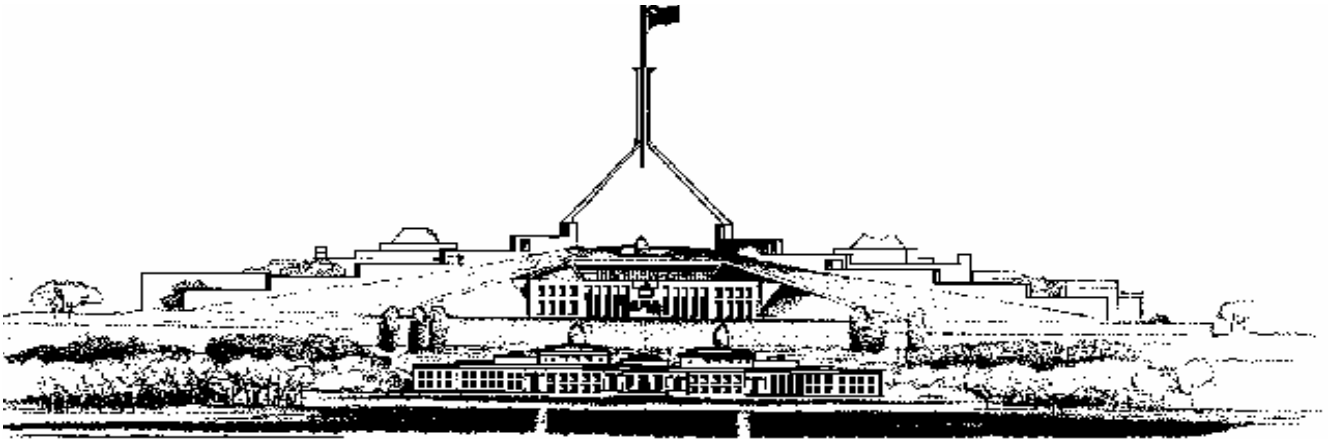




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 3, 2011

Monday, 28 February 2011

FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SECOND PERIOD

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SITTING DAYS—2011

Month	Date
February	8, 9, 10, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28
March	1, 2, 3, 21, 22, 23, 24
May	10, 11, 12, 23, 24, 25, 26, 30, 31
June	1, 2, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23
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August	16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25
September	12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22
October	11, 12, 13, 31
November	1, 2, 3, 21, 22, 23, 24

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

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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
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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 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 Multicultural Affairs	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 and Public Sector Superannuation	Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Minister Assisting the Attorney-General on Queensland Floods Recovery	Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
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, 28 February 2011

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 10.00 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 Pearce, Werriwa, Leichhardt, Fowler, Throsby, Barker, Shortland and Blair. These matters will be considered in the Main Committee later today.

PETITIONS

Mr MURPHY—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Petitions, and in accordance with standing order 207, I present the following petitions:

Australian Software Industry

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of Australian software industry members draws to the attention of the House the harm to society of patents that restrict computation and information processing.

Such patents actively inhibit, rather than promote innovation. For small to medium-sized software developers, it is neither viable to search patents, nor defend against patent lawsuits. The government's 2009 Venturous Australia report found that "in new areas of Patenting such as software and business methods, there is strong evidence that existing [patent] arrangements are hampering innovation."

The Australian software industry has a long history of innovating without software patents. This shows that patents are not necessary for innovation. Examples include:

- VET (antivirus, 1989)
- Trumpet Winsock (internet connection, 1993)

- rsync (data synchronisation, 1996)
- netfilter/iptables (firewall, 1998)

Further, due to the rapid evolution of software techniques and the context in which they are used, withholding a technique for 20 years renders it effectively useless to society.

In 2008, the "Advisory Council on Intellectual Property" held a public consultation during their Review of Patentable Subject Matter. Microsoft Corporation was the only respondent regarding software. The Australian software industry cannot, therefore, be well-represented in the Review's findings. We were unaware of the public consultation, so could not make a submission.

We therefore ask the House to introduce and pass legislation to exclude computation and information processing activities from patentable subject matter.

by **Mr Murphy** (from 708 citizens)

Marriage

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of two citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House:

- that we, two men, are married to each other, have been so for twenty-four years and will remain so forever
- Government refuses to register our marriage; that does not alter the fact of it
- homosexuality is a perfectly natural and healthy part of humanity; a fundamental and unalterable part of us;
- Government regards marriage, exclusively, as the traditional union between one man and one woman;
- traditionally, homosexual love has been persecuted, criminalised in Australia until at least 1997; it is unsurprising homosexuals were denied inclusion in marriage. That does not make it right.
- we honour marriage; to imply we are a threat to it, other families or children, is groundless
- our Christian beliefs celebrate our marriage; Australia has no official religion; the reli-

gious beliefs of one group oughtn't to be imposed on all by the law

- at the UN, Australia has recently been asked to cease this discrimination and respect our fundamental rights
- denying our marriage is a denial of our very humanity; it causes real disadvantage; it society it encourages continued homophobic bullying; it harms young people; it would demean and diminish Australia if it continued

We therefore ask the House to:

allow equal access to marriage for all couples (without forcing any persons or religious group to perform any marriage against their beliefs)

by **Mr Murphy** (from 2 citizens)

