the financial means to do so to make private financial provision for a family member with a severe disability. Changes delivered by the Gillard Labor government are expected to increase take-up by over 20 per cent. I am pleased to have this opportunity to recognise close to three million Australians who provide care and more than 3,000 people from Parramatta who provide care for loved ones. Their work is substantial and their contribution immense. The government recognises that there is always more work to be done in uplifting the life circumstances of all Aus-

tralian and we also recognise that the ageing population face ever-increasing demands. (*Time expired*)

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (6.52 pm)—Last week across Australia we celebrated National Carers Week 2010. The theme—‘Anyone any time can be a carer’—serves to remind us that we never know what is round the corner and when we may be called upon to be a carer. ‘Anyone any time can become a carer’ reflects the unexpected and indiscriminate nature of who will be called upon in the future to become carers. Last week was an opportunity to publicly and collectively thank all local areas in the Brisbane area and across the country. Carers Week serves to highlight and promote the valuable role that Australian carers play. Approximately 20 per cent of the Australian population has a physical or intellectual disability, yet many of these people face significant challenges in fully participating in the work force, family and community.

Support for people with illness and disability is most often provided by full- and part-time carers. These carers sacrifice their time, lives and independence to look after loved ones. The value of this caring role can be measured in terms of the \$30 billion annually that it might otherwise cost. The primary carer’s role is equivalent to a traditional full-time paid job of 40 hours or more per week. But we know that carers provide more than 40 hours per week of care. They provide the basic values of love and dignity to the person in their charge. These things cannot be measured so easily.

In Australia, there are some 2.6 million unpaid carers giving their time and energy 24 hours a day, seven days a week to care for their loved ones and families. In my own family, I have seen firsthand the role that carers undertake, often forsaking their own well being. It has become a 24-hour, round-the-clock process of love, often depriving them of basic and simple pleasures such as being able to meet friends and family members for coffee or just having that really valuable time out.

The coalition when in government developed a package of measures to improve the position of carers, including more respite and the establishment of the National Respite for Carers program. We introduced a carers pension and increases in funding for and a broadening of eligibility for the carers allowances. It was the coalition that first gave recognition to young carers and their specific needs through respite and information services. Throughout, the coalition government continued its commitment to support and ease the financial burden of carers and in 2006 the government recognised that there was a gap in the level of assistance for families caring for young children with a disability.

During the 2010 election campaign, the coalition released a range of policies to assist people with disabilities and their carers. We proposed to establish the office of the Commonwealth disability and carer ombudsman to give Australians with a disability and carers a real independent voice on policy activities within the government. The ombudsman would independently investigate claims and assist Australians with a disability and their carers to resolve dispute with government departments and ensure that the Commonwealth government is accountable to Australians with a disability and carers.

The young carers scholarship program was another one of the coalition’s commitments to take real action. It was designed to particularly value the work of young carers. Around this country at this time there are 400,000 Australians aged under 26 who care for a person with a disability or a long-term illness. The ABS data shows that 6.6 per cent of carers are aged un-

der 18. It is absolutely mind boggling that these young people have such a heavy burden of responsibility placed on their shoulders. Many of these young carers are missing chances to further their education, to take part-time work or to mingle with their peers. Getting through secondary school or university is an added burden. This program would have assisted young carers to take up places in secondary schools, TAFEs and universities.

There are many groups that provide emotional support to carers and family members providing care. One such group is the Palliative Care Association of Queensland. I recently met with the CEO in Brisbane. He outlined many instances where members of his organisation have been providing care for loved ones during this very difficult time in their lives. There is constant stress. The emotional demand placed upon carers is something that should never be underestimated. They do incredibly valuable work. Many volunteer organisations across many of our electorates and communities are involved in caring for carers. Their work deserves high praise and recognition. I am pleased today to be speaking to this motion.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (6.57 pm)—It is a great pleasure for me to speak on this motion, because it is a really important motion about some very important people in our community. I want to congratulate the member for Parramatta, Julie Owens, for putting this motion on the *Notice Paper*. She is well regarded in this place for her commitment to carers and has a long-standing history of working in that particular area. I also want to place on the record my support for carers broadly and for this motion.

Last week was National Carers Week. I got the opportunity to speak briefly on a range of matters in relation to that last week. It is time for us in this place to recognise the vital work that is done by nearly 2.6 million carers across this country. That is a lot of people. If you analyse what that represents and the work that they do, it is a lot of hours, a lot of effort and a lot of love going into making sure that the people who need them are properly cared for. We cannot ever as a government compensate people for the work that they do in providing that care every hour of every day. It is almost an impossible task. There are numbers floating around the place about what that represents. We heard just before from the member for Brisbane a figure of around \$30 billion a year. Whatever the number is, it is too much for any government to bear on its own. That is why we need to recognise the work of carers; that is why we need to acknowledge what they do. Beyond recognition, we need to provide real support for people who care for others. That is where government comes in: to put in place the proper assistance measures and regulations.

It is fair to say, I think, that all governments through time progressively work through improvements for people who are carers. I know that, as much as people on the other side have done their bit when they were in government, we too, on this side, will do our part now that we are in government. And we have done that in a number of areas. We have recognised that being a carer is an exhausting job. It is a full-time job, much more than a paid job. It is often seven days a week. It is 24 hours a day. There is often very little opportunity for respite, and that is one of the great areas of difficulty and need: how do you provide that respite for 2.6 million carers around the nation?

The government is committed to supplying practical help for carers. We are doing that across a range of areas, from disability care through to health care, mental health care, aged-care services and a range of other areas. Measures we have particularly taken are to deliver a \$60 a fortnight increase to the base pension rate plus an increase of \$5 a fortnight in the new

pension supplement for carers who receive the maximum single rate of carer payment. We have moved to guarantee the certainty of the annual ongoing carer supplement of \$600 for each person in care, which benefits around half a million carers specifically. We have also looked at overhauling the complex and restrictive eligibility requirements for carer payment, particularly in relation to children, which is often not as well recognised.

We have provided a funding boost for the states and territories for specialist disability services as well, and we have put in place and are developing a National Carer Strategy, which is a really long-term agenda, a long-term approach, to help guide policy development and delivery. Often the things that government could do and can provide are more than just monetary supplement. It is also about making sure that policy development and delivery are done properly. That strategy is due for release in the first half of next year, in 2011.

The government also is committed to recognising the role of carers and the very important part they play. Last week I spoke on the Carer Recognition Bill, which for the first time actually defines what a carer is and sets out 10 key principles on how carers should be treated, through the Statement for Australia's Carers. That is reflected back through the public sector, through the Public Service, through policy, and will bring a much more holistic approach to the way that carers are treated in this country.

I also want to mention an incredible couple who were the feature of a media story in my electorate last week: Goodna's Harry Chalk and his wife Ellie, who cares for her husband around the clock and has been doing this very unselfishly for the past 20 years. Harry was struck down with a particular disability which meant that he had no movement from the neck down, and Ellie has been there for him for a very, very long time and continues to provide that support. You can imagine the amount of work and the pressure on this one woman to look after her husband for the past 20 years and continue to do that. That story for me reflects what we need to do in this place and the care we should provide as well.

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (7.03 pm)—It gives me great pleasure to be able to speak in support of the motion by the member for Parramatta recognising the work of carers in the community. The timing of the motion is fitting, as we have just celebrated Carers Week for 2010 from 17 October to 23 October. I remind the House that the theme of this year's celebration was, 'Anyone, any time, can become a carer'. That theme should resonate with all Australians when we come to contemplate our blessings and/or misfortunes. Any one of us at any time could be faced with the daunting challenge of caring for a loved one. Let us not forget that reality.

I was invited to participate in Carers Week activities in my home town of Townsville. Activities included open days, lifestyle expos and shopping centre displays in Townsville, Bowen, Rollingstone and Charters Towers. In addition to the organised activities, Carers Week gave hundreds of paid and unpaid carers in my electorate an opportunity to share their experiences and to network together in a positive way. Activities such as Carers Week are vital in assisting these wonderful people to continue their vital work. I take this opportunity to commend the work of Sandy McIntyre, Regional Carer Services Officer in Townsville, and her team for their work in organising Carers Week activities and for their general support work.

I also take the opportunity to publicly recognise the work of Cootharinga North Queensland, an organisation that has been looking after the needs of people with disabilities for almost 60 years. Cootharinga has won a number of awards for excellence for its tireless work in

easing the burdens shared by disabled North Queenslanders and their families. I would like to make particular mention of Cootharinga's respite service, particularly the Older Parent Carers Project that was set up specifically to help older carers who may be suffering ill health or simply the realities that come with advancing years. The respite service not only provides a welcome break for clients and their parents but also seeks alternative, longer term support arrangements. This service has been a great source of relief for older constituents in my electorate who are understandably worried about the welfare of their children after they can no longer provide care or, indeed, pass on.

I note that paragraph 1(f) of the motion by the member for Parramatta recognises measures that the government has taken to ease the burden on carers through increases in carer payment and the annual carer supplement and the range of other measures including increased funding to state and territory governments for 'specialist disability services including supported accommodation, in-home care and respite'. While these measures are welcome, I remind the House that no amount of money will ever compensate Australian carers for the wonderful, selfless work they perform every day to make the lives of the less fortunate in our society more enjoyable. The work they do and the load they carry simply cannot be quantified. These quiet achievers are the unsung heroes of our society. I welcome the opportunity to pay tribute to Australia's carers and offer my support to the motion by the member for Parramatta.

I would like to finish by asking the committee to always be mindful of the process which must be followed to gain access to support. Currently, a carer, to gain the best possible help for their loved one, must paint them in as black a picture as humanly possible. We are asking family members to articulate just how hard it is to care for a loved one. This is as sad and upsetting a process as one will ever have to endure. Any change which will ease this burden must be looked at with great care.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER(Ms Vamvakinou)—Order! The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Mental Health

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mr Dutton**:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) mental illness afflicts more Australians than almost all other health disorders, only ranking behind cancer and heart disease in prevalence;
 - (b) forty-five per cent of the nation's population will experience a mental health disorder at some point in life;
 - (c) younger Australians—those between 16 and 24—bear the brunt of mental illness, with prevalence of problems declining with age;
 - (d) with early and targeted treatment, many people can overcome mental illness or lower the incidence of progression or relapse;
 - (e) expansion of the *headspace* and Early Psychosis Prevention Intervention Centres (EPPIC) models could help an estimated 200 000 young Australians, and in doing so, free-up existing services for others with mental illnesses whilst alleviating pressures on public hospitals and emergency departments; and

- (f) the Government has moved to cut services in mental healthcare;
- (2) requires the Government to:
 - (a) expand the number of *headspace* centres to a minimum of 90 nationally;
 - (b) establish a national network of 20 EPPIC centres;
 - (c) provide an additional 800 beds for mental health, associated with the EPPIC centres;
 - (d) appropriate funds necessary to provide these critical steps to expanding mental health treatment facilities; and
 - (e) immediately provide additional funds for existing *headspace* centres; and
- (3) sends a message to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting that it concur.

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (7.07 pm)—I am very pleased to speak to this motion on mental health, which has been moved by the member for Dickson and seconded by me. What this motion demonstrates is the important priority the coalition places on mental health. It is extraordinary to us that, after 18 months of a national health and hospital review, after 90 or 100 visits to hospitals led by the Prime Minister, the government's response in the area of mental health has been so profoundly inadequate. It is not just us: mental health experts across Australia are staggered by the lack of vision and lack of action that this government has shown in the area of mental health.

As a member during this time I have been involved in many different aspects of the parliament with respect to mental health. We have had some very good parliamentary forums on the issue of youth suicide, and I was very pleased to be the founding co-chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Schizophrenia, a bipartisan group which has as its goal removing the stigma of mental health but also shedding some light on this condition, which has a lifetime incidence of affecting one in 100 Australians.

On behalf of the opposition we think it is important that the government does really focus on mental health. Mental illness afflicts more Australians than almost all other health disorders, only ranking behind cancer and heart disease in prevalence. According to figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, mental illness accounts for 13 per cent of the total burden of disease in Australia. These same figures show that almost half of the nation's population, 45 per cent, will experience a mental health disorder at some point in their lives. Many more will be impacted by mental illness as a family member or a friend grapples with a mental health problem. I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the work done by organisations such as *beyondblue*, *Lifeline* and others—all of which have increased the profile and given avenues for people with a mental health issue to go to. If we consider an illness like depression, depression is really a chronic disease that should be managed as a chronic disease. The risk of relapse of depression is as high as 77.5 per cent. That is why it is important that it is treated actively for one year, perhaps three years.

It is widely acknowledged that mental health treatment in Australia is currently underfunded. Mental illness accounts for 13 per cent of the national health burden but receives only six per cent of the health funding. Today we are calling upon the government to implement the key elements of the coalition's Direct Action Plan for Better Mental Health. One key aspect of our policy was a substantial increase in the number of *headspace* sites from 30 to 90. The *headspace* model is internationally recognised as being highly effective in combating mental illness. It is a youth-friendly site. It was the former member for Adelaide, Trish Worth,

and the member for Sturt who started the rollout of the headspace sites. In fact, it was an initiative that that Howard government took to the 2004 election. There is a real question mark over the government's commitment to headspace, as shown by their slow rollout and the lack of recurrent funding that is there for each centre.

We would also like to see a commitment from the government to establish a national network of 20 early psychosis and prevention intervention centres and to provide an additional 800 beds for mental health associated with these centres. Labor have made no specific commitment to mental health beds. The government have no idea of the number of mental health beds they will be funding or the models of care which will be associated with these beds. We believe it is important in the subacute space that we have mental health beds—and we have nominated 800—but also that they be associated with a network of early psychosis and prevention intervention centres. The EPPIC model is about improved access to services, early intervention targeting those who bear the brunt of mental illness—16- to 24-year-olds—and alleviating the pressure on public hospitals and overstretched emergency departments.

During the election Labor only promised \$25.5 million for early psychosis intervention centres—which might, at a pinch, fund two. It will not provide us with a national network. It still will not address the gaps in servicing that currently exist in the area of mental health. Finally, the government must appropriate funds necessary to provide these critical steps to expanding mental health treatment facilities and immediately provide existing funds for existing headspace centres.

In the 2006 budget, when the Leader of the Opposition was health minister, the Howard government committed to spend \$1.9 billion over five years to June next year. This still remains the single biggest investment in mental health by any government in Australian history. It is something which I am very proud to be associated with. What we did was we used the infrastructure of Medicare to create a greater role for general practitioners in primary care and for allied health professionals. It followed on from Senate committee reports, and also from the *Not for service* report, which was released by the Mental Health Council of Australia in October 2005.

Since the 2007 election, funding has been reduced substantially. Labor have cut funding to mental health in a range of programs in their first two budgets. They cut funding for the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program from \$191 million to \$63 million. They removed OTs and social workers from the MBS Better Access program. They cut funding to mental health services in rural and remote areas. In the Rudd-Gillard government's national health and hospital reform plan, mental health was completely overlooked, with mental health amounting to less than two per cent of the total reforms.