Animal Rights: Humane Slaughtering

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of undersigned citizens of Australia calls on the Minister for Agriculture to install CCTV cameras in all slaughterhouses, factory farms and dairy farms in Australia to make sure all animals are slaughtered humanely and to prevent the abuse these animals suffer every day.

by **Mr Murphy** (from 273 citizens)

Animal Rights: Humane Slaughtering

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of undersigned citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to call on the Minister for Agriculture to install CCTV cameras in all slaughterhouses, factory farms and dairy farms in Australia to make sure all animals are slaughtered humanely and to prevent the abuse these animals suffer every day, as there are currently no CCTV cameras monitoring activities in slaughterhouses, factory farms and dairy farms.

by **Mr Murphy** (from 713 citizens)

Bedourie Postcode

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition signed by the friends of Bedourie, a town in the Diamantina Shire Council in the

Channel Country region in south west Queensland....

Draws to the attention of the House that currently the town of Bedourie shares the same post code as the town of Boulia which is located 200 kilometres north and is in the Boulia Shire Council boundary. Bedourie is in the Diamantina Shire Council boundary which covers an area of 95,000 square kilometres and is the second largest Shire within Queensland. The Shires' Administration Centre is located in Bedourie and employs 70 of the 140 local residents. The Diamantina Shire communities are experiencing sustainable growth and due to this population increase the number of residential houses has increased by 18.5% over the past two years. Bedourie also forms a major part of the outback history dating back to the 1880s and receives over 120,000 visitors to the area each year. Bedourie is also home to the famous Bedourie Campoven.

We therefore ask the House to call on Australia Post under the Australian Postal Corporation Act 1989 to allocate the town of Bedourie with a unique post code of its own in order for the town to secure its own identity and be recognised as an historic and growing community within Queensland and Australia. We also call upon the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy to support the town of Bedourie in its request for a postcode.

by **Mr Murphy** (from 1,432 citizens)

Petitions received.

Responses

National Retail Award and School Students

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 24 November 2010 concerning a petition lodged in the House of Representatives around the time of the 2010 Federal Election. The petition (number 314/566) relates to award modernisation and the ability of school students to work less than three hours at the Terang Home Timber and Hardware Store under the General Retail Industry Award 2010. I apologise for the delay in responding.

In determining appropriate minimum engagement periods for employees under modern awards, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission con-

sidered the full range of prevailing standards in existing awards and instruments and also took into account the advice submitted by a wide range of employer, employee and industry stakeholders. In the case of the retail award, having considered these factors, the Commission settled on a three hour minimum engagement period for casual and part-time employees. This reflected the standard occurring in a majority of retail awards operating around Australia.

The Australian Government supports the Commission's decision to continue including minimum engagement periods in modern awards. While the Government recognises the importance of casual and part-time work opportunities for young people undertaking study, it is also committed to ensuring that employees are protected from unfair employment policies. Minimum shift provisions operate to ensure that employees are not forced to work very short shifts that might not even cover the cost of getting to and from work.

Fair Work Australia (FWA), the new independent tribunal, can vary a modern award where this is necessary to achieve the modern awards objective of a fair and flexible safety net. On this basis, several employer groups applied to FWA to reduce the minimum engagement period for all casual workers covered by the modern retail award, not just student casuals. On 9 July 2010, FWA decided not to vary the minimum engagement period.

The National Retail Association (NRA) and Master Grocers Association appealed this decision. On 8 October 2010, the decision was upheld, however, FWA noted in the appeal decision that there would be nothing limiting an interested party applying to vary the award with respect to the engagement of student casuals only. The NRA has subsequently applied to vary the modern retail award to enable secondary school students to agree to reduce the minimum engagement period. This application is scheduled to be heard in early 2011.

I trust the information provided is helpful.

from the **Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, Senator Chris Evans**

Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 22 November 2010, informing me of the petition recently submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions, urging the House of Representatives to reject any recommendation to cut the water supply to the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area.

I regret the delay in responding.

I am aware that there is concern about the potential impacts of water reductions flagged in the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's (the Authority) Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan. However, the Australian Government is committed to delivering a healthy river system, strong regional communities and sustainable food production, and the way water has been managed in the Murray-Darling Basin will not support these outcomes in the long run.

The Government has committed to bridge any remaining gap between the amount of water that has already been recovered for the environment and what is required for the environment according to the Final Basin Plan. We will only purchase water from people who choose to participate in the Government's programs. We will not obtain water through compulsory acquisition.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia is conducting a Parliamentary Inquiry, chaired by Mr Tony Windsor MP, into the impact of the proposed Basin Plan on communities as a whole. This inquiry will consider all of the issues not just environmental — and allow communities to provide their views directly to Parliament.

I would encourage the petitioners to get involved in the Authority's planning process where they can most directly influence the approach the Authority takes on their issues of concern.

from the **Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Mr Tony Burke**

Medicare: Bone Densitometry

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 22 November 2010 concerning a petition regarding bone densitome-

try testing. In accordance with Standing Order 209 (b) my written response is as follows.

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that all Australians have access to appropriate and effective medical services.

Currently, Medicare benefits are payable for:

- the diagnosis and monitoring of bone loss if a patient has certain specific medical conditions or is undergoing particular treatments likely to cause rapid bone loss;
- the confirmation of clinically suspected low bone mineral density, usually following a fracture;
- the monitoring of established low bone mineral density; and
- those patients over the age of 70 years.

In order to ensure that items on the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) remain current and reflect best clinical practice, the Department of Health and Ageing, in consultation with the appropriate medical specialists, does review items from time to time as new evidence comes to light.

In 1995, following a review of bone densitometry, public funding was provided for:

- the confirmation of presumptive diagnosis of low bone mineral density;
- the diagnosis and monitoring of bone loss associated with specified conditions; and
- the measurement of bone density 12 months following a significant change in therapy for established low bone mineral density.

It was not supported as a screening service.

In 2007, eligibility of an osteoporosis medication on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme was extended to treat patients over the age of 70 with low bone mineral density without fracture. To coincide with this expanded eligibility for this medication, a new item for testing the bone density of those patients over the age of 70 was added to the MBS.

For Medicare purposes, all bone density testing is subject to a restriction on the time interval between tests, ranging from one every 12 to 24 months, depending on the circumstances. This is because bone density loss is considered a relatively slow process and repeat testing within 24

months is unlikely to assist in clinical decision making. For those specific medical conditions or particular treatments that may cause more rapid bone loss, a rebate is available for repeat testing at 12 monthly intervals.

It is the Government's aim that services listed in the MBS, including bone densitometry, should reflect and encourage appropriate medical practice based on the best available evidence.

A mechanism currently exists for medical organisations or companies to apply to the Australian Government for listing of and review of tests on the MBS. This is through the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) which provides advice to the Minister for Health and Ageing on the strength of the evidence relating to the safety, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of new medical procedures and technologies, and under what circumstances public funding should be supported. The work of the Committee also ensures that Australians have access to safe, effective medical services that represent value for money to them both as patients and taxpayers.

New tests or extension of the indications for existing tests are assessed by expert committees (composed of consumer representatives, health economists, health administrators, clinical experts in pathology, surgery, specialist medicine and general practice as well as health technology assessment professionals), and Medicare rebates are provided for those tests that are proven to be safe, effective, and cost-effective.

Should more evidence become available an application can be made to MSAC to review the current bone densitometry items and the options for extending them to include other clinical indicators and age groups. Information on the application process and the contact details for MSAC can be obtained on the website at www.msac.gov.au

As you may be aware, Australia does not currently have a population based screening program for osteoporosis. In determining whether there is sufficient evidence to establish an organised screening program, the Australian Government has developed a Population Based Screening Framework. A copy of the Framework is available at www.cancerscreening.gov.au

The Screening Subcommittee of the Australian Population Health Development Principal Committee provides guidance to decision makers when assessing potential screening programs in Australia.

At its 6 July 2010 meeting, the Screening Subcommittee considered a proposal for the prevention of osteoporosis in women. The Screening Subcommittee agreed that the proposal has merit, however, it identified some significant gaps when considering the proposal against the specific criteria of the Population Based Screening Framework.

Consequently, the Screening Subcommittee determined that the proposal did not meet the requirements for a population based screening program.

Thank you for taking the time to raise your concerns. I trust that the above information is of assistance.

from the **Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon**

Step to the Future Program

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 26 November 2010 in regards to a petition supporting Step to the Future Foundation's (STTF) Youth Forums. I apologise for the delay in responding.

I appreciate the concerns raised by the petitioners in regards to STTF Youth Forums. The Australian Government is committed to helping young people successfully manage their transition from school to further education or work and is working with the states and territories to provide young people with equitable access to programs that help them reach their full potential.

In July 2009, the Australian, state and territory governments signed up to the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions (the National Partnership). The National Partnership focuses on:

- lifting the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate to 90 per cent by 2015;
- at least halving the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and

- supporting the Compact with Young Australians.

Under the National Partnership, the Government is providing funding of \$623 million over four years for programs that support youth at risk, encourage community based partnerships and provide funding to the states and territories for agreed reform areas. These agreed areas can include mentoring, giving jurisdictions greater flexibility to allocate resources to areas that will produce the best outcomes for young people.

Further information on the National Partnership is available from the Department's website at www.youth.gov.au/transitions.

In Victoria, the state government is using part of this funding to support mentoring activities through the funding of community agencies, many of which deliver programs that support young people in school. On a local level, the Victorian Government has proposed four complementary initiatives within the Improving Career Development Services suite to be funded under the National Partnership.

The four initiatives are:

- development of a careers curriculum;
- professional development for career practitioners;
- careers mentoring network initiative; and
- regional career development coaches.

In September 2008, following an external evaluation of the STTF Youth Forums, DEEWR, FaHCSIA and Defence funding was withdrawn from STTF and DEEWR's contribution was redirected to the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions.

In my response to the Mr Darren Chester MP, Member for Gippsland, I noted that the petitioners may be interested in the Prime Minister's Australian Youth Forum Challenge (PM's AYF Challenge). The AYF Challenge was initiated to provide young people with the opportunity to implement innovative ideas on engaging with other young people in their community, empowering them to be active change makers in their communities. Funding has been provided to assist in making some of these ideas become a reality

while encouraging other young people to become active in community life.

Information on future funding rounds will be promoted on the Australian Youth Forum website www.youth.gov.au/ayf.

In the broader mentoring field, the Government has allocated funds of \$660 000 from the National Career Development component of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions to the Australian Youth Mentoring Network (AYMN).