The medical profession was so disenchanted by the government's health reforms that we saw our best resigning from government positions. Professor John Mendoza, chair of the National Advisory Council on Mental Health, resigned from his position, writing:

It is now abundantly clear that there is no vision or commitment from the Rudd Government to mental health.

The Commonwealth government needs to listen to the calls from the community, from health experts and from the opposition. They need to provide national focus and leadership in the areas of mental health. The coalition set out in the election campaign a very clear policy and a very clear framework for mental health and, at the time, our policy on mental health was ac-

knowledge by stakeholders as a major advance for early intervention and the treatment of mental illnesses. We need to work towards a society that understands and can respond to the personal and social impact of mental illness, and there needs to be a bipartisan approach to achieving this end.

The bottom line is that we need a national, uniform approach to combating mental illness. That is why we call on the government to act now to expand the number of headspace sites to a minimum of 90 nationally, to establish a national network of 20 early psychosis prevention and intervention centres, to provide an additional 800 beds for mental health associated with these centres, to ensure that these centres are adequately funded and to immediately provide additional funds for the existing headspace centres. This is an important priority. There is a strong feeling in the community that mental health has not been well addressed by this government. This is an area where the government needs to act, and that is why we are calling on the government to take action and adopt the coalition's policy on mental health.

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (7.17 pm)—I rise to speak in support of better initiatives, more initiatives and a more responsive way of acting with mental health services, but I want to put on the record that, while the member for Boothby was just saying we need to work in a bipartisan way, I suggest that their motion is not a way forward for working in a bipartisan way. The member for Boothby also attacked the government, saying that in 18 months we did not completely reform the whole mental health system. The federal government does not wholly manage the mental health system; it is done with states and territories and does not purely rest with the federal government. Attacking the government by saying that in 18 months it did not completely reform it, change it and fix every problem in mental health—it is just ludicrous to think that those things could happen. I do not want to relive the past, but I could say that in the 12 years or more that they were in government they did not fix it. They did not move to fix it. The coalition government also did not appoint a minister for mental health. But I do not want to spend too much time dwelling on that. I just rebut some of those comments because they are absolute nonsense, and to say that the government has no commitment is simply not true.

There is for the first time a Commonwealth minister for mental health. That did not exist before. I know that the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, in one of his first speeches—I think he had been minister for 40-odd hours—said he could not describe what an honour it was and how excited he was to be in that position. He also outlined some of the issues and realities that we have to face. Some of those are that, as a community, we know that we have not done well enough for people who suffer mental ill health, for their carers and for families—if they are fortunate enough to have that caring network around them. There has been underperformance for decades, and it flows from decades of government inaction at all levels: bad planning, wrong priorities, and non-responsive services. There is a whole lot that needs to be done. The Prime Minister has said that, yes, we have to do better, and that is where we have started. To work in a bipartisan way means we have to recognise that and work out what we have to do now. To come up with a policy in an election, as the coalition did, and say, 'This is the blueprint; this is the way to fix it all,' is ludicrous. You cannot come up with something at such short notice—in such a short time—and say, 'This is going to do it.'

Funding is always important. We need more funding. I always say I welcome more funding. But we also have to direct that funding. We have to make sure that it is going to work and

gets to the people it needs to get to. We have to ensure that when someone fronts up to a health service with a problem that is to do with their mental health they are responded to in whatever way is needed. We know that sometimes in our health systems all around Australia people do not get a response or the care that they need when they front up, and if their particular disorder or presentation of symptoms does not fit a service then they may not get through the door. Those are some of the things that we have to stop. Places like the headspaces are critical, but there is more that is needed. There is the early intervention for psychosis. We need to do more early intervention for young people—but intervention in a way that works. The headspaces are being rolled out; there will be about 30 extra. I know that, like all members, I will be saying I want one in my area, and I know that it will be competitive. It is hard to do. We have the health services that are able to respond with the care that is needed for the people in their communities, and some of the health reforms will start to lead the way to doing that.

I agree with paragraphs 1(a) to 1(e) of the motion of the honourable member for Dickson, in which he notes certain things, but I disagree with his comment in paragraph 1(f) because it simply is not true. I shall turn to that soon. I also have to disagree with paragraph (2), requiring the government to do what is contained in 2(a) to 2(e). It is no use our coming in here and being prescriptive. We have to work through the issues, work with the mental health experts and work with the teams. We need to have mental health as an integrated part of our health system. In some areas, this has not been the case and there has been a discrepancy in services. I can remember years ago looking at how much funding per person there was for mental health in each state and territory and finding there were lots of discrepancies. That is one of the things that is being addressed through the COAG agreement, including the COAG agreement in April this year. Do we need more money in another state or not? Maybe we do and maybe we do not, but they are not easy issues and they are not issues that we can determine by standing up and speaking on a motion about mental health.

I have worked as a mental health advocate. I have worked as a lawyer representing people in institutions in different places. I have had a long involvement in the area both professionally and personally. I know that we have too many people with mental ill health in jails and they should not be in jails. Those are some of the issues that will be dealt with through COAG, through health reform and through the agreements, but we cannot resolve all of those there.

The current forward estimates include \$1.2 billion of spending on specific mental health initiatives, and that is beyond the Medicare benefits schedule and the PBS. That is a doubling of the previous government's expenditure over its last four years. I do not say this by way of crowing; I say it by way of fact. Those members on the other side who said the government is cutting funding and not doing enough ought to think long and hard before they start to throw out those comments. We are rolling out the first 10 of up to 30 new headspace sites and the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing has written to the states seeking their interest in partnering with the Commonwealth to develop the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre. That is the first ever Commonwealth investment in the EPPIC model since its introduction in 1992 and it comes from the federal government. The expansion of the subacute beds—that is, the 1,300 beds which were committed at COAG—will support mental health as well.

There is also the \$277 million suicide prevention plan announced in the election, and that will boost front line services like Lifeline, which will be able to take tens of thousands of additional calls. Don't Lifeline do a wonderful job? Where would we be without Lifeline in our communities? There are so many groups that I am loathe to name just one, but we all know the work that Lifeline do. Just having someone answering telephone calls and being there really does make a difference. There is also the expansion of the psychological services on the ground for people who have attempted or are at high risk of suicide, particularly after discharge from hospital. I have looked at the statistics, as I am sure everyone else has, about people who are discharged from hospital after attempting suicide and about how there has not been any follow-up. Those are some of the things that we have to change, but wasn't it wonderful that during the last election everyone was talking about mental health? Who would have thought years ago that we would be in an election with the media, with members of parliament and with parties focusing on mental health initiatives, discussion and debate. It seemed to me to be a coming of age, in a sense, that mental health is clearly on the mainstream agenda, which is where it should be. The fact is that we now have a Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, someone who can be a primary advocate at the federal level and with the states and territories through COAG. Each and every one of us as MPs is an advocate for people who have mental ill health.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (7.27 pm)—I am very pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this motion of the member for Dickson. I think that we need to give the subject even greater airing than it has had in these last few months. I have been here longer than the member for Page and in 1996 I had responsibility as minister to roll out a national youth suicide prevention program. So we on our side have had quite a long commitment in dealing with this, albeit we probably still did not give it the continuity that it deserved. A number of us also pushed for the \$1.5 billion that the Howard government injected into mental health in that last term in government.

I was pleased to hear the contribution of the member for Page and that of my colleague the member for Boothby on this subject because in 2010, frankly, mental health is still an issue that is frequently swept under the carpet in our country. It is incredible to think that a complaint that will affect over 45 per cent of Australians to some degree rates low on the list of priorities, particularly government priorities. Even when we heard the continued rhetoric about national health reform in the lead-up to the election, the government promised only \$277 million over four years compared to the coalition's commitment of \$1.5 billion over the same period, an amount of over five times as much as the government. But funding alone is not the solution to effectively treat mental health. It must be targeted through innovative services, and I agree with the member for Page on that point. It must be targeted at an early stage to those who need it most.

There are many different types of mental illness, and we cannot just treat it as one homogenous illness. It manifests in so many different ways. It is like comparing a heart attack with a stroke or with kidney failure. We have to also understand that there are different types of mental illness, and they need different kinds of treatment and proper diagnosis. We have seen, through recent publicity, some very high profile cases and the terrible consequences of misdiagnosing mental illness and treating bipolar disorder as depression. These are very different mental illnesses. Many of them are life threatening in a very real way, and many of

them are for a lifetime. As the member for Boothby said, it should be treated as a chronic illness because it is never going to go away; it has to be managed for the whole of life. We know some people go through periods of depression when adverse events happen in their life, and they might get over it with treatment within a few months or a few years. But some kinds of mental disorders are chronic illnesses that have to be treated for the whole of life, and that is often overlooked.

This is why the coalition's commitment expressly mirrored the recommendations of the National Health and Hospital Reform Commission, particularly that:

... a youth friendly community-based service, which provides information and screening for mental disorders and sexual health, be rolled out nationally for all young Australians—

and that:

... the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre model be implemented nationally so that early intervention ... becomes the norm.

The coalition's policy provides for 20 early psychosis intervention centres based on the EPPIC model and 800 mental health beds and, importantly, 60 additional youth headspace sites. Youth headspace deserves to be singled out because of the benefits it provides in catching demographics that do not usually seek assistance. Of every Australian that has a mental disorder, only 35 per cent actually get treatment—and I will come back to that shortly—compared with 80 to 90 per cent of people with physical health problems. In young people with a mental disorder, the percentage of those treated drops to 25 per cent and for young males, 15 per cent.

Mental health expert, Professor Patrick McGorry, commented in an ABC radio interview the day after being awarded Australian of the Year that the particularly low diagnosis and treatment of young people is 'simply because we've dismissed it as part of growing up'. He noted:

... people say all the time to me, both at professional and public forums, how do you tell when your teenager or your young adult isn't actually experiencing a mental disorder or a mental health problem for which they need some health or mental treatment?

Trying to answer that question is near impossible for parents. Instead, the focus of youth headspace is on providing a community based youth friendly, low stigma, one-stop shop where people who are experiencing mental health concerns can literally drop in and discuss their concerns with professionals in a supportive environment. From there, an appropriate diagnosis or course of action can be determined. At this one-stop shop individuals can also seek treatment for substance abuse problems.

In the last parliament I was part of the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth, and we did a very good report on youth homelessness, *Housing the Homeless*. But it became abundantly evident during that inquiry into homelessness that so often the condition of many young people goes undiagnosed. Mental health issues then have a tendency to spiral out of control, and these events lead to homelessness, drug dependency and all the related general health issues. We took evidence of young people with anxiety disorders and behavioural issues that saw them kicked out of home at a young age, their undiagnosed disorders escalating along with increasing vulnerability. Some of these young people were 13 and 14, and they were living under bridges at that age. As a method of coping with the pain, this morphed into drug dependency, which leads to disruption of education, long-term unemploy-

ment and, too often, trouble with the law and prison. It is a great tragedy of isolation from mainstream community and family life and invariably leads to premature and life-threatening illness.

Data from the Youth Action and Policy Association notes that homeless youths are four times more likely to have mental health issues than youth in safe and secure environments. Statistics further show that 50 per cent of young people accessing housing or homeless agencies have one or more identifiable mental health issues. This data shows a great need for more appropriate support of supervised care than what already exists. The situation was highlighted just this weekend in the *West Australian*, which ran a story titled 'Youth in distress'. In an interview with Merryn Kenderdine, who voluntarily admitted herself to the Way Centre in Bentley when she was a teenager a number of years ago, she explained:

I did not get a lot of help or treatment there ... they were mainly making sure that I didn't run away, kill myself or anything like that.

She said that patients were not let outside, and went on to say:

It was just this small courtyard where you could smoke ... there was no sporting activity. You couldn't go out and kick a ball. It was bare minimum.

Most worryingly, she said:

A lot these kids are left with a sense of fear of their illness itself and their life as a result of that experience. The other impact potentially is that if they run into strife in the future, they won't access services because of the experience they had before.

Since Ms Kenderdine's time at the facility, more funds have been committed by the state government, but the situation highlights the lack of overarching funding support and vision which can and should be provided by the Commonwealth. Speaking on radio in January, Professor McGorry outlined his view on why such support is not forthcoming. He believes we lack confidence and that it is a common position in Australia in mental health.

The COAG National Action Plan for Mental Health notes on page 18 that the first insights into the sheer number of people who receive no treatment for mental health disorders came from the national population surveys over a decade ago. These surveys showed that 11 per cent of Australians had a mental health disorder but received no treatment. The action plan surmises that, if the findings of a decade ago are generalised today, the number of Australians not being treated is 2.3 million individuals. Imagine if we failed to treat 2.3 million people with cancer, or 2.3 million people with heart conditions, or 2.3 million people who had had a stroke. Imagine the outcry. I think it has been too long that we have left mental health problems the poor relation to all other health problems. We have the architecture for change in place. All that is needed now is the political will to do something.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (7.37 pm)—Mental illness affects every state and territory, every city, every town, every community and every family. It should be something on which we come to this place with goodwill, with friendship and with affection towards one another in looking at how we can tackle this serious problem. While, to a certain extent, I would be happy for the member for Dickson to put forward motions urging us to do more with respect to mental health and the mental illnesses that people suffer from each day, in each place and in each family, to be lectured by the member for Boothby about our alleged failings, faults and foibles with respect to what we have done in relation to mental health, in circumstances where the coalition's record is not as they purport it to be, really sticks in my craw. This is a

serious issue and it should be treated in that way, not used as a political point-scoring method by the member for Boothby.

But, if you really want to look at it and if the coalition really want to put to us what their record is with respect to health, look at what they did across the country, and I will look at what we did in my community. We know that, when the opposition leader was the minister for health—and the forward estimates indicate this; they cannot deny it—a billion dollars was taken out of the health system. What did we do when we were first elected in 2007? We immediately put money into health and hospitals across the country and lined up the states and territories in relation to that. In my community alone, we have an Ipswich GP superclinic now functioning at the University of Queensland, dealing with all kinds of health needs of people. Right beside it is the federally funded University of Queensland Psychology Clinic. If the coalition had their way, that GP superclinic would be shut down. It is the same thing with respect to health and doctors. The coalition are the ones who capped the number of doctors.

Mr Dutton—Simply untrue.

Mr Neumann—They did. They capped it in 2004, when Tony Abbott was the minister for health. That is what they did. We have made a strong commitment and we are funding more doctors, more nurses and more training places. E-health is another aspect important to mental health. Again, we had the shadow minister for communications here today in this place sitting opposite, where the member for Dickson currently sits, with a private member's motion. He was in the House earlier today with a bill with respect to, really, attempting to procrastinate and delay on the National Broadband Network, which is so critical for e-health. So the coalition have form with respect to this issue, and it is a bit rich for them to come in here and start lecturing us on these types of matters.

The truth is that we are the first government ever to have a minister for mental health. We make no secret of the fact—the minister said this today in question time—that there is a lot more to do. We have started, and the COAG reforms have invested significant additional resources in mental health. This includes the headspace and EPPIC sites, not to mention a major investment in subacute beds. As the minister said in his answer today, many of those are associated with mental health. Of course, this comes on top of our primary care and hospital reforms, which we believe will have a significant impact across the whole spectrum of patients, including those suffering from mental health problems.