The AYMN is a not-for-profit peak body organisation that fosters best practice in youth mentoring activities through development and promotion of national benchmarks, mentoring resources, research, training, conferences and other community forums. The AYMN also supports Partnership Brokers and Youth Connections providers who, under the National Partnership, incorporate mentoring as part of their services.

AYMN's website, www.youthmentoring.org.au, lists registered mentoring programs by state location. Under the auspices of the Baw Baw- La Trobe Local Learning and Employment Network, the Gippsland Mentoring Alliance provides support to the community-based mentoring projects in the Traralgon area.

Under the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions, the Government is demonstrating its firm commitment to providing leadership and support for youth, careers and transition programs. The substantial investment in the National Partnership's coordinated approach means that it is no longer in a position to fund individual projects such as the Step To The Future Youth Forums.

Thank you for bringing this petition and the petitioners' concerns to my attention.

from the **Minister for School Education,
Early Childhood and Youth, Mr Garrett**

Menindee Lakes

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 26 November 2010 concerning the submission of a petition regarding Menindee Lakes. I regret the delay in responding.

The Menindee Lakes project originates from a 2007 election commitment to work with

New South Wales (NSW) to examine options to reduce reliance of Broken Hill on Menindee Lakes for its water supply, provide up to 200 gigalitres (GL) of water for the environment, and reduce wasteful evaporative losses from the Lakes.

The Menindee Lakes scheme, built in the 1950's and 60's, is located in a hot, dry and windy environment. Current management arrangements for these broad and shallow lakes result in large evaporative losses averaging around 420GL per year; this is roughly equivalent to two years of water supply for Adelaide, so it is an important issue at a Basin scale as well as locally. Technical assessments have indicated that changing the management of Menindee Lakes to reduce these evaporative losses and improve environmental outcomes is possible, if Broken Hill's water supply can be made less dependent on the Lakes.

The Australian and NSW governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the cooperative investigation and subsequent implementation of key water reform initiatives in New South Wales, including Broken Hill's urban water supply and Menindee Lakes operational arrangements (the MoU) in July 2010.

Under the MoU investigative work is being undertaken to identify options for infrastructure and operational changes that can improve the operation of the Lakes. This work includes assessment of a newly identified aquifer close to Menindee to reduce the reliance of Broken Hill's water supply on the Lakes. I am advised that sourcing water supply from aquifers is common for dry cities around the world, with Perth currently using aquifer storage to supply more than half of its drinking water and around 30 per cent of Australian fresh water supplies currently sourced from groundwater. It is therefore not a new or untested technology.

The Australian and NSW governments are committed to working with stakeholders to achieve the best outcomes at Menindee Lakes. Initial consultation has taken place and a broader community consultation process will be undertaken as definitive information becomes publicly available and as options are considered. Stakeholders include the Broken Hill community, irrigators, In-

digenous groups, local government and the Menindee community.

In addition, you may be aware that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan provides scope for the MDBA to 'accredit' engineering works and measures for their ability to achieve environmental objectives using less water. This means that any strategic engineering works and measures undertaken at Menindee Lakes may lead to an increase in the Sustainable Diversion Limits identified in the Basin Plan.

Finally, I wish to draw your attention to the requirement that any development that could have a significant impact on our environment would need to obtain approval under all relevant state and federal legislation.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

from the **Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Mr Tony Burke**

Mentelle Basin

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 26 November 2010 to the Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population, and Communities regarding a petition on oil and gas exploration in the Mentelle Basin, offshore Western Australia, which has been referred to me as the Minister responsible for this issue.

I note the concerns raised in the petition and make the following comments.

The discovery of new petroleum reserves has the potential to reduce Australian energy import dependence and increase supply certainty for the domestic energy market. However, the Government recognises the importance of balancing economic development and preserving the offshore environment.

Prior to inclusion in the release, the area in the Mentelle Basin was subject to a rigorous assessment process. This took into account the multi-use nature of the areas and the potential impact of exploration on the marine environment. This included consultation with state and Australian government agencies whose stakeholders may have an interest, including the former Australian

Government Department of Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts (now the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population, and Communities).

Concerns raised during the consultation process were taken into account by the Government in finalising areas for inclusion in the release. Details on issues specific to areas, such as marine animal migratory routes, that potential explorers need to take into account when assessing and determining how to explore an area, have been included in the release's information package.

Further, additional conditions to protect the environment may be placed on a petroleum exploration title at the time it is granted where this process identified relevant issues of environmental significance. All titleholders are required to conduct their activities in a manner that meets permit requirements.

This is in addition to the stringent environmental standards and reporting requirements set out in the legislation and associated regulations to which all petroleum exploration and development activities in Australian are subject.

No petroleum activity can occur in Commonwealth waters unless the activity complies with all relevant Government legislation and regulations. The Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006 (OPGGSA) provides the Regulator with the necessary powers to undertake inspections and audits of all operations to ensure and enforce compliance with good industry practice, approval conditions and other requirements.

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999 (EPBC Act) regulates the assessment and approval of proposed actions that are likely to have a significant impact on a matter of National Environmental Significance and requires approval by the Minister for the Environment.

The OPGGSA's Environment Regulations and the EPBC Act are very clear that a comprehensive assessment of all significant impacts on the environment must be completed before any exploration well is drilled or before any seismic line is run.