In my electorate, we have seen significant investments in health and hospitals, including significant investment in Ipswich General Hospital. We have seen a substantial increase in funding, and the Ipswich General Hospital is the hub around which the health service operates in the city of Ipswich. There is additional funding to assist great organisations in my local community that deal with people suffering from ill health. This supports wonderful people like Diane Bos, who is the manager of the Ipswich and West Moreton Lifeline service. It supports Southern Cross community care, Focal Extended and ALARA—wonderful organisations receiving assistance from the federal government to provide help for those people suffering from mental disability.

The coalition purports to give us lectures on funding for mental health, and we have seen tonight spokespeople for those opposite saying that they put a lot more money into mental health and propose to do so in future. Let us have a look at the record. With respect to mental health funding under the Medicare Benefits Schedule, pharmaceutical benefits funding and

funding for mental-health-specific programs, including Indigenous programs to do with mental health services, we will nearly double that over the next four years—\$1.2 billion from 2010-11 to 2013-14. That compares to—wait for it—only \$516.3 million from 2004-05 to 2007-08. Five hundred and sixteen million dollars is not the same as \$1.2 billion, the money that this government is putting in. The Howard government put nothing like the kind of funding that the federal Labor government has put since 2007 and will put into mental health services. Furthermore, as part of our election commitment, there is \$277 million allocated over four years for mental health. That will go principally towards tackling issues of suicide. I have dealt with many chaplains in my electorate, and they do wonderful work in the schools with young people suffering from depression, anxiety and other kinds of difficulties. I have dealt with the wonderful organisations I have spoken about tonight, who do great work with people who are suffering challenges in their lives from mental illness, particularly depression. Three-quarters of those people who kill themselves are men, so mental health with respect to men is a big challenge.

There is a lot more to do, but the funding we are putting into front-line services will make a difference. There is nearly \$114 million to provide services to those at greatest risk of suicide, including psychology and psychiatric services and non-clinical support to assist people with severe mental illness and carers with day-to-day needs. That is why I said the psychology clinic on the University of Queensland Ipswich campus, receiving federal government funding via the division of general practice, will make a difference in the lives of people locally.

I mentioned Lifeline before. Lifeline Australia is also receiving assistance. There is \$74.3 million for direct suicide prevention and crisis intervention, including funding to provide safety at suicide hot spots. There are more services, particularly through Lifeline Australia. I want to pay tribute to the Reverend Diane Bos, who I mentioned before. She is a pillar of the local Uniting Church and has been involved as the general manager of Lifeline in Ipswich. The work that she does should not be underestimated—it is tremendous. Her love, affection and capacity to show care for those in need are so evident in her life. She puts her concern for her fellow human beings into practice, and I want to pay tribute to her.

I mentioned assistance to men in greatest need before: \$22.8 million to provide services and support to men at greatest risk. Funding through beyondblue will assist up to 30,000 additional men each year. I also mentioned young people. There are many great chaplains, counsellors and people who work with young people in my electorate. There is \$66 million to promote good mental health and resilience in young people, to prevent suicide later in life. Much of what we are doing comes from the COAG process, working in consultation with the states and territories to achieve good outcomes.

Every community suffers problems with mental health and illness. Some people suffer these problems temporarily. For some it is chronic, severe, debilitating, employment inhibiting and stifling to recreation. This is a serious problem, and I would hope and expect that those opposite would adopt a more conciliatory and bipartisan approach and not use these motions to simply attack us.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (7.47 pm)—I would like to start by acknowledging the contributions of each of the members from both sides on what is an incredibly important motion. In particular I would like to thank very much the member for Boothby, who commenced the debate in my absence due to commitments in the other chamber. I also thank the member for

Pearce, who has had a long-abiding interest in this area and in health issues generally. She did great credit to herself in her contribution tonight as well.

During the recent election campaign the case was compelling to act and to act decisively when it came to the issue of mental health. Much debate had taken place across a long period of time right around the country about the need for hospital reform and the way in which we deliver health services needing to be dragged into the 21st century. There had been failings at a state government level right around the country for a generation in the way in which different health services were proposed and implemented. Something had to give way.

The then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, had made a promise in relation to hospitals and the delivery of health services at the 2007 election. Expectation was incredibly high during the course of the last three years about how it was that the government was going to implement this change, not just in relation to hospitals and the management of hospitals but, importantly, in relation to the delivery of primary health care as well. Of course, people were bitterly disappointed—quite astounded and dumbfounded—at the lack of response when it came to the incredibly important issue of mental health. The fact that the government had provided responses to the Christine Bennett report and yet had not at any stage attempted to make a comprehensive response to mental health meant that they were condemned by many.

As we spoke to people right across the country in the lead up to the campaign, and also over the course of the entire last three years, people—particularly the health experts—were particularly disappointed at the government's ultimate response that this was something they were going to deal with in their second term of government. Every expert had been led to believe that this was a No. 1 priority for the government. The promotion of Pat McGorry to Australian of the Year only ramped up that expectation and, of course, people became bitterly disappointed when this government did not act on mental health.

So, whilst I welcome this motion and debate, I am disappointed about the government's response—not just during the election campaign but since. I know that the government will say to the Independents and to health experts around the country at the moment: 'Just wait. Just wait and see what this government does, because we're promising to do a lot in relation to mental health.' They will say to the Independents, probably tonight, 'This motion is not worthy of support because the Gillard government is on the cusp of putting money into mental health.' My message to them and to the experts who have had so much to contribute in this space is that that is the same empty rhetoric that they were provided with in the last three years by the Rudd-Gillard government.

This coalition grasped the issue of mental health, and we put it squarely on the agenda during the last election campaign. People expected the coalition to retreat on the issue of health and we did the opposite. We took the fight up to the government on what we thought was a failed plan in relation to their hospitals proposal, which only dramatically increased the number of bureaucrats in the system and which has been at the heart of dysfunction and the reason for failure at a state level over the course of the last 10 or 15 years. We embraced much of what the experts had to say because we did not believe that mental health was an area where we needed another inquiry. We did not believe that mental health was an area that needed to be put off until tomorrow. We believe that the government needs to have action in place immediately. It is completely without credibility that the government would argue that they

could put in place proper reform in the health space without providing a direct and important response to mental health.

Much of the debate has been about the stress on emergency departments and that families are going through. Of course, we are all shaped by our own life experiences, but I can remember in a previous life—many years ago, as a police officer—fronting families who had had suicide attempts by children in the family, accompanying ambulances with some of those people to emergency departments and parents who were grieving and in a complete state of shock and despair when a message had to be delivered that their young child, male or female, had taken their life. That is a burden that no family, no parent, should ever have to incur. What we had hoped, by putting this issue front and centre, was that we could relieve some of that pressure, that we could take away the angst and the pressure that families face, that we could take away the inappropriate care being offered at emergency departments at two or three o'clock in the morning when people present with suicide attempts, because not only is the expertise not available but the whole-of-care that that patient requires is not available. That of course puts extra pressure and stresses not just on the emergency department workers but the doctors and nurses trying to deal with other cases that present during emergency hours. What we put forward was something that we had consulted quite widely about, and we had a comprehensive plan that was endorsed by many prominent Australians in this space. We proposed during the election campaign that the number of headspace centres go to a minimum of 90 nationally, and the establishment of 20 EPPIC centres, early psychosis prevention and intervention centres, that would have on average 20 acute and 20 subacute beds at each of those centres—an additional 800 beds nationwide. When we said that we wanted appropriate funds to put some of these services into place, this was were received with great acclamation from many people, including Pat McGorry, John Mendoza, Ian Hickie and others.

It is important to recognise what some experts had to say. They were dismissed by the government; they were embraced by us. David Crosbie, who is the CEO of the Mental Health Council of Australia, is soon to step down. He is a distinguished Australian who has made an extraordinary contribution, and he said:

Mental health is a part of the final COAG health reform agreement. ... The commitment of the Federal Government to become a major player in community mental health is restated in the agreement, but it is not enacted.

Professor Ian Hickie, again, is a leading Australian, a world expert and a person of whom Australians should be proud. He is from the Brain and Mind Institute, and he said in relation to the coalition's commitment:

This is exactly the size and the scale and the focus that we've been looking for and it is what the Australian government can actually do.

John Mendoza, who was the chair of the Prime Minister's mental health advisory council—appointed personally by Kevin Rudd—resigned in disgust at the inaction of the Rudd-Gillard government in relation to mental health. When the coalition made its announcement he said:

... it creates a whole new service infrastructure, that offers ... evidence-based services to hundreds of thousands of young Australians and their families, who at the moment are locked out of any specialist support for what are the most common illnesses in early adulthood.

Professor Pat McGorry, the Australian of the Year, again, an incredibly well-credentialed expert in mental health, not just within our country but internationally, said of the coalition's policy that it would help up to 100,000 young people. He also said:

... this policy would save lives, ensure young lives are not stunted or derailed, and stem the tide of Australians with untreated mental illnesses flowing to our emergency departments, onto our streets and into our prisons.

These were the independent voices who looked, quite critically, at what the coalition had to offer, and they said that we were spot-on.

It is why, as I said before, I am disappointed with the response from the government tonight. I hoped that out of this motion we would get a sense of bipartisanship—that the government would accept that more needed to be done and that they would do it sooner rather than later. They will be saying to all and sundry that action is just around the corner, but they have said that for the last three years, and if people go meek and mild and weak in relation to this motion if it is put to a vote then they are really signing up to the government's continued plan of inaction. There has been much debate in relation to this motion about the facts and the contributions of both the former coalition government and the government since it was elected in 2007, but let me restate for the record—and it is incredibly important to do so: between 1995-96 and 2002-03, expenditure on mental health under the Howard government increased by 53 per cent, from \$792 million to \$1.2 billion. In 2006—and this is the most important point—the Howard government made the biggest single investment in mental health of \$1.9 billion over five years. So what we proposed with \$1.5 billion in the election campaign, had we been elected, would have been the second-biggest investment in mental health in this country's history, only matched by that \$1.9 billion which was put in place by the Howard government in 2006. When you look at Labor's record, it is only the last May budget that people need to be reminded of. This government tried to cut the money going into mental health, and they should be condemned for that. This motion should be supported because it is in the interests of all Australians.

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (7.52 pm)—At age 22, I gave the eulogy at the funeral of my friend Andrew McIntosh, who had taken his own life. It was one of the hardest things I had ever had to do. Andrew was a high school friend of mine, a gifted athlete who could pick up a new sport within a few hours, a person who took the time to listen to his mates and who was always there to share a laugh. He drove a bright yellow Valiant Charger, loved music and was always up for a night out. Andrew was studying sports education at the time of his death. We all thought that he was on his way to becoming a great teacher. But none of us caught sight of the fact that the black dog had found its way inside him. Andrew died in 1994, but I know that his parents, Grahame and Rena McIntosh, still miss him every day.

I thought of Andrew in January of this year when I attended the funeral of Canberra lad Alex Hodgins, son of Judy and Tony Hodgins, who run the Gods Cafe at the Australian National University. Alex was a handsome man with a ready smile, and I knew him through the Gods Cafe, where he would often make my daily coffee and we would have a chat about what he was up to or what I was thinking about that day. On that day, back in January of this year, Alex's loss had touched hundreds of his friends, and the church in Ainslie was overflowing with young men and women in the flower of their lives, all dressed in black, with their puffy red eyes.

There is no simple solution to reducing suicide, but we can improve the odds of survival. One of John Howard's first acts as Prime Minister was the national firearms agreement, which cut the suicide rate by making it harder for people to get their hands on a firearm. Australians are also better at talking about depression today, thanks in part to public advocates like Jeff Kennett and Jack Heath, but there are still too many young people who take their own lives; too many parents who bury their own children. As a society, I think we can do better. I do not agree with parts of this motion we are debating today—I think it is a little too simplistic and there are some inaccurate claims about the current government—but I do respect the opportunity to talk today about the critical issue of suicide, the issues of mental health and what we can do about them.

At the moment the Labor government is delivering a range of new reforms which are aimed at trying to improve the way in which we as a society deal with mental health.

The Gillard government is rolling out up to 30 new youth-friendly services and providing extra funding for the existing 30 headspace sites. Headspace is a program that works with community youth services. The government is providing \$25½ million over four years to expand the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre, the EPPIC model which is referred to in the motion, in partnership with states and territories. The government is providing \$13 million over two years to employ extra mental health nurses. The government is also providing \$5½ million to extend the Mental Health Support for Drought Affected Communities Initiative through to 2011. And the Gillard government is providing resources in direct suicide prevention and crisis intervention programs, such as improving safety at suicide hotspots and increasing funding for Lifeline Australia.

I met recently with Mike Zissler, the CEO of Lifeline, and talked to him about the way in which Lifeline operates and the important role that Lifeline plays, not only through its well-known telephone hotline but also through the counselling support it can provide and through the training that Lifeline does in teaching us how to have a sensible conversation about suicide. Mike talked to me about the importance of using the 's' word—of actually saying to someone you think might be contemplating suicide: 'Are you thinking about suicide?' He said that their research has shown that asking that simple question, actually using the word 'suicide', will often result in somebody who is on the brink saying, 'Well, yes, I am thinking about suicide,' and provide that crucial window to do something about it.

The government is providing more services and support to men, who, as previous speakers have noted, comprise about three-quarters of suicide victims, and through programs such as beyondblue expanding the reach of suicide support to men. The Gillard government is also providing resources to promote good mental health and resilience in young people in order to prevent suicide later in life. As previous speakers have also noted, this has been the first ever Commonwealth investment in the EPPIC model since its introduction in 1992. The Gillard government also has the first Commonwealth minister for mental health, recognising the importance that this government places on the issue of mental health. Labor has been building resilience in young children by expanding the KidsMatter program and has been funding initiatives in high-risk communities such as Indigenous Australia, which accounts for a disproportionate share of all suicides. Mental health is a particular second-term priority for the Gillard government. I know that the Minister for Health and Ageing has a series of meetings

planned around the country with consumers and carers. He will be out there listening to their experiences and having those stories shape Labor's policy.

On 12 October 2010 I opened a day-long event in my electorate titled 'Towards recovery: how do we talk about suicide?' It was run by the ACT Transcultural Mental Health Centre and the Mental Health Community Coalition. I wish to use the opportunity today to pay tribute to the hard-working organisers, including Simon Tatz, Brooke McKail and Simon Biereck. The event was conducted in Pilgrim House as part of Mental Health Week. Events like this help emphasise the importance of talking about suicide and help allow community groups, which provide the solution to this problem, to come together and talk about how they have addressed the issue and how we can do better.

I would like to finish my comments today by talking about the experiences of one of my staff, Lyndell Tutty. Lyndell is a woman who is always ready with a smile and a joke. She is somebody who is ready to make fun of me wherever I need to be taken down a few pegs. You would never know it from looking at Lyndell that she has had her own very serious battles with depression. Lyndell provided me with terrific help today in preparing the comments I have made in this place. I want to finish by quoting from her words on dealing with depression. She said:

Education, recognising the symptoms, the triggers, and early intervention are the key.

With education you are provided with tools and therefore hope and confidence that you can either manage your illness or beat it.

When you have no confidence and feel soulless the last thing you can do is believe in yourself, but with support, hope and education you can try your best to ride the dark moments until you are strong enough to believe.

Lyndell is now a terrific contributor to public policy in Australia and I am really proud to have her on my staff and to have the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion today.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Vamvakinou)—Order! The time allocated for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Cord Blood Donations

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mrs D'Ath**:

That this House recognises:

- (1) that many lives have been saved through the research and the use of organ and blood donations throughout Australia;
- (2) that one form of donation is cord blood from the umbilical cord and placenta, and that:
 - (a) research has shown that this blood is a rich source of blood forming stem cells known as haematopoietic stem cells;
 - (b) the use of these cells for transplantation to a sufferer of leukaemia, lymphoma, and some tumours, provides the best chance for a cure; and
 - (c) recent research has established that umbilical cord blood stem cells can demonstrate plasticity, suggesting a role for them in the treatment of diseases such as diabetes, cerebral vascular disease, and Parkinson's disease;

- (3) that the collection of umbilical cord blood cells for research and for processing is a safe and non-invasive procedure, and that this procedure does not involve the destruction of an embryo given that the umbilical cord and placenta are usually discarded as waste;
- (4) that the collection of umbilical cord blood is not available in all States and Territories or hospitals throughout Australia, and that:
 - (a) the collection, processing and storage of umbilical cord blood requires specialised techniques by appropriately trained and accredited professionals; and
 - (b) based on limitations on the collection centres that currently exist, not all permissions for donations given by women at existing collection centres results in the actual collection of the cord blood;
- (5) that the Federal Government already funds the Australian National Cord Blood Collection Network; and
- (6) the great work being done by the Australian National Cord Blood Collection Network, AusCord, the Australian national network of umbilical cord blood banks and cord blood collection centres.

Mrs D'ATH (Petrie) (8.06 pm)—I moved the motion before the House because it deals with an issue that I am extremely passionate about and believe needs broader community awareness. That issue is the use of umbilical cord blood. Why is this cord blood so important? Cord blood is very rich in stem cells, and these are the building blocks of all blood cells in our bodies. They carry oxygen, fight infection and stop bleeding. As the Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry website explains:

The most common diseases currently treated using cord blood are related to blood disorders and some cancers such as:

- Immune deficiency
- Leukaemias
- Blood diseases such as Aplastic and Fanconi Anaemia
- Metabolic storage diseases
- Thalassaemia

Leukaemias, lymphomas, myeloma and related blood disorders can develop in anyone of any age at any time. It is estimated that every two hours someone loses their life to leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma. The Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry notes:

In the future the range of diseases treated using cord blood might be expanded due to new technological and scientific advances.

Internationally, the use of human cord blood goes back to the 1970s, when the first report was released. In the 1980s, cord blood was shown to have similar attributes to bone marrow and recommended to be used as a bone marrow alternative in transplantation. In 1988, in Paris, the first successful cord blood transplant to regenerate blood and immune cells was completed on a six-year-old boy suffering from Fanconi anaemia, a blood disorder. Since that time, progress has steadily moved forward.

I became aware of blood cord donations when, in 2000, as an anxious and excited mum to be, I was handed a form from the Mater Mothers Hospital as part of the admission forms. The form asked me if I would give consent to donating the umbilical cord upon the birth of my child. As a first-time mother I was excited to think that I could make a difference in saving lives by donating what I understood to be a very valuable source for research into stem cells.

After I delivered my daughter, Emma, I asked about my donation and was advised that the umbilical cord was not kept. The reason given was that the cord needed to be picked up by the blood bank that processed cord blood between the hours of 9 am and 5 pm Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays. Unfortunately, my daughter was not born between these times. In 2002 I found myself in the same situation. Having given consent to donate the cord, I gave birth to my second child, Cameron, who happened to arrive on the Queen's Birthday long weekend. Once again, the cord could not be donated.

Umbilical cord blood is collected from the placentas of recently delivered newborns and is an accepted alternative to bone marrow and peripheral blood stem cells as a source of haematopoietic stem cells, or HSCs, for transplantation. For many paediatric transplant indications, umbilical cord blood is regarded as the preferred source of HSCs. The advantage of cord blood as a source of HSCs relates to its ease of procurement and its less stringent human leukocyte antigen, or HLA, compatibility requirements. Outcomes are influenced by cell dose, HLA matching and the length of the search process. Research is in progress to explore the means of optimising the effectiveness of cord blood transplants in adults.

What currently happens with the umbilical cord and placenta after a child's birth is that they are disposed of as medical waste. This rich source of stem cells is simply thrown away in most cases. Considering the debates that have gone before us in this House on therapeutic cloning and embryonic stem cell research, the donation of cord blood does not carry such heavy moral burdens for our society. As such, many more women across Australia may be willing to be donors. Cord blood is obtained only from those mothers who are medically suitable and who have provided their written consent. While cord units are freely donated, there are substantial costs associated with the collection, processing, banking and matching of cord units. Only those hospitals accredited with the cord blood banks are able to collect cord blood. The collecting, processing and storage of cord blood are specialised techniques that need to be performed by trained and accredited staff. The cord blood collected also needs to be processed as soon as practicable, usually within 48 hours of collection.

To maximise Australia's cord blood collection requires the collection and banking of cords which are most in demand by transplant patients or which better reflect the diversity of tissue types in the Australian population. For example, the National Cord Blood Collection Network commenced collection of Indigenous cord blood units in the 2006-07 financial year. At the end of December 2007, 52 Indigenous cord blood units had been banked. Compare this with the fact that in 2008 there were 15,000 births registered where at least one parent was an Indigenous Australian.

Simply ensuring more cord blood banking does not necessarily equal better clinical results. What is needed are strategies that focus on those cord units most in demand, which would increase the likelihood of providing a match unit. In the case of Indigenous Australians, it is about developing the strategies to increase the banking of suitable cord blood units. I do believe, however, that with the expansion of services for collection and the potential for more unused cord blood donations to be donated for research when they are unsuitable for transplantation we could provide greater opportunities for scientists to find new and improved ways of using HSCs.

Currently, cord blood banks operate in New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Victoria and Queensland. There are no participant hospitals in Western Australia, South Australia and

Tasmania. With a total of 296,600 births registered in 2008 in Australia, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, it is worth investigating improved strategies for the future. At this point, I wish to acknowledge the efforts made over the past decade in the area of cord blood donation. The previous Howard government, in 2000, assisted in the establishment of the Australian National Cord Blood Collection Network. The Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry, since 2001, has been funded by the Commonwealth and the state and territory governments for the operation of the National Cord Blood Collection Network. The ABMDR has contracts with each of the three public cord blood banks to collect, process, store, test and release Therapeutic Goods Administration compliant cord blood units.

I congratulate the federal Labor government, and particularly the Minister for Health and Ageing, for continuing to fund, and in fact increasing funding to, the National Cord Blood Collection Network in the budget for 2010-11. In Budget Paper No. 2 for 2010-11 it is noted that the government will provide \$18.1 million over four years to continue and increase the level of funding for the National Cord Blood Collection Network, also known AusCord. It is noted in the budget papers that the increase in funding will improve the sustainability of the National Cord Blood Collection Network and bring funding in line with support for other blood products.

The government has also committed to continuing to work with the states and territories and the National Cord Blood Collection Network to ensure that the supply of cord blood units is adequate to meet the needs of the Australian population. I welcome the federal Labor government's commitment to cord blood donation and hope that through public debates such as the debate on this motion more awareness can be generated in the broader community. With the knowledge that stem cells collected and processed through cord blood are potentially being used for transplantation to individuals with leukaemia, lymphoma and similar life-threatening diseases, I hope that all members would support this motion.

I end by thanking all of the scientists and medical professionals who every day are working on new ways to save lives, who persevere in their aim to find a cure for so many diseases that take the loved ones of so many people. These are diseases that take the lives of the young before they even get to create memories. To those scientists and medical professionals who are already today saving people from diseases that we once thought of as terminal—to all those hardworking medical professionals—we say thank you. I commend this motion to the House.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (8.16 pm)—I congratulate the member for Petrie for bringing this issue to the attention of the House. The Australian Cord Blood Collection Network has been doing fine work over the past 10 years. I also thank the member for introducing the acronym HSC so that I do not have to wrangle with the almost impossible-to-pronounce word 'haematopoietic'! All the diseases that have been shown since the early 1980s to respond to cord blood have seen significant improvements in survival ratios over the past two decades. I can recall that, during my training in 1988, cord blood was first used in a transplant. By 1990, things had moved very fast. There was already then a very good understanding of human lymphocyte antigen markers on the outsides of cell walls, which basically determine whether cells are recognised as foreign or not when they are transferred or transplanted between hosts. That applies to cord blood as it does to every other organ. I will make just a couple of comments on cord blood before moving to the more general issues of transplantation.

Cord blood banks were set up as early as 1992, I think. Eurocord was among the first of those, a few years later. By 1995 it was quite common in Europe to have access to those kinds of procedures. Australia leads the way outside Europe, in general, with about 168 procedures last year, making us probably the third or fourth outside Europe but still a long way behind nations like France and Spain that lead the world. It needs to be remembered that these stem cells are not quite the same as an embryonic stem cell, in that they have already been through one series of differentiation, so they are not quite as plastic as one would hope. But there is some positive news that there may be some use for them as stem cells in that truly plastic sense that they can actually differentiate into different tissues.

The main focus is on the treatment of aplastic anaemias and the family of anaemias and a whole range of blood-borne cancers for which the key treatment is systemic chemotherapy followed by a bone marrow transplant. That is what cord blood is all about. The key issue at the moment around cord blood is not so much HLA antigen compatibility—which is always really important—but, as we are now realising, the volume of blood and the amount of packed cell that is actually collected. There is very little point in collecting less than 60 millilitres. We are now finding that we are pushing higher and higher in Australia to 60-, 80- and ultimately 100-millilitre minimum collections as a useful sample for use in therapeutics. We are now discovering worldwide in the most recent research that it is not so much HLA compatibility as it is the amount of blood that can be collected from a placenta. As has already been pointed out by the previous speaker, we are avoiding a lot of the ethical and moral issues around the destruction of an embryo. By the same token, apart from some fairly unusual peri-Mediterranean traditions around the placenta, the placenta is normally discarded in Australia, which makes collection of the blood from a placental cord almost without concern—apart from the fact that you need skilled people to do it. If you are not able to collect 80, 90 or 100 millilitres of cord blood there is a real problem, because much of our collection consists of samples of less than 80 millilitres, which is very problematic in therapeutics.

We are also seeing, if you draw a bell curve of the volumes of blood that are being collected, a real depletion at the high end of the large collections. There is a real chunk coming out, because these collections are being deployed clinically and where there is a real gap in these large-volume collections. This is another very good reason for supporting the previous speaker, who talks about having specialised staff who are able to collect this blood in adequate volumes all around the country in as many hours of the day as is clinically and financially feasible.

There has been a tenfold increase in collection of cord blood over the past 10 years, and that matches what is happening overseas. We also know that there is increased storage and more rapid availability, and all of these elements are really important in our ability to treat people who need it. The benefit of cord blood cells is that they are a fairly immature cell—we call them immunogenically naive—and that makes them far more able to be used more broadly. They have a good gene transfection rate, longer telomeres and a higher expansion potential, which is always good if you are trying to maximise your clinical results.

Of course, for the banks themselves we need an ability to store these cells for years but to use them immediately, and that is why nothing else is going to work. That is why it was recognised as early as 2000 that we needed a well-funded cord blood collection network to support the work of the banks, which had been around but had not really grown to a point where

there were enough samples to remove concerns around HLA matching. The problem is that, if you move to an Indigenous network or to Indigenous mums who have completely different HLAs, it is even harder to find a useful match. That is why it is a real challenge to move into some of the minority populations and expand the bank accordingly.

Moving more broadly to organ and tissue, work in encouraging people around the country to be donors is very important work of both governments as well. In Australia, even though we almost universally accept the importance of organ donation and the fact that it saves lives, we are still very, very low in the numbers. My general rule is 20-40-60, which means that only 20 per cent of Australians can actually recall an explicit conversation with family members about whether to become organ donors, around 40 per cent of people simply do not know and 58 to 60 per cent of people agree to it at the time when that very, very tough decision to allow a loved one to donate their precious organs has to be made.

What we do know is that if Australians do take that step then our rates are exceptionally good in regards to the number of organs that are harvested. At the moment, we have around 13 per million Australians in the population being organ donors. But once that decision is made, a large number of organs can be harvested and deployed in a clinically appropriate way within the time frame. That speaks to how well our system is operating. There are 1,700 people sitting on waiting lists for organs right now. Less than half of them receive a clinical operation in each year. Around 450 are required to provide 800 people with a life-changing organ transplant.

Right now, we know that there are up to 4,000 skin and tissue transplants per year and around 1,100 corneal implants, which can help around 1,600 people for the obvious reasons. I can tell you that talking to families about the very tough decision of whether or not to donate corneas is intensely personal and a very difficult conversation to have at that most difficult of times. But obtaining those corneas within a six- or 12-hour time period, being able to keep them cold, transport them and deliver them to where they are needed—to the entire surgical team that is ready to put those corneas in—is no mean feat. What we know is that that is working exceptionally well, particularly around the larger centres in Australia. We are now seeing around 1,600 people a year having their sight restored thanks to corneal transplants.

It is worth nothing that there is a bit of variation between states. A gold star goes to South Australia for having 38 donors per million. Bringing up the rear is Western Australia—and I am sad to see that there are no Western Australians in the chamber at the moment to take that message back to their state government—with eight donors per million. They really can do better. All of these figures improve slightly each year. That is very much due to the strong work that has been done by federal governments to encourage organ donations. The previous Prime Minister made that a particular focus during his tenure. That was much appreciated.

I will close where we began: with cord blood. There is one thing that we know: the collection of cord blood that occurs at every location where there is an obstetrics service. That should be the goal. We can train existing clinical staff to become specialised at collecting cord blood to maximise the odds that, if a mum decides to donate cord blood, she is able to. Finally, we need to make sure that that cord blood is available in a large enough sample to make it a clinically useful one. We face the challenge that there is a real deficiency of high-volume samples, because they are being heavily utilised. We have a library now that is skewing back towards having the smaller samples that are less and less clinical useful. I support the motion.