To date these systems have proven very effective, with the offshore petroleum industry operating safely and successfully in some of Western Aus-

tralia's most precious marine and coastal environments including Rottnest Island, Barrow Island and areas adjacent to Ningaloo Reef

That being said, the timeline from the inclusion of an area in an Acreage Release through to actual granting of a permit and exploration being undertaken extends over many years. In light of recent events, I am reviewing Australia's petroleum regulations and industry practice to ensure that our regulatory system is world's best practice and that we have competent and professional operators in the industry. If this review identifies additional measures that should be taken, I will move quickly to address any deficiencies in the Australian system.

If thought appropriate I can arrange for my Department to brief the Committee on the processes involved in acreage release and in approving subsequent exploration activities.

Thank you for bringing the concerns raised in the Petition to my attention. I trust this information has been of assistance to you.

from the **Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism, Mr Martin Ferguson**

Statements

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (10.03 am)—I would like to take this opportunity today to speak about several matters relating to petitioning, including the form and content of petitions and the role of technology.

Firstly, I would like to briefly talk about the form and content of petitions. While petitioning may be a longstanding tradition in our parliament, the rules governing petitions have changed more often over the years than one might think.

The most recent major changes, which include the creation of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, also removed the requirement for all petitioners, other than a principal petitioner, to provide an address. Before this, all people who signed a petition were required to provide their address. The rationale behind the earlier

requirement was to verify that the individual signing the petition was indeed genuine. However, in recent years there have been increased concerns about protecting the privacy of petitioners.

Also, evidence provided to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure for its 2007 report *Making a difference: petitioning the House of Representatives* suggested that the requirement for petitioners to provide their address was a disincentive to petitioning.

This report led to a number of changes in the standing orders governing petitioning, making petitioning a more vibrant and active way for the public to interact with the House and also increasing the responsibility of ministers to respond to the issues raised in petitions.

Nevertheless, many people continue to draft petitions in the older, traditional format. While this inclusion does not render any petition out of order—and the signature pages are not published online—I would like to make the point that it is not necessary. I also note that petitions, once presented in the House, are included in the *Votes and Proceedings*, and the originals are therefore available to be viewed.

As I noted earlier, petitioning in the House of Representatives has changed significantly in the last few years, and some long-held rules have been altered to take into account the changing times.

One of the reasons for this is the changing role of technology in all our lives. Computing and the internet have changed the way that we undertake even the most basic of tasks, and that too is starting to change the way petitions are being organised by the public.

We are seeing an increasing use of email to distribute petitions by principal petitioners under the current arrangements of the House.

From this point, the signed, hard-copy petitions are sent back to a central point for collation or sent straight to the House of Representatives. At this stage, petitions must still be signed and they must be original hard copies if they are to be considered by the Petitions Committee for presentation to the House.

Potential petitioners interact frequently with the Petitions Committee secretariat through email, often asking for information on the requirements of the House and sending draft petitions to get some feedback. This is a very practical step for petitioners to take before they go to the trouble of collecting signatures. It helps them to prepare petitions that are likely to be found to be in order, thus enabling their concerns to be heard by the House and referred to ministers for a written response.

The Petitions Committee's webpage on the Parliament House website has information about contact numbers for the secretariat and how to prepare petitions. The secretariat cannot compose petitions and it does not decide whether they are in order or not, but it can provide information to help petitioners ensure their likely compliance with the House's standing orders.

Technology also has a role to play in publicising the concerns that are raised in petitions. After a petition has been found in order by the committee and presented to the House, its terms are published in *Hansard* and placed on the committee's website for public perusal. If a ministerial response is requested and received—and this happens in most cases—the text of the minister's response is placed alongside the terms of the petition on the committee's website, as well as being notified to the principal petitioner.

I note in passing the great increase in the number of ministerial responses to petitions since the establishment of the Petitions

Committee in 2008. For example, from 1997 to 2007 the number of ministerial responses each year was either none or one. In 2008, 56 responses were received; in 2009, the figure was 94; and, in 2010, 53 responses were received—that is, about 77 per cent of petitions received a ministerial response.

Making information on petitions and responses available online enables non-principal petitioners and other interested individuals to follow the progress of petitions and to read the ministerial responses, informing the community generally and reducing the need for principal petitioners in particular to try to pass on the response to a possibly disparate group of fellow signatories.

The next natural step in the evolution of electronic communication and petitioning is likely to be the introduction of electronic petitioning, if the House follows the example of a range of other parliaments. Several jurisdictions overseas and Australian state parliaments—Queensland and Tasmania—have introduced electronic petitioning. While the systems they use to process the petitions may vary, they all seek to simplify and modernise the petitioning process to improve access to parliament for the people.

While electronic petitioning may have seemed a radical concept several years ago when introduced and promoted by the Scottish parliament, the processes that have been established in Queensland and Tasmania show that an electronic petitioning system can operate effectively alongside the more traditional system of hard-copy petitions in a parliament such as ours.

We look forward to the next stage in the process of petitioning and to finding new ways of engaging Australians in the work of the House.