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (8.24 pm)—I would like to begin my contribution in supporting this motion by thanking the honourable member for Petrie for bringing this matter of critical importance to the attention of the House. It was not something that I had turned my mind to in any forensic way. I was aware of it; it was there; it was happening; it is a good thing. But the fact that you put it on the *Notice Paper* and I said that I wanted to speak to it meant that I had to do some research. I would also like to thank the honourable member for Petrie for sending me some of the links to websites that made that research a bit easier. It is one of those issues where there is no browbeating or people saying that somebody else is responsible. It is just a question of this being a really important issue. It is a work in progress. It is an issue that we all have to do better on. The member for Petrie is raising awareness of this issue. That awareness raising is the important factor. When members hear about this and start to know things about it, they can take it up in other forums in their respective states

I would also like to thank the honourable member for Bowman for his contribution, which was technically informative. I am not going to try to match it, given his previous profession. It was good to hear that, as it provided a broad perspective on the whole issue of organ and tissue donation. It provided some facts and figures and also some of the challenges. Having served on hospital boards and having set up the first ethics committee at Lismore Base Hospital—and I understand that the honourable member was at Lismore Base Hospital—I know that hospitals face very real issues daily. We can debate a lot of those issues at a theoretical level and take philosophical positions on them—and we do—but the fact is that most people want us to address them in a way that is also practical so that we can help families and loved ones who struggle and have to face some very difficult challenges to do with illness, and particularly with their children.

I am coming to grips with this issue and what cord blood is. I have read that cord blood is the blood left behind in the placenta. I heard from the honourable member for Petrie that it is also left behind in the umbilical cord after the birth of the baby. It is a rich source of blood-forming stem cells. It can be used instead of bone marrow transplants in children. The cord blood research throughout the world continues to explore its potential. There are no guarantees that it can prevent or cure the range of disease that some claim it can. But it certainly is helping.

One of the things that the honourable member for Petrie said was that the umbilical cords and the placentas go into the medical waste of the hospital. Having served on hospital boards, I know that to be true. There were issues to do with getting rid of medical waste, what it is, where it goes and all of that that we had to deal with. So I was well aware of what constitutes medical waste in the system.

Something that I read about was what cord blood does, and not just in the technical sense. I had a look at the website of the Murdoch Children's Research Institute. It says 'cord blood gives a second chance'. That says a lot. That is clearly what is being expressed in this motion and by the honourable members speaking to it. That is what this is about: giving that second chance. Cord blood gives a second chance where there might have been no chance and no hope. To have this available as a medical resource is a great thing. For women who have given birth, it is a gift that they can give freely as they know how it is going to be used. As mothers, we are called on to give many gifts in our lives. This is another gift, but what a won-

derful gift. It seems like we are always giving. This is one of those gifts that I will not get the opportunity to give, but if I was able to give it I am certain that I would.

The research, and statements by previous speakers, shows that cord blood cannot be given everywhere and it cannot be given out of hours. That is something that has to be worked on. I had a look at the hospitals where it is available, The member for Petrie spoke about the states where it is and is not available. When I look at New South Wales, the state that I live in, I see that public cord blood donation is available at just four hospitals—all in Sydney. I understand that cord blood donation may be difficult to do at some of the regional hospitals, but people do give birth at regional hospitals. I am sure that will change as things develop and more money is made available. It is very pleasing to know that in the 2010 budget the government made available \$18 million over four years for the National Cord Blood Collection Network. When I looked at the hospitals, I saw that they are mainly in capital areas. I imagine that they are probably the teaching hospitals or the major referral hospitals in those areas.

My research informed me of the fact, which I did not know, that the Cord Blood Bank is a partnership between the Bone Marrow Donor Institute—the BMDI as it is also known—the Royal Children's Hospital and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute. It was nice to read about the work that they are doing together. The Murdoch Children's Research Institute website talked about helping over 100 people, including a 5-year-old girl named Milli Kerr-Crowley, whom I mention because her name is publicly available. Milli was diagnosed with leukaemia when she was just six months old. After months of chemotherapy and an injection of cord blood from an anonymous donor Milli's health quickly improved. I know that I cannot make any scientific comment, but the title reads 'Cord blood gives second chance'. Clearly, that is what the institute is trying to show: that cord blood can be well utilised, including with other traditional forms of treatment. I imagine that in the future it will become a traditional treatment as well.

I thought about the risks involved, because we are talking about medical procedures, so I did some research on that. It would have been interesting to hear from the good doctor about whether there were any risks. Everything I read said, no, there were no risks. It is even easier, if you are a mother who has just given birth, to give that gift if you know that there are no risks associated with it. There can be risks for people who make organ and tissue donations. However, everything I have read about cord blood donation has said that there is no risk. That is very reassuring to know, because it makes cord blood donation much easier to promote.

In closing, the member for Bowman spoke about organ donation. It seems that the figures for organ donation in Australia are low. We talk about it a lot and we are conscious of it but we do not seem to sign on easily. I know that I hesitated, but I have now signed my licence to say that I will donate organs.

Mr Laming—You have to do it on a form as well.

Ms SAFFIN—Yes. But at least it is on my licence, and I have talked about it. I think donation is an issue we all have to turn our minds to. (*Time expired*)

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (8.34 pm)—I congratulate the member for Petrie for moving this motion. I also congratulate the government for its interest in this area, in particular the 2008 legislation which established the Australian Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation Authority. In my contribution to the debate on that legislation, I noted the difference organ

donation made to people's lives and how selfless were the people who had donated organs from loved ones to give the gift of life to others. I spoke about two friends. One, Peter, had died when he fell through a shearing shed roof. His widow donated every bit of Peter that she could give away—bones, eyes, kidneys—to give the opportunity for other people to have a good life. She has become a strident campaigner in our community, promoting the cause of organ and tissue donation. I also spoke of a woman that I know very well who has received a kidney. It has made such an enormous difference to her life, in fact, that she now works on dialysis helplines, helping people in that same position. These are very big events in people's lives, even though they may seem to be remote from almost everybody who has not been faced with the issue of organ donation.

Australia has a proud history in medical science, with the bulk of our Nobel laureates, including William and Laurence Bragg, Howard Florey through to Barry Marshall and Robin Warren, coming as a result of medical breakthroughs. This motion recognises that stem cells are the new frontier in medicine and offer possible solutions to many of the diseases and ailments which bedevil our society, which has managed to extend our life expectancy. We all want to live longer—and, on average, we do. That means that along the way many more things are likely to go wrong with us and we will fall victim to ailments that, perhaps, in previous times we may not have lived long enough to have experienced. We all, particularly in this job, are confronted every day with people who are facing quality of life issues, and I suggest that we may be debating some things about quality of life in the very near future.

Stem cell research has the potential to make a great contribution to people's quality of life. I remember well the campaign by the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation in the lead-up to the last election. They visited virtually every member of parliament lobbying for the establishment of a clinical trial base, and in the lead-up to the election the coalition committed \$35 million for the establishment of those clinical trials for juvenile diabetes. I am disappointed to say up to this stage it has still not been matched by the government. Not only would those clinical trials address juvenile diabetes; they would also enable a network to be set up for trials on a broader base for many of the advances that are going to happen in stem cell research. Once this clinical base is set up it will be able to be used by many others in the industry—and, of course, in stem cell research this is exactly what they need. Researchers need a database to help with their understanding of the life and medical history of the individuals in the trial from start to finish. I hope that the government comes round to supporting that trial in the near future.

What is even more disappointing is that the government has also chosen not to renew support for the Australian Stem Cell Centre. Funding will cease in mid-2011. While Professor Richard Boyd, from the Monash Immunology and Stem Cell Laboratories, has welcomed the new funding committed in the area by the federal government, he notes that the overall reduction in funding will restrain researchers and tempt them to go offshore. In fact, the Australian Stem Cell Centre chairman, Professor Doug Macdonald, has said that the new funding is only about half the \$8 million the centre will achieve in its spending program in its last two years leading up to 2011.

The Australian Stem Cell Centre was funded over nine years and so one must divide the total funding of \$98.55 million by the nine years to get an approximate annual figure. Although this figure was not necessarily equalised in every year in this way, this would give average

annualised funding of \$10.95 million. The NHMRC has received additional five-year funding of \$2½ million and that works out to about half a million dollars a year. So the new funding announced by Minister Carr is around about \$3 million per year, thus making the total earmarked for stem cell research around about \$3½ million a year. That is considerably less than the current commitment.

To come back to some of the diseases we may possibly be able to treat with advances in stem cell research, in the last parliament I was privileged to be part of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation. In February this year we received a briefing from Professor Richard Boyd, from the Monash Immunology and Stem Cell Laboratories. He talked about some of the things it might be possible to address with stem cell treatment in the future, such as MS, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, Huntington's disease, motor neurone disease and acquired afflictions like stroke and spinal cord and brain injuries. The costs to individuals of these various diseases, ailments and injuries is absolutely enormous and, as you would know through your work in your electorate, Madam Deputy Speaker, you deal with people afflicted in this way on a regular basis. We all become involved, in a personal sense, in their lives in some way. I think of all those I know struggling every day with Parkinson's and MS, and anything that we can possibly do in this place to achieve some kind of benefit in their life—and perhaps, for those in the future, complete cure—we should do.

I was pretty excited by the prospects that were outlined in this briefing we received, but I was taken aback to hear that there was a three per cent annual increase in the incidence of diseases like asthma and type 1 diabetes. I pricked up my ears at this and made a remark along the lines that I thought type 1 diabetes was a hereditary disease, or that at least it was inflicted normally at a young age, in comparison with type 2 diabetes, which is endemic. Professor Boyd replied that there were quite a few diseases in that category, asthma and peanut allergies being two that were increasing on an annualised rate. When asked why this was the case, he explained that they thought it may be because people are now living in an antiseptic environment where things are oversterilised—that we are taking too much care of the food we eat. So perhaps our kids do not eat enough dirt! I said, 'So you mean the woman in the tuckshop who has got one glove on is actually killing us?' In a roundabout way of speaking, that is what is happening. I know that is a bit of an aside to the subject we are debating today, but I found it to be a very interesting point that we are actually increasing our ailments. In fact, in our modern society we legislate as to how our food should be handled and contribute to the problem. The highest rates of type 2 diabetes in Australia are in remote Indigenous communities. The lowest rates of type 1 diabetes type are also in remote Indigenous communities, where cleanliness is not set at such a high level. Their immune systems are challenged at a younger age and thus grow with the person. There are probably some lessons in that for all of us.

So I do recognise the government's support for the National Cord Blood Collection Network and the intent of this motion. The possibilities are almost endless, and as the cord blood bank grows we will be able to match donors much better than we can at the moment. We need a national base to achieve these results. It is very encouraging not just for those with long-term incapacity but, probably more importantly, for those who are yet to face those challenges.

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (8.44 pm)—I rise tonight to support the motion by the member for Petrie. I must say that when the member for Petrie first spoke to me about this I thought it was a great opportunity. She should really be commended for bringing it to this place for us to debate. The research and use of organ and blood donations across Australia has for decades been the difference between life and death. I have been registered as an organ donor for many years. In my inaugural speech I spoke about the death of my brother due to a genetic disorder. I think it is very important that we have the option for, in particular, organ and tissue transplants that can help save lives. As the previous speaker mentioned, the federal government, our government, should be congratulated on the work that we have done on a national organ transplant authority.

One form of donation that often goes unrecognised is cord blood, which over the years has increasingly been used as an alternative to bone marrow treatment, with over 90 per cent of patients able to find compatible cord blood for transplant. The most appropriate source of stem cells is from another person, whether that person be a family member or an anonymous stem cell donor. The chance of finding a match within your family is around 30 per cent, yet the chance of finding a more suitable unrelated donor is even higher at 80 per cent. Given its success in treating patients with dire illnesses, it is now more than ever the preferred option of treatment.

Cord blood is the blood from the umbilical cord and the placenta after the delivery of a baby, which research shows is a rich source of blood-forming stem cells. Cord blood may be collected by accredited staff using one of two methods. While the placenta is still in the womb, immediately after the delivery and the cutting of the umbilical cord, the midwife, doctor or collector will puncture the umbilical cord vein and drain the blood from the placenta into a bag. This will take several minutes. When the placenta is expelled, more blood may be collected from the veins in the placenta. The other option is after the placenta is out of the womb. The cord blood collection takes place after the placenta is expelled, away from the delivery room.

This blood is pivotal to birth, as it provides a baby with nutrients when it is in its mother's womb, but research also shows that it can assist with the treatment of life-threatening illnesses, including acute and chronic leukaemia, lymphoma, immune deficiency, some haematological malignancy, blood diseases, metabolic storage diseases and other tumours. In 2005, stem cells similar to embryonic stem cells were isolated from cord blood. The stem cells, while not possessing the same potency as embryonic stem cells, have been shown to be convertible into non-blood cells, such as liver cells. Research is being undertaken into the therapeutic use of these cord blood derived stem cells for diseases such as cystic fibrosis. Other trials are being undertaken into the use of the cells in repairing organ tissue and in the treatment of diseases such as diabetes, Parkinson's and cardiovascular diseases.

The Sydney Cord Blood Bank describes cord blood stem cells as the building blocks of the blood cells that are often found in bone marrow, which have the capacity to continually produce blood cells found in the circulating blood—white cells and red blood cells, for example. Cord blood can be obtained from the umbilical cord without harming the baby, the mother or normal delivery procedures. It ensures that these cells are immediately available if ever needed as the blood can be frozen and kept for around 20 years without affecting the potency of the stem cells. If you do not choose to store your baby's cord blood it will normally be dis-

carded as medical waste after the birth. That is frightening to think about. If we have opportunities to help people live, to have a better quality of life, we should clearly seize those opportunities to help keep people who are sick or have chronic illnesses to have a better quality of life and perhaps to prolong their lifespan.

In Australia there are two types of cord blood banks which cater for these options—government and community funded public banks which store donated cord blood for public access, and private and not-for-profit banks which store children's cord blood for personal use. AusCord, which is the national cord blood collection and banking network, collects blood from participating hospitals in order to secure a sufficient supply for the entire Australian population. The three public cord blood banks in Australia licensed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration are the Sydney Children's Hospital of New South Wales, the Royal Children's Hospital in Victoria and the Mater Misericordiae Hospital in Queensland.

I am very pleased that in the 2010-11 budget the federal Labor government announced \$18.1 million in funding over four years for AusCord. I am very proud to say that that is an increase on previous budgets and is aimed to bring the service in line with funding for other blood products. Hospitals around the country contribute to AusCord. However, due to the lack of specialist staff and appropriate facilities, donations from women in Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia are more often than not inaccessible. I would like to congratulate AusCord on its fantastic efforts in research and its commitment to blood collection and donation.

The Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry 2010 annual report states that the cord blood banks have collected more than 20,000 cord blood donations, which are searchable throughout its registry. In 2008, 2,218 cord blood donations were banked in the same year. Thirty-seven patients received cord blood donations from within Australia and a further 24 from overseas. To go back to what I was saying before, I think it is important that we do whatever we can, wherever we can, to help better the lives of Australians right across the country. In regional areas this is a problem. We need to be looking at where we can collect more of these samples to build up a greater bank and storage for use in the future. As I said earlier, the member for Petrie should be congratulated on bringing this forward. I have a very keen interest in research into genetic medical disorders through my family connection. The opportunity to help save lives is something that we should never underestimate. I think we should do all that we can within our power to help make lives better for Australians in the future. I commend this motion.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (8.52 pm)—I would also like to add my commendation to the member for Petrie for putting this valuable motion on the *Notice Paper*, and I acknowledge the contribution made by previous speakers. In the short time I have available to me I would like to speak on two aspects of the motion: organ donation and the Australian National Cord Blood Collection Network. Unfortunately, Australia has one of the lowest rates of organ donation in the world. In 2009 Australia had only 11.3 organ donors per million of population. This was a decrease from 12 organ donors per million of population in 2008. Spain has the highest rate of organ donation, with 34.4 out of every million of their population donating organs, the USA with 26.1 per million and the United Kingdom with 15.1 per million. In Australia so far 228 people have donated their organs, with 683 people having received donated organs. These

are very sad figures for Australia's health system and very sad figures for the thousands of Australians who are waiting years for a much-needed organ transplant.

During my time as an organ donor ambassador for the AMA there were many ways I saw in which we could improve our rates of organ donation under the current arrangements. We do not need radical reforms but we do need to see some changes in the system. There needs to be more awareness about the process of being an organ donor. In the past, many people mistakenly thought that by ticking a box on a drivers licence you were already registered as an organ donor. But you do have to fill in the necessary and appropriate forms with Medicare.

In Australia we do not really need to go down the rule in, rule out path that some countries have travelled. I do not think it is the most humane approach. I do think that there are many cases where individuals do not talk to their family. They agree to be organ donors, but they really need to speak to their family more, to just put it on the table and make their loved ones aware of their wishes, because it is always much more difficult at the time.

What we need is stronger awareness and we also need dedicated staff to talk to families during those very difficult times. Having the dedicated staff will ensure that those loved ones that have decided to be organ donors can assist and are able to donate to others. Improving the current system in this way will allow for more organ donations and optimal transplant times, resulting in greater success. There needs to be a greater understanding for families and patients involved.

As for the umbilical cord blood, we need to establish a national framework through COAG and there needs to be appropriate public and private holding and storage facilities in the majority of Australia's major hospitals, not just, as previous speakers have mentioned, Sydney Children's Hospital in New South Wales or the Royal Children's Hospital in Victoria or the Mater Hospital in Brisbane. This is a front-line research area in medical science and stem cell research and it deserves to have the full government support that is afforded to other blood products. In Australia we have always been at the coalface of medical advances. Going back some time ago when I was a member here previously, in 2000, Dr Wooldridge was the first to announce a \$9 million funding program over four years to establish a national cord blood bank. That was very innovative at the time and it also provided an opportunity for treatment for many Australians, including children, that had life-threatening diseases such as leukaemia. This is a very important area and we have come a long way since those days.

A considerable amount of funding has been put into the National Centre for Adult Stem Cell Research and it has benefited many Australians. Research is being done at the moment into diseases such as Parkinson's, motor neurone and schizophrenia. An estimated 100,000 people suffer from Parkinson's, a disease that I have personal experience of, having three family members afflicted with it. The other diseases are very long-lasting and debilitating.

The government in 2005 provided \$20 million over four years to fund the operational cost of the National Centre for Adult Stem Cell Research, and then another \$2 million was provided to support the infrastructure costs. It is very important that we keep funding these measures and that we ensure that the national collection framework is put in place. It is a very important initiative and we must ensure that the collection of cord blood and the network are there for all Australians and are there for all our medical researchers in the most efficient way. Cord blood needs to be collected. To brighten the light of science anywhere is to brighten the

light of science everywhere. Let's do what we can to ensure that the light of medical science stays bright always for all.

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (8.58 pm)—I would like to join with the other speakers in applauding the member for Petrie for putting this motion on the *Notice Paper*. It is certainly a very important motion that gives greater awareness of the opportunities that exist to promote medical science with regard to the extraction of blood from the umbilical cord and placenta. I well remember about a decade ago in this House the very divisive debate that we had in relation to embryonic stem cell research. Certainly a lot was said about the future of adult stem cell research and about the destruction of embryos in relation to extracting stem cells, which the scientists at that time were saying offered so much hope.

I was alarmed to hear the member for Petrie say that she had offered to have the blood from her umbilical cord and placenta extracted on the occasion of the births of each of her two children but that that did not take place. We would hope that with this motion being debated tonight there is greater awareness of the shortcomings in that area and that this type of blood will become available in all states and territories, because it obviously offers so much hope. Well done to the member for Petrie and congratulations to the previous speaker on her contribution to the debate. This is one of the best motions I have ever participated in debate on, albeit very briefly, in the time that I have been here.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Debate resumed from 18 October.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Flinders Electorate

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (9.00 pm)—I wish to raise a grievance in relation to the treatment of a beautiful young family on the Mornington Peninsula by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Secondly, I wish to raise a grievance about the treatment of another family in a bureaucratic nightmare involving the Victorian government. Thirdly, in a more positive step forward, I wish to help a family who have suffered a very sad loss. All of these come together under the theme of protecting families on the Peninsula.

Let me begin with the case of Helen Coates and Stuart Kruse. Helen and Stuart are Australian citizens and have spent 10 years in the United Kingdom. A year ago they adopted a beautiful five-year-old Rwandan girl called Isimbi. They brought her home to Australia to live at Mount Martha. I know Isimbi because she was in the ballet class for five-year-olds of my daughter Poppy. I did not know there was an issue until one day my five-year-old came home and was drawing a picture. She wrote 'Love Poppy' on it and I asked her what it was about. She said that it was for Isimbi. I said, 'What has happened?' and she said that they took Isimbi away. This beautiful Rwandan girl, who had obviously been through traumatic circumstances at home in Rwanda and who had been adopted by Helen and Stuart—a wonderful Australian couple who had given her hope and a sense of future—had been, with her father, deported.

Because the adoption process is still under way in the UK, the family had to apply for a temporary 12-month visa for Isimbi to enter Australia. That expired in October and in order for Mr Kruse to finish his Australian work contract and for the family to spend Christmas with their Australian relatives, they returned briefly to London to apply for a further three-month visa for Isimbi. That was refused by Immigration officials who deemed Isimbi to be an unacceptable immigration risk at age five. Mr Kruse was forced to abandon his work contract, Isimbi was prevented from completing her preschool year and her life in ballet, and it was quite a sad class. I know this because I discovered the problem from my five-year-old daughter Poppy, who was drawing pictures to send in cards to Isimbi. The whole class could not understand what had happened to one of their friends.

The family were separated while Helen Coates returned to Mount Martha to pack up their home. The family will now be forced to spend Christmas in London, away from their extended family and friends. On behalf of Helen Coates, Stuart Kruse and Isimbi, I wrote to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Bowen. We learned from Mr Kruse late last week that the family had received a formal apology from the immigration department and had been offered a visa for Isimbi. However, it is now too late for the family to change its plans. What we have seen is a ridiculous example of bureaucracy, with real human consequences, without ministerial oversight. It has separated a family and brought an injustice to a young girl whose life has been difficult but who has found joy and a home with her adopted parents.

The family is understandably furious and Helen and Stuart want an investigation into how this decision could have been made in the first place. I will again be approaching Minister Bowen. It is not a promising start to his administration that these things are occurring on his watch. I would like the minister to speak with the family, directly and personally. I would like him to call them—we will provide the details—firstly, to apologise but, secondly, to explore rapid solutions. This is a fine Australian family, with an adopted five-year-old, with everything in order. This family has been treated roughly, rudely and badly and great distress has been caused within the community of Mount Martha generally and most specifically within the family of Helen Coates, Stuart Kruse and Isimbi. I will be writing to the minister. I hope that he will have the decency to speak with the family directly.

The second grievance I have in relation to the protection of peninsula families concerns the bushfire planning permit process. Michael and Leigh-ann Stokan of Rye have found themselves caught in a bureaucratic nightmare, and it shows no signs whatsoever of ending. They want to build a home in Rye on a block of land adjacent to the freeway reserve owned by the Mornington Peninsula Council and VicRoads—nothing unusual or untoward in that. They applied for a planning permit but were told they had to get a CFA report first. To this point in time, nothing unusual. The CFA then told them that the freeway reserve, owned by the council and by VicRoads, posed a wildfire threat to their property and had to be cleared. This is a reserve owned by a state instrumentality and a municipal authority, and the property had to be cleared. So the freeway reserve has not been cleared or maintained to any specific standard. The couple were then told they would have to pay up to \$5,000 to get a bushfire consultant to write a report about the freeway reserve. They were told that even if they did hire a consultant there was no guarantee that they would get their planning permit. The council has agreed to talk to VicRoads about the condition of the freeway reserve but has refused to say how long this will take or what the outcome will be.

I myself have spoken with an officer of the council, who is doing a very decent job but who is caught in a bureaucratic bind without leadership from the state. Every day that passes is costing the Stokans significant additional funds. Meanwhile, the council continues to issue fire abatement notices to residents warning that they are required to keep their own properties clear of vegetation, whilst the municipal land and the state owned land is not in a fit state, is not considered to be acceptable and is considered to be a fire risk. We in our office know of at least three other residents going through a similar battle—what you might call a bureaucratic nightmare—with the state authorities due to their proximity to state and council owned land.

I call on the council, for whom I have great respect—I think the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council is one of the finest municipal authorities in Australia—to meet with state officials, and I ask the Premier to intervene to ensure that the ridiculous situation of private citizens being caught in a bureaucratic nightmare because of a dispute between two levels of government is resolved.

The third local family issue that I wish to raise this evening is in relation to Heath Langdale. The Westernport Warriors is a Hastings based football team. I know it well. It is aimed at enhancing the lives of people experiencing disadvantage, unemployment, homelessness, mental illness, disability, addiction, substance abuse and social and economic hardship. All of these elements combined make the catchment for the Westernport Warriors. The Warriors were formed in 2005 by Andrew Brady, who was previously a local policeman. He was helped by Peter Edhouse and Harry Witfield and many other local supporters.

This year the team had tremendous success and won the premiership. The team dedicated its premiership to the memory of its former captain, Heath Langdale, whom I knew. Heath collapsed and died suddenly at training in February. The coroner could find no reason for death, but a condition called long QT syndrome is suspected. I have dealt with another family recently that has had the tragic loss of a young boy, about 20 years of age, who was fit and healthy and who suddenly passed in the night in a similar circumstance.

Long QT syndrome is caused by a fault in the electrical system of the heart. It makes the heart develop arrhythmia, which means that it beats too fast and the electrical impulses can simply collapse. It is a common cause of sudden death in young people, but it is not well understood and it is difficult to detect. I would urge more generally the need for greater research on a bipartisan basis. I think it is important that we support this.

Heath left behind a partner, Cassie, and two beautiful young children. To honour his memory we are working with the Westernport Warriors to initiate an annual award in Heath's name. I would be privileged to donate that award. It will be an encouragement award for the player who has put in the best effort over the season and it will be in the form of a trophy for the player, plus a shield engraved with each player's name that will be kept at the club.

I am honoured to be able to recognise Heath. He was a very good member of our community. To Cassie and your family: I am sorry that you have lost such a good man, but he made a big difference and he mattered. (*Time expired*)

Wakefield Electorate: Infrastructure

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (9.10 pm)—I rise this evening to talk about infrastructure in my electorate of Wakefield and in particular to talk about the government's National Broadband Network, which is an important project that will help Australia remain competitive in the global economy of the 21st century.

I would first like to commend the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy for his unwavering commitment to implementing this policy. That unwavering commitment is in the face of some opposition out there, particularly in this parliament from the Liberal and National parties, somewhat extraordinarily. The minister recently came down to my electorate and switched on a very important television re-transmission tower which, for the first time in about 25 years, since the founding of Craigmore and Hillbank, now gives a strong enough signal for people to get a clear picture on their TV screens from free-to-air channels. This was one of my most important election promises and one that I was absolutely committed to implementing because I think there is something un-Australian about not being able to watch the cricket or the tennis and not being able to get a clear signal just because of where you live. This is a residential area of Adelaide and it always perplexed me that television stations could get away with not servicing these people. But, as we know, markets do fail on occasion and governments have to step in, so we stepped in with this television re-transmission tower, which has fixed that problem and added greatly to the amenity of people in Craigmore and Hillbank. It has made a lot of people very happy. About 50 or 60 people came out to the opening of the tower and I think half of them were there just to make sure I kept my promise. I have had consistently very good feedback from that area whenever I have done shopping centre stalls or been out in the community. I think people do get a big kick out of seeing politicians deliver on their words. So it is a tick, I suppose, for my performance so far.

Often the residents remind me that the job is not done. They always ask me about broadband, which is also terrible in Craigmore, which is stuck on an old exchange on a pair gain, as were the residents in Burton, where I used to live. I have moved now and I have ADSL, but there are many black spots all over my electorate, particularly in Craigmore and, to a certain extent, Hillbank. They suffer from the same problem: they are stuck on dial-up and they are stuck on wireless and it has a huge effect on people's lives. A couple of years ago I met a young lady, an American, who had married a South Australian. They met in Iraq, of all places, and love bloomed. She moved to Hillbank, but she had to commute to Sydney every week so that she could do her job as a journalist. Had she had a national broadband network and been able to get high-speed internet services, she would not have had to make that commute to Sydney every week. Obviously, that places a great deal of strain on a relationship, but it also places a great deal of strain on the economy. With us all being aware of our carbon emissions, it is a vivid example of how the National Broadband Network will prevent the necessity to travel as much.

We are in this situation because the previous government had 18 failed broadband policies over 12 years of government, and when they left office Australia's broadband speed lagged behind those of 26 other OECD nations. That is quite an extraordinary record. It stunned me, to tell you the truth, when they started putting out pamphlets in my electorate saying that they opposed the National Broadband Network. I was absolutely overjoyed. I was so overjoyed I

quoted it in my own election material. So I thank Senator Ferguson for that pamphlet promoting Tony Abbott's commitment to tear up the National Broadband Network. You would have thought that they would give consideration to all the evidence, the amount of angst in the community about this and the obvious concerns of many members of this parliament—not just the Labor Party. You would have thought that the Liberal and National parties would have learnt their lesson. But what did we get straight after the election? Mr Turnbull was back in the harness—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! The member for Wakefield ought to refer to members by their titles.

Mr CHAMPION—I take your point, Mr Deputy Speaker. The member for Wentworth was back in the harness—and that is a good thing for his party, no doubt—but his marching orders were to destroy this valuable national piece of infrastructure. It is extraordinary that they should be so utterly honest about their commitment to do this. We just have to remember what is at stake here. There is a great deal at stake in terms of the new economy, e-health, e-education, small business opportunities and productivity. At the moment we rank 29th out of 50 countries. We have an average connection speed of 2.6 megabits per second and no Australian city is in the top 100 cities in the world for average internet connection speed. So we have a situation where we have been left with this legacy of inaction, this legacy of failure. We are trying to fix it up and, every chance they get, the member for Wentworth and the Liberal Party decide to obstruct this valuable piece of infrastructure.

We know it is valuable in so many ways. The Centre for International Economics found that it could increase GDP by 1.4 per cent after just five or six years, and that it will deliver speeds for both uploading and downloading, which is a particular feature of a fibre network. We know that it will create some 25,000 jobs just in infrastructure, just in building this great national network. We know that this is the Snowy Mountains scheme of the 21st century. It is of vital national importance.

We have to contrast that great nation-building program with the opposition's policy, which is delay and inaction. Just like they delayed in government, they now seek to delay us in implementing our policy, a policy that has found favour with the Australian people, a policy that will deliver important economic and social benefits to people in my electorate. People in my electorate are on the front line of this problem in many ways. Adelaide has some of the worst infrastructure. A lot of pair gains were put in suburbs that were expanding in the late eighties and early nineties. We have a lot of country towns in my electorate. Many of them have people commuting on the Northern Expressway, which is a piece of infrastructure that was completed before time and on budget, an infrastructure project in which 14 per cent of workers were either Indigenous or young workers, giving those people a start in civil construction.

What we want to do is to create the same type of infrastructure program with the National Broadband Network, something that will create jobs, build economic growth and deliver vast social benefits to this country. That is something that does not just benefit Labor voters or independent voters; it will benefit coalition voters. So it is just bizarre that they should stand in the way of this important bit of national infrastructure, that the member for Wentworth should be given just one job—that is, to demolish the NBN. It really is, I think, an extraordinary act of economic vandalism. It is an extraordinary act of vandalism to the national interest and I urge opposition members to think carefully about what they are doing. It is not in their

interests, ultimately, and it is certainly not in the country's interests to prevent this National Broadband Network from proceeding.

**Schools First Program
Victoria State Election**

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (9.20 pm)—I would like to speak on a couple of issues this evening. The first is quite definitely not a grievance but a cause for some celebration, and I am going to say something nice about a bank. Just hours after urging the government to take seriously the price-signalling aspect that can be at the heart of collusive behaviour and drawing attention to banking practices and the petrol industry in that regard, I am going to say something nice about the National Australia Bank. I was fortunate to attend three separate ceremonies in the Dunkley electorate relating to the Schools First funding program that the National Australia Bank, I believe, has contributed more than \$10 million towards. It has overseen the program in partnership with the Foundation for Young Australians and the Australian Council for Educational Research. This Schools First program aims to provide support for school and community partnerships that have been set up to address a particular identified need or an opportunity within the school community that will bring benefits for students, where a plan has been developed and each partner is making a contribution to that plan, where the program is well organised and it is clear that the students will gain benefit from that program.

The National Australia Bank, the Foundation for Young Australians and the Australian Council for Educational Research consider applications and are in a position to make two kinds of awards available. One is the seed funding grant of around \$25,000, and about 40 of those have been made available in 2010; and the other is the local impact award of some \$50,000 each, and 68 such awards were announced in 2010. And we have state, territory and national awards to come, so there is still some good news to come.

I am thrilled that three of the secondary colleges in my electorate chose to take up that opportunity and won awards, and I would like to touch briefly on their programs. The first one is the Elisabeth Murdoch College in Langwarrin. I want to pay particular tribute to Acting Principal Judy Curson and the team that was involved in formulating this fantastic community mentoring program. It is an initiative that is very timely because it brings together a number of elements within the Langwarrin community to prepare young people for life into the future and skill them up with competencies which I think should be embedded in the school curriculum, but sadly are not, that are crucial to the way in which people interact: communication skills, working in teams, problem-solving and the like. This program, operating through Elisabeth Murdoch College, has as its partners the fantastic people at the Frankston University of the Third Age. Gail Dudeck and the team from the University of the Third Age have come together with the local council, Langwarrin Community Centre—the team there including Maree Saleeba and the board members—and the college students and staff for this cross-generational collaboration to develop the skills that I touched on.

At the award celebration, Amy Thomas and Bree Peart, two year 11 students who were very involved in the development of this program, were recognised—fine young people who are great examples and fantastic students at the college. They came forward to work with the teaching community and the University of the Third Age to pull this program together. The students drove the project and were an inspiration for the future opportunities stemming from this original idea. It is great that Bree and Amy are focusing on their studies. They were in-

strumental in the funding application and initiated the conversations that were needed with project partners to make it happen. So the young people themselves at the school were integral to the development of the program. The baton has been passed: Rhys Battisson and Lachlan Gray are two year 8 students who will be taking up the reins and providing that kind of student horsepower to the program.

It is about community mentoring that benefits the community and the students. The University of the Third Age bring their senior and experienced people into the school community. They meet regularly at the Langwarrin Community Centre. The program was about joint opportunities for two-way learning, where a young person can teach a mature-age person computer skills or an older person help a younger person prepare for a job interview or work on better management of their time and on communication skills and the like—things that are very important to the success of those young people into the future.

So I just want to give a big shout out to Elisabeth Murdoch College and all the gang that were involved there. It is fantastic that they have got recognition with this award. Phil Sim, deputy president of the EMC council, was also at the award ceremony. It was great to see the school really getting behind it. But that is just one example.

If we head over to Frankston North and Carrum Downs, we find that Flinders Christian Community College was also awarded a Schools First Seed Funding Award of \$25,000 for a collaboration called Learning ICT with Industry. Year 9 and 10 students were able to work with information and communications technology industry professionals in the design and publishing area to produce the school magazine. Students were given the opportunity to take on roles and responsibilities that are normally experienced in the workplace, and to engage with a team focused on outcomes and collaboration. The industry professionals were able to play a significant role by connecting their workplaces with the schools so that there was learning and collaboration and real-time videoconferencing for problem-solving, and an ability to draw from the experience of the professionals who were making their time available to the students. Centreforce was at the heart of that. Mr Murray Payne, the director, and all of his staff put a lot of time into it. It is fantastic to see that contribution.

The school has been able to use some of the funds from the award to purchase equipment that will enable them to take further this videoconferencing collaborative learning model. I would like to send out my congratulations to Jillian Hudson, a teacher at the college, and Murray Payne of Centreforce, the two individuals who were behind that and who were given lots of support and encouragement by Maria Varlet, the campus principal of Flinders Christian Community College at Carrum Downs. When I was there for the presentation, the students were telling me about the wonderfully enhanced learning opportunities that arose from that collaboration.

The third school to receive a Schools First award was Mornington Secondary College, and again I was pleased to be part of that award celebration. This award was for the college's Drum and Flag Corps program, a police youth corps program. This is a fantastic program comprising cadets, flag bearers, the marching corps and the drum corps led by dedicated local senior constables Mick Mears and Chris Dawson, and teacher and youth corps coordinator Paul Papettas, who is a very important part of the program. Now in its fourth year, over 200 students have been involved. Annually, this is part of their syllabus. It plays a key part in bringing police work, law and community closer together so that people who might not start

out with a positive view of policing and law enforcement can gain firsthand contact with people through the program that Paul Papettas operates. The students learn about what policing involves. There are a number of excursions. They go behind the scenes and get to experience firsthand the workings of the police and how it affects all of our lives in terms of public safety and the wellbeing of the community. They visit the police academy, the air wing, the dog squad, the water police and the mounted police stables, as well as local police stations and central operations. They march at key events on occasions such as Australia Day, Anzac Day and Remembrance Day. More recently, they participated in the Bendigo and Moomba parades, to mention just a few examples.

This program is important for its educational content, but it is also crucial for the attitudinal change that is part of it. We are seeing young people developing strong, positive and lasting relationships with police. Mutual respect is developed. Respect for the law is nurtured. The students develop a knowledge and understanding about how policing and law and order adds to the wellbeing and vitality of our community. It helps to break down misconceptions and stereotypes on both sides, and positive attitudes remain with the students for years into the future. So it is a very important program. It is great to see that these three secondary schools in the Dunkley electorate have won that recognition and the resources that come with it.

Finally, in the 30 seconds still available to me, I want to commend Geoff Shaw, the Liberal candidate for Frankston in the upcoming election, and Donna Bauer, the Liberal candidate for Carrum. On the weekend I was pleased to be at a community meeting where they announced a \$2½ million commitment to help restore Kananook Creek. It is an important waterway in the Dunkley electorate. It is a focal point of much of the city as it looks towards Port Phillip Bay, but what we have seen is the silting-over of that creek. It needs a good cleanout. It is not navigable any longer, especially around the mouth and past the boat ramps to Beach Street. It should be a community asset. It deserves some love, care and attention and I am pleased to see this announcement by the coalition. (*Time expired*)

Vietnam: Human Rights

Vietnam Vision

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (9.30 pm)—I rise to speak about a concerning human rights issue in Vietnam. Since I last spoke about this issue, over the past five months another four Vietnamese human rights activists have been arrested by the Vietnamese authorities. Mr Pham Minh Hoang, a 55-year-old lecturer from the Ho Chi Minh University of Technology, was arrested on 13 August. The Rev. Duong Kim Khai, a 52-year-old member of the Mennonite Church in Vietnam, was arrested on 10 August. Ms Tran Thi Thuy, a 39-year-old merchant, was arrested on the same day, 10 August, in Dong Thap. Mr Nguyen Thanh Tam, a 57-year-old farmer, was arrested on 18 July in Ben Tre.

These individuals had peacefully expressed their concerns about social justice and freedom of religion in their country. Disturbingly, the location of Mr Pham Minh Hoang has not been disclosed to his family, despite repeated requests for information from the government. I am advised that his family has been continually harassed by local authorities. I further understand that the Vietnamese government has detained the political prisoners, accusing them of 'aiming to overthrow the socialist government', a crime which may lead to a death penalty. The member for McMahon and I have recently written to the Minister for Foreign Affairs urging Aus-

tralia to use its full diplomatic relationship with Vietnam to ensure these political prisoners are treated fairly.

The distressing human rights situation in Vietnam was brought closer to home earlier this month with the arrest of Mrs Hong Vo, an Australian citizen of Vietnamese ancestry. Mrs Vo was taking part in a peaceful demonstration in Hanoi to promote democratic reform in Vietnam. Thankfully, Mrs Vo was released and returned home late last week. I am sure it goes without saying that members in this place would express our best wishes to Mrs Vo and her family.

These arrests are further examples of human rights abuses which are regrettably all too common in Vietnam. According to the latest Human Rights Watch report on Vietnam, dozens of democracy advocates, religious activists, human rights defenders and online critics have been arrested since 2009. They were detained under vaguely worded national security laws such as spreading 'anti-government propaganda' or 'abusing democratic freedoms'. There are more than 400 people imprisoned in Vietnam for the exercise of fundamental rights. Quite frankly, we should all find that astounding. It is also astounding that Vietnamese law authorises arbitrary 'administrative detention' without trial. Furthermore, dissidents and others deemed to be national security threats can be involuntarily committed to mental institutions or detained in state-run rehabilitation centres. To any Australian who enjoys the freedoms of this country, this must be shocking.

As Vietnam is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the international community can rightly expect that it will uphold the civil and political rights of individuals, including the most basic rights of freedom of speech, press, expression, religion and assembly. These are all commitments that we sign up for when we sign that covenant, as Vietnam has done. Since its accession to the World Trade Organisation, Vietnam's positive economic record is commendable. However, the government's attitude towards human rights remains of concern.

I want to thank Viet Tan for bringing these disturbing matters to my attention. Viet Tan is a pro-democracy group with members inside Vietnam and around the world. Viet Tan aims to bring about democratic change in Vietnam's through non-violent means and civil engagement. I have had the pleasure of working with Dr Phong Nguyen, a cardiologist at Liverpool Hospital in my electorate. He is a member of Viet Tan's leadership team in Australia. Dr Nguyen and Viet Tan organiser Tan Nguyen are strong advocates for advancing human rights in Vietnam. Dr Nguyen is a man who has obviously reaped the benefits of a very good education in this country. He now gives back to this country in a most critical way through the work he does at Liverpool Hospital, but he is also committed to fighting for his countrymen in Vietnam. He is a man of considerable integrity and he has earned my respect. I commend Dr Nguyen and all members of Viet Tan for their commitment to furthering human rights in Vietnam. For the sake of the people of Vietnam I truly hope their efforts bear fruit.

There are a number of other organisations operating in Australia who have a focus on making a difference for the better in Vietnam. One of those organisations is Vietnam Vision. In my electorate the Rotary Club of Liverpool West provides annual funding to a Vietnam Vision team led by local surgeons who travel to Vietnam each year and perform up to 300 cataract operations, restoring sight, free of charge, for the poor in Vietnam. Members of the club also

travel with the team, meeting their own travel costs, to provide logistical support for the surgeons on the trip.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting with members of the club and local doctors, including Mr Trung Chinh Dang, Dr William Trinh, Dr Le Duc Hong, Mr Thuan Ngyuen, Mr Charles Hill, Mr Joe Cauchi and Mr Ted Mlynarz. It was very rewarding to hear firsthand what these volunteers experienced in Vietnam and the circumstances under which the cataract surgeries took place. After his first visit to Vietnam, Ted Mlynarz wrote:

I was able to see the patients, already prepared for the operation, waiting their turn, noticing their anxiety, and maybe fear. However, once the operation was over, I could see the relief and joy in their general persona.

This is a local organisation making a difference for the better for people in Vietnam. The Vietnam Vision volunteers from my electorate are people who do not sit idly by and watch what happens in Vietnam; they choose to make a difference. I commend them for the action they take.

In closing, can I say that there has been a disturbing increase over the past few years in the number of people arrested in Vietnam for advocating for human rights issues. Their so-called crimes have included supporting political groups not recognised by the state, criticising government policies, calling for democracy, giving interviews to foreign journalists and providing legal advice to other dissidents on trial. As a nation we should be doing all that we can to urge the Vietnamese government to adhere to the International Bill of Human Rights, which that government ratified and pledged to obey back in 1982. Australia is a nation which greatly respects human rights. This respect is echoed through our political and legal systems and, quite frankly, is embodied in our culture. It is our duty, therefore, wherever possible, to advocate for human rights throughout all countries.

Once again, I say that I support all those organisations in my electorate who do such good work on issues such as human rights in Vietnam. I salute those Vietnam Vision volunteers I have mentioned, who have taken it upon themselves to make a positive difference in people's lives—people who would not otherwise have been able to avail themselves of cataract surgery. The Vietnam Vision volunteers have put that surgery within the means of the poor of Vietnam. They should be congratulated.

Building the Education Revolution Program

Ms LEY (Farrer) (9.40 pm)—I rise tonight to speak about Building the Education Revolution and the unfortunate results of that program in my electorate of Farrer. As was raised again during Senate estimates last week, the Building the Education Revolution program is running significantly behind schedule, with almost half of the \$16.2 billion of supposed stimulus money still unspent long after the threat of recession has passed. Under the school halls program, so far only 30 per cent of 10,697 projects, or 3,114, under all three rounds has been completed, with only five months to go before the original deadline for completion of all last round projects expires on 31 March 2011. Nationwide, thousands of projects are running behind schedule and are being granted extensions of time by the federal government to maintain the illusion that everything is progressing well.