COMMITTEES
Economics Committee
Report

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (10.10 am)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, I present the committee's report entitled *Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia annual report 2010 (first report)*, together with the minutes of proceedings.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON—Over the last several years the Australian economy has, by any reasonable standards, been an outstanding performer. While many leading economies across the world continue to suffer from the effects of the global financial crisis, Australia has experienced steady growth throughout its economy as a whole, with significant gains in key sectors, such as the export orientated mining industry. The committee's hearing confirmed the wisdom of the economic reforms that Australia has undertaken over the last generation—reforms that have provided us with a legacy of hard-won economic resilience.

The forecasts for Australian growth and stability provided by the Reserve Bank of Australia in late 2010 were positive. At the time of the hearing, Australian consumer price inflation was about 2½ per cent in underlying terms and about 2¾ per cent in headline terms and the bank forecast was for the economy to grow by 3½ per cent on an annual basis from the December quarter 2010, rising to a possible high of four per cent by the end of 2011.

This forecast, of course, preceded the cataclysmic flooding that swept across the eastern states of Australia, especially Queensland, and shall most likely be revised subject to a systematic reconsideration of the latest developments. Exactly to what extent in the longer term the flooding will impact

on the forecast is unknown. The rebuilding of flood affected regions across Australia is going to be an immense national challenge. It is estimated that \$5.6 billion is needed to rebuild flood affected regions across Australia. This will help communities to recover and get back on their feet. Budget spending cuts and reprioritisation will deliver two-thirds of the \$5.6 billion needed to rebuild flood affected regions. The rest, as we know, will be provided by a modest one-year temporary levy.

Yet, regardless of what revised form the updated forecast ultimately takes, the November hearing offered us a valuable insight into the Australian national economy before the floods. Largely due to our favourable terms of trade—made possible by the urbanisation of China and India, with its resultant pressure on the price for minerals and fuel—Australia was rapidly closing the gap between actual and potential output. The principal drivers for economic growth were increases in private investment, robust income growth and a strong labour market. In the view of the RBA, the great challenge ahead was to raise productivity and expand the supply side of the economy. While inflation was lower than expected, the bank board expected that the prospect of further increases in the cash rate was sufficiently serious to justify their decision to raise interest rates in early November.

There was a rigorous investigation of this position by members of the committee, particularly in light of recent bank profits. The RBA continues to aim to keep inflation within the two to three per cent target range but without crushing the real economy in the process. Inflationary pressures that can be expected include the 10 per cent growth rate in China, the ebb and flow of the European economies and the fact that the US was not falling into another recession.

Other important factors that will have a bearing on a continued strong Australian economy include the fact that wages remaining steady—the pick-up in wage growth was no faster than was to be expected. The RBA governor's view is that we should not grow the economy too quickly over an extended period; otherwise there is the potential for 'getting into trouble'. The RBA governor made positive comments about the fiscal stimulus winding down, saying there were good signs that handing over of public spending to private spending was positive, with substantial increases in business investment. Of course, the government is doing a great deal in relation to improving competition in banking, including the banning of exit fees—which is being opposed by the opposition—boosting consumer flexibility to transfer deposits and mortgages, introducing a mandatory key fact sheet for new home loan customers and empowering the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to launch more prosecutions in this area.

Australia continues to enjoy economic conditions that would be a welcome relief to almost all other industrialised countries. Inflation remains within the targeted range and unemployment remains relatively low in historic terms. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia, Mr Glenn Stevens, and other representatives of the RBA for appearing at the hearing on 26 November 2010. I would like to put on record my thanks to the secretariat for the fine work they have done in helping produce this report.

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (10.15 am)—I rise on behalf of coalition members of the Standing Committee on Economics in support of this report, which was put forward with the support of both sides of this chamber. At the outset I would like to thank the hardworking, diligent economics committee

secretariat for the good work that they did with respect to the presenting of this report and supporting the members of the committee over the entire period, including preparation of documents and the arrangement of an economist to brief the committee prior to and post the Reserve Bank's presentation. I would also like to thank the Reserve Bank governor and other members of the Reserve Bank for their testimony and for their full and frank discussion with members of the committee.

In terms of looking at monetary and fiscal policy settings in this country, it was an important part of the committee's work to have a frank discussion with the governor. It is part of the accountability mechanism that the committee has with the Reserve Bank to ensure that monetary policy settings in this country are appropriate in the views of the parliament, bearing in mind of course that the Reserve Bank is independent. We touched on a large number of areas in our discussions with the Reserve Bank. I must say that there were a number of issues raised which sparked concern for me and other members of the committee. There was also the opportunity to explore more fully the impact of some of the government's policy settings on monetary policy.

There is no doubt, as the chair of the committee has outlined, that Australia has enjoyed a relatively benign economic environment over the past several years. That is not to understate in any way, shape or form the fact that unemployment has gone up, the fact that a large number of Australians are doing it very tough and the fact that for many there has been a great deal of economic uncertainty. Notwithstanding that, Australia has weathered the GFC much better than many other countries. The important question, though, was: 'Why?' This was a point that was put to the Reserve Bank governor. We know that the Treasurer and government

members opposite claim it was all their brilliant economic stewardship but I suspect, as the report outlines and indeed as the chair of the committee touched upon, there is a lot more that has driven this than the recent policy settings of the government. Of course the fiscal reforms that have taken place over many years under both guises have been a key part of this, but the role of the Reserve Bank in setting monetary policy limits at an appropriate level has also been key.

I questioned the Reserve Bank governor on this point, and he made what I thought was a fairly interesting comment with respect to the relationship between fiscal stimulus—which of course was the centrepiece of the government’s response to the GFC—and monetary policy settings. Paragraph 2.30 of the report states:

When pressed on what would have happened with the cash rate had there been less fiscal stimulus, the Governor stated that it would have been lower, but qualified that observation by noting that it would not necessarily follow that this ‘would...be a better mix of policies’.

The important point I felt as a member of the opposition was the unqualified statement the Reserve Bank governor made that there would have been a lower set of interest rates, a lower monetary policy setting, had the government not borrowed tens of billions of dollars and pumped it into the Australian economy. So we know in part that there is now some economic price to be paid as a result of this massive stimulus that we saw from the government.

In addition, there was a chance for me to question the Reserve Bank governor about labour market flexibility, and again the chairman of the committee touched upon this. I note with respect that when it comes to labour market flexibility some concerns were raised. In fact, to quote the governor, paragraph 2.25 of the report states:

As to the regulatory changes,—

those are in fact the industrial relations changes—

it is an important question to what extent these changes may have flexibility. It is very hard for me to tell. Many people that we encounter from a business background are quite concerned. It is not uncommon, of course, that when there has been a change for there to be uncertainty about how the new system will work. In some respects, I guess, one would have to say it is as much in the implementation and administration of it as in what the legal provisions themselves say.

In other words, we need to watch in great detail what happens to wage price inflation. I commend the report to the House.

The SPEAKER—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. Does the member for Dobell wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (10.20 am)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

The SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 39(d), the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

Economics Committee

Report: Referral to Main Committee

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (10.20 am)—I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Main Committee for debate.

Question agreed to.

Corporations and Financial Services Committee

Reports

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (10.20 am)—On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services, I present the following reports of the commit-

tee together with evidence received by the committee: *Statutory oversight of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission*, February 2011; and *Report on the 2009-10 annual reports of bodies established under the ASIC Act*, February 2011.

Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

Mr RIPOLL—I am pleased to speak to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services reports *Statutory oversight of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission*, February 2011; and *Report on the 2009-10 annual reports of bodies established under the ASIC Act*.

At the outset I would like to thank the members of the committee for their continued hard work and efforts in overseeing ASIC, the regulatory body, and also in the number of inquiries that we have from time to time. I also thank the secretariat for their hard work and everything they do to make possible the work of the committee members themselves. I wanted to place that on the record.

Section 243 the ASIC Act directs the committee to inquire into and report on ASIC's activities and matters relating to those activities to which parliament's attention should be directed. On 1 August 2010, responsibility for supervision of real-time trading on Australia's domestic licence market was transferred to ASIC from the Australian Stock Exchange. ASIC has also been given responsibility for licensing and monitoring consumer credit providers, received additional consumer protection powers and, from April this year, will be responsible for the national business names register as well.

The transfer of these responsibilities has occurred relatively smoothly. While it will take another six to 12 months for the benefits to be fully assessed, ASIC can report im-

provements in monitoring broker conduct. The time from problem identification to formal investigation has also decreased. The committee will continue to monitor these functions and review their impact on ASIC's overall performance and resources. The committee has previously reported to the House that it was closely monitoring the progress of ASIC's investigation into the collapse of Storm Financial as well as a number of other investigations.

On 22 December 2010, ASIC announced that it would commence proceedings in the Federal Court of Australia against Storm Financial and other financial service providers, including the Bank of Queensland, the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and Macquarie Bank. The committee is pleased that decisions are being taken. It remains concerned for investors who face the loss of their savings and in some cases their homes because of investments about which they may not have received adequate information and advice.

The report on annual reports has been prepared in accordance with section 243 of the ASIC Act. The report examines the annual reports of the following bodies established under that act: the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board, the Australian Accounting Standards Board, the Companies Auditors and Liquidators Disciplinary Board, the Corporations and Markets Advisory Committee, the Financial Reporting Panel, the Financial Reporting Council and the Takeovers Panel.

The committee was generally satisfied with these reports. It has made some comments on matters concerning the Companies Auditors and Liquidators Disciplinary Board and, in particular, the Financial Reporting Panel, to which I might direct my final remarks. The committee notes the referral of four matters to the Financial Reporting Panel

in August 2010. This represents a big change. Prior to August 2010, the panel had not made a determination on a single referral of a dispute between ASIC and companies. The committee also notes that, having been referred in August 2010, the matters were resolved by October that same year. The committee has asked ASIC about the low number of past referrals and will be discussing this issue at its next oversight hearing. The committee holds its next hearing with ASIC on 11 March and will continue to pursue a number of the issues discussed in these reports and raised in the House today.

I again thank the secretariat and the committee members for their continued hard work and diligence in these areas.

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (10.25 am)—I am pleased to speak to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services report on the statutory oversight of ASIC and the report on the 2009-10 annual reports of bodies established under the ASIC Act. As the chair, the member for Oxley, has noted, this committee reports to parliament from time to time on ASIC's activities, and the committee's report considers a number of these, including the expansion of ASIC's responsibilities, its response to the Storm Financial issue, issues arising from the global financial crisis, ASIC's complaints-handling system and ASIC's financial literacy programs.

I highlight a couple of these themes. The committee explored with ASIC issues arising from the global financial crisis. These issues included the feasibility of a unique client identification system for the Australian market, the freezing of investor funds in late 2008 and regulatory reform. ASIC advised the committee that the United States has estimated the cost of implementing a unique client identification system in that country at US\$4 billion upfront, with annual ongoing

costs in excess of US\$2.1 billion. As a result of these estimates, ASIC wishes to conduct further analysis and discussion in order to determine the feasibility of such a system. The committee notes ASIC's advice that the Australian markets are operating well.

ASIC advised that, of the 93 frozen funds, 20 are now unfrozen while 32 remain frozen but offer periodic withdrawals. Applications can be made to access money from any of the funds if an investor faces financial hardship. ASIC advised that \$155 million has been paid in hardship relief, with over 4,700 of the nearly 6½ thousand hardship applications approved.

The committee has previously informed the House that it maintains an ongoing interest in ASIC's capacity to receive and resolve complaints. ASIC has advised that it receives between 13,000 and 15,000 complaints a year. Since commencing its role in monitoring consumer credit providers, ASIC has received 999 credit complaints from both consumers and industry. The committee notes with approval ASIC's commitment to continuously improve its complaints handling process and to use information gained through the process to improve other areas of responsibility and service delivery.

The committee also sought ASIC's advice about the effectiveness of ASIC's financial literacy programs. ASIC advised that the programs are regularly reviewed in order to determine their effectiveness. The committee is particularly interested in what populations need attention when targeting financial literacy programs, and the committee will continue to raise this issue with ASIC.

The chair has already touched on the report on annual reports in respect of the Financial Reporting Panel, so I mention in particular the Companies Auditors and Liquidators Disciplinary Board. The committee has expressed concern about the low numbers of

applications made to the board. It is aware that some stakeholders in the sector have a view that disciplinary processes are not working as effectively as they should. The committee also notes concerns about the confidentiality of the board's hearings reported in the inquiry of the Senate Economics Legislation Committee into liquidators and administrators. The committee does intend to revisit these matters once the government has formally responded to the report of the Senate Economics Legislation Committee.

I join the chair in thanking the secretariat for their assistance and hard work and the ASIC officials for their ongoing cooperation with the committee on behalf of this parliament.

Migration Committee Statement

Ms VAMVAKINO (Calwell) (10.30 am)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration I wish to make a statement concerning the committee's inquiry into multiculturalism in Australia.

I am very pleased to inform the House that the Joint Standing Committee on Migration has launched a broad-ranging inquiry into multiculturalism in Australia. Before speaking about the inquiry I want to welcome the government's response to recommendations by the Australian Multicultural Advisory Committee, chaired by Mr Andrew Demetriou. On 16 February the government announced its intention to create a new independent advisory body, the Australian Multicultural Council, to succeed the current advisory committee. A new anti-racism strategy is to be developed in partnership with key organisations like the Australian Human Rights Commission. In addition, I want to welcome the government's renaming of the position of the parliamentary secretaryship held by Senator Kate Lundy, who will now

be known as the Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. These are all very positive developments and, as Chair of the Migration Committee, I welcome them.

I also want to acknowledge the cultural and linguistic diversity of Indigenous Australians as we go forward in this inquiry. Indigenous Australians have a history of settlement on this continent that stretches back thousands of years. It is a simple truth that we are a migrant society. Cultural and linguistic diversity has been a feature of Australian society since the earliest days of colonisation. It is popular to talk as though Australia's ethnic diversity is a product of post World War II migration only. But, as any student of Australian history knows, some of the earliest settlers to arrive on Australian shores were in fact the Chinese, the Afghans and the Malay, especially in the north of the continent. And the British did not discriminate about who they transported to these shores! Among the First Fleet convicts were not only the English, Irish and Scots but also prisoners from different parts of the Empire.

I do not want to underplay the enormous impact of the White Australia policy, but that era is long gone and should remain dead and buried. Last week in this place both the government and the opposition reaffirmed their commitment to multiculturalism and a non-discriminatory migration program. It is time to move forward together and ensure the benefits and success of Australian multiculturalism is the main story in this place.

This inquiry is an opportunity for the committee to stay in touch with the challenges migrant communities face. It has broad terms of reference to look at practical measures that enable migrants, including refugees, to settle, integrate and participate as full members of Australian society. It will canvass the contribution that migration

makes to Australia and make recommendations to maximise the positive effects of migration. Some of the key issues that we will be exploring are the role of multiculturalism in the government's social inclusion agenda; the adequacy of settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees; and incentives to promote settlement in regional Australia as well as our major cities. The committee will also look at the skilled migration program and ways to better utilise the skills of all migrants already in Australia. It will also consider initiatives to assist migrants establish small businesses.

Some have asked, and continue to ask: why conduct an inquiry when the government has just announced its commitment to multiculturalism? The answer to this is simple: patterns of migration and trends within communities are not static. New and different communities arrive, economic and social conditions change and government programs must therefore be reviewed to ensure relevance, value for money and effectiveness. The range of issues that the committee will explore is very broad. For example, as our population ages, how should we respond to the needs of elderly migrants, especially those who need residential or nursing home care? We have a skills shortage and an extensive skilled migration program, but are we doing enough to recognise the skills of migrants already here and to provide them with opportunities to work? Housing is expensive. How