Apart from the waste, perhaps even more shameful is this government's efforts to hide the mess. Also revealed last week was the fact that the federal government drafted two different

versions of an agreement to implement the BER. One version was signed by state and territory education authorities and another one by the non-government school authorities in each state. This delivered the situation where the non-government school sector is being held to a significantly higher standard and can be punished financially much more severely for breaches of the agreement than can the state governments. Under the deal, the federal government can seek repayment from state schools for some or all of the funding which has not been spent in accordance with the agreement or acquitted to the Commonwealth's satisfaction. Alternatively, it means that independent and Catholic schools are required to repay all their funding, should the government decide so. The state education authorities can be required to repay only the money that the federal government deems was misspent. Fairness for all under Labor? Not under this revolution.

As the shadow minister for education highlighted in the House last week, hundreds of schools have been forced to accept McSchool hall style demountables, delivered off the back of trucks, irrespective of what local communities wanted. Schools in some jurisdictions that wished to build new classrooms were told they had to have stock standard school halls or libraries, irrespective of whether they already had a school hall or a library. Schools were not allowed to use local builders or contractors and instead were forced to use large-scale contractors from capital cities, which were used to operating on a much bigger scale, to roll out small, local projects, in many cases in tiny country schools hundreds of kilometres away from Sydney, where those contractors were based.

I will take one school in my electorate as an example, Holbrook Public School. We had what sounds like a mightily impressive \$2 million project. But what was the school sold? It was a pup. There was no consultation with them at all prior to the project starting. There was no room for variation of the project that they received. While Holbrook's children and teachers were in desperate need of new kitchen and canteen facilities, what they got was another of Labor's ubiquitous school halls. Fair enough, the school may have reasoned, but was there enough room to seat all students and teachers, let alone parents, for assemblies and school events? Sorry, not under this revolution. Holbrook proudly fosters the education needs of over 200 students, but the hall offers seating for about a hundred. Even a grade 3 maths student could add up and tell you that it was simply not appropriate to the school's current or future needs. It never was and is never going to be.

Was air conditioning included so that the hall was notionally comfortable during the days of 30 to 40 degrees Celsius? Sorry, not under this revolution. Under the National School Pride program, also part of the BER, schools wishing to spend their maintenance funds on energy-efficient air conditioning to make buildings usable that were without air conditioning, were refused permission to do so. Instead they have been told to knock the building down and build a new one that does have air conditioning. Even outlets and organisations which support the principle of the BER have said that there is as much as 30 to 50 per cent waste in this program. Indeed, when I wrote to the then education minister on behalf of the students and the school community of Holbrook I was referred to the government's BER Implementation Task Force. This was the task force that the now Prime Minister said originally that we did not need, and then, when she finally did agree that it was needed, she would not release its specific findings. There are many other examples throughout my electorate and it is no small feat that these can be made public given the original guidelines announced by the government

where principals and governing councils were effectively gagged and told not to speak to the media or the opposition for fear of losing their funds.

At the little town of Pleasant Hills just north of Albury, the Building the Education Revolution scheme delivered a total package of two screen doors, three blinds and awnings, a concrete path, soft floor mats and a new storage area. There were a few dollars left over for small improvements to their driveway, a ceiling for a shed used in the wet weather, and new surrounds for the sandpit. What was the price? Let us say that it came in at a quarter of \$1 million—\$250,000. But even if you could rationalise that staggering price tag, the school had to write off project management costs of \$80,000.

The story was similar for the nearby town of Henty. The Henty public school was so frustrated that it could only express public dismay at the rapid progress being made under the BER at a neighbouring private school which had self-managed its BER funds. Indeed I went to St Paul's Lutheran Primary School at Henty just a fortnight ago. The upgrades to their toilet block, library and classrooms were impressive. And what about the work at Henty public school? It is not yet finished; not under this revolution.

Parents have called my office in tears as they see the progress being made in the non-government schools in their town and the wonderful facilities that are appearing before their eyes. Whether or not you agree with the rationale for the stimulus in the first place, we all, especially country people, demand and understand the need for value for your dollar and value for money. I can recall when the stimulus program was first announced. It was talked about in terms of local builders, local architects, local tradespeople, local workers getting a say. But the reality has been so different.

I went to one school—and I am not going to name the school—where the principal almost hung his head in shame and pointed to a small demountable classroom that had cost \$200,000. They were not even allowed to connect the rainwater tank that they had acquired under a Howard government program for water conservation. They were not even allowed guttering on the roof of this sad little square box that had come off the back of a truck from far away. If the government wants to truly implement how these projects should be managed, it should look no further than the private sector.

As the House is aware, the opposition have been calling—and we have called again today—for a judicial inquiry from the very outset when our concerns were announced. Those calls have been ignored. It is now time for the parliament to agree to the private member's bill that my colleagues have spoken about in the House tonight, and I do call on all Independent members to support the inquiry. The creation of a fully-independent judicial inquiry is absolutely critical, as it will be the only investigation into the school hall program that actually has the power to subpoena documents and summon witnesses. It will also be the only inquiry with the primary task of discovering whether the government obtained value for money, because we have seen reams of evidence and testimony in the media and from the various other inquiries suggesting widespread rorts, price gouging, collusion, state-skimming and waste. The government just simply has not provided any good reason why they are opposed to the judicial inquiry that we want. It is incumbent on the government to ensure that taxpayers receive full disclosure of how their funds are spent. Despite promising to publish all the costing data during the election campaign they have made no move to do so. So if the Prime Minister has nothing to hide in her handling of the rollout of this program, then surely she has nothing to

fear from a judicial inquiry. Again, I call on the Independent members of the cross benches to support this bill so that it succeeds in the House of Representatives and we have the inquiry we so desperately need.

Health

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (9.49 pm)—I am aggrieved at the attitude of the LNP in Queensland, particularly in rural and regional areas, with respect to scare campaigns they have undertaken in relation to rural hospitals in South-East Queensland and also on their threats to close down the Ipswich GP superclinic which is open for business at the University of Queensland Ipswich campus. As early as April this year the then LNP candidate for Wright, Hajnal Ban, was running around the countryside in the electorate of Wright, which I was still representing before the boundaries changed, in areas like Gatton, Laidley and Boonah, alleging the government were going to close down rural hospitals as part of the national health and hospitals network reforms. It was complete and utter nonsense. This was the sort of scare campaign they undertook in places like the Brisbane Valley as well in respect of the hospital at Esk. I then took the Minister for Regional and Rural Health, the Hon. Warren Snowdon, to my electorate and had a forum in the Brisbane Valley reassuring people that the federal Labor government is strongly committed to hospitals in regional and rural areas. In fact, under our hospital reforms, funding in South-East Queensland will prosper and continue to prosper.

But the Ipswich GP superclinic has always been, and will continue to be, under threat by the coalition. I met with patients and staff at stage 1 of the Ipswich GP superclinic. It is located at the University of Queensland campus providing an urgent care clinic focusing on care for chronic or complex skin conditions as well as chronic dermatitis, skin cancer and other illnesses as well. The GP superclinic in Ipswich is part of a health precinct that has been created by the University of Queensland Ipswich campus. Medicine, nursing and physicians assistants courses are run there and there is a psychology clinic funded by the federal government through the Ipswich and West Moreton Division of General Practice.

The Ipswich GP superclinic is great for the local community. In fact, the *Queensland Times* newspaper had an editorial on 21 May entitled 'Get hands off our super clinic Joe', referring to the member for North Sydney. The editor of the *Queensland Times* waxed:

Politicians who devise ways to save taxpayers' precious dollars should usually be applauded, but Shadow Treasurer Joe Hockey does not deserve any thanks for his latest cost-cutting proposal.

Stage 2 of the GP superclinic at Ipswich will link in closely with the psychology clinic and the training of medical students which is going on. I am really looking forward to the involvement that the clinic and other medical facilities have with the Ipswich study that Professor Robert Bush at the University of Queensland is undertaking. He is doing a longitudinal study of a growing community. The GP superclinic will link with the Ipswich study and with other health facilities in that investigation and reporting.

Two GPs and a nurse will staff the new Ipswich GP superclinic from 8 am to 6 pm Monday to Friday. They will bulk-bill all concession card holders, children under 16 years of age and patients over 65 years of age. The fully operational Ipswich GP superclinic will have particular emphasis on cardiovascular, paediatric, pain/ musculoskeletal, diabetes, respiratory and mental health services. That aspect of the GP superclinic is expected to commence operation in late 2011.

We are rolling out these GP superclinics across the country, building what we believe is essential health infrastructure which Australia needs for the future. We are investing \$275.2 million to establish GP superclinics in 36 communities. We have committed another \$355.2 million for 28 more GP superclinics.

Mr Darryl Grundy, the CEO of the Ipswich GP superclinic, said that UQ Health Care, which runs the GP superclinic, is different from other centres for three reasons. One, there is a focus on supporting the local health community by seeing patients who cannot get in to their regular GP via the urgent care clinic. That will assuage the concerns of any local GPs in Ipswich who are concerned that their practices may suffer. Secondly, it will seek to collaborate with GPs and other health professionals with specialised skills and interests to support patients with chronic or complex conditions. Thirdly, there is the leadership of the university and the focus on best practice excellence, which this brings.

Mr Grundy's background is as a pharmacist. He has extensive business management experience. I have met him and talked to him about the GP superclinic at the University of Queensland. He is very excited about the prospects there. I am also pleased about the way they have used the existing facilities. Mr Deputy Speaker Slipper, you had a lot of years in Ipswich and you know what the old Challinor Centre was like. That is where the Ipswich campus of the University of Queensland is located. They have used the heritage listed buildings in a very exciting way. They have made use of these historic buildings. At the same time as they have updated them and created important health facilities for the people of Ipswich they have kept the facade and architecture in place.

With respect to health services in our area this will add a lot. A study conducted by the Ipswich and West Moreton Division of General Practice some few years ago found that we had only one GP for every 1,609 people living in Ipswich and the West Moreton area. Fortunately, those numbers have improved slightly. I am looking forward to the GP superclinic at the University of Queensland being an important part of the hub-and-spoke model that will be used as part of the Medicare Locals and the local health and hospital network. The proposals I have seen and read do look at Ipswich as being part of that model with the Ipswich General Hospital and the GP superclinic located within a stone's throw. They are reaching out to the rural hospitals which will prosper and not suffer.

Boonah, Laidley, Gatton and Esk have small but vital hospitals. We have no intention of seeing those hospitals wither on the vine without funding. We have every intention to make sure that they continue. In those regional and rural communities the hospitals are critical to primary health care, critical of course to those patients who require an overnight stay and are sometimes then referred to the Ipswich General Hospital. Those hospitals provide so much.

The Esk Hospital in the Brisbane Valley is very important. It is the place from which Meals on Wheels operate. Meals are prepared there and given out across to Toogoolawah, Esk and other places in the Brisbane Valley. It is a great community service. It is a place where groups meet in the boardroom to discuss health prevention and where exercise classes are held. I was there on many occasions when I was on the health community council locally. I always believed that Esk Hospital served a great role in the Brisbane Valley.

I have been aggrieved by the LNP in South-East Queensland, who have been running scare campaigns threatening that we will close down these important regional hospitals. It is not true. I have also been aggrieved by the threats to close down the GP superclinic in Ipswich,

which we think is so important to add to the value of primary healthcare services in the Ipswich and West Moreton region. I am excited about the future of our region. I am excited about the Gillard government's infrastructure spending locally, not just on roads and community infrastructure but on health infrastructure in our region. (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—There being no further grievances, the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Main Committee adjourned at 10.00 pm

QUESTIONS IN WRITING**Ministerial Staff Security Assessments****(Question No. 10)**

Mr Briggs asked the Attorney-General, in writing, on 30th September 2010:

For how many current ministerial staff have security assessments not been undertaken.

Mr McClelland—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

All of my current ministerial staff have had security assessments completed.

Saatchi and Saatchi Illegal Arrivals Campaign**(Question No. 15)**

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Home Affairs, in writing, on 30th September 2010:

In respect of the contract provided to Saatchi and Saatchi to conduct a campaign on behalf of the Government to discourage illegal arrivals to Australia:

- (1) What is the total monetary value of the contract and what sum had been spent as at 30 September 2010.
- (2) In how many countries is this campaign being undertaken.
- (3) What specific sum has been allocated to (a) agency fees, (b) travel and accommodation and other incidental expenses by the agency, (c) production expenses such as talent fees, and (d) equipment hire and the like.
- (4) As at 30 September 2010, how many: (a) volley ball nets and fishing nets had been purchased and distributed, to what locations, and at what total cost; (b) street theatre performances had been undertaken, in what locations and at what total cost; and (c) actors had been engaged to conduct these performances, at what total cost (including meals, accommodation and travel expenses), and what fees were paid to script writers, directors and drama coaches to support these performances.
- (5) What other initiatives have been undertaken as part of this campaign and what is planned for the future.
- (6) As at 30 September 2010, what measures were in place to assess the effectiveness of the campaign, and how had the performance rated against these measures.

Mr Brendan O'Connor—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) Saatchi and Saatchi has not been contracted by the Australian Government to conduct any campaign to discourage irregular maritime arrivals to Australia. The Australian Government contracted the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to conduct a counter-people smuggling communications campaign in Sri Lanka. IOM sub-contracted Saatchi and Saatchi to deliver some aspects of this project. The total value of the contract awarded to IOM for this project is AUD194,506 (As a result of renegotiating a more favourable contract the budget was revised down from the figure quoted in the original proposal). IOM paid Saatchi and Saatchi USD6,500.00 for initial campaign research and campaign design services. Saatchi and Saatchi's role in the campaign ceased in August 2009.
- (2) This campaign was only conducted in Sri Lanka.
- (3) (a) IOM paid Saatchi and Saatchi USD6,500.00 for initial campaign research and campaign design.
(b) Total travel, incidental and accommodation costs for the campaign were USD5,100.

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- (c) Total production costs including all campaign collaterals were USD58,421.
 - (d) Total equipment hire and dissemination costs for the collaterals was USD6,000.
- (4) (a) No volley ball nets were produced. 150 high quality fishing nets branded with campaign key messages were produced and donated to Fisheries Federations in Negombo and Chilaw. The total cost of the fishing nets was USD 10,500.
- (b) 30 Street theatre performances were conducted in selected community areas surrounding Negombo and Chilaw. The total cost for all performances including talent, production costs and equipment hire was USD5,500.
- (c) The total cost of USD5,500 includes all costs for script writers, directors and drama coaches. This figure also includes accommodation and travel expenses. No further breakdown is available.
- (5) The campaign conducted by IOM in Sri Lanka concluded in July 2010. Customs and Border Protection is currently considering options for future communications initiatives in Sri Lanka.
- (6) IOM were contractually required to conduct an evaluation of the methods of dissemination, community awareness of messages and any resultant behavioural change. The evaluation found that 96% of those surveyed at the completion of the campaign responded that the campaign messages had changed their mind about considering involvement in irregular migration. The evaluation also suggests that the campaign penetrated the target communities, with high levels of awareness of the campaign. Since the campaign began there has been a significant decrease in the number of ventures departing Negombo and Chilaw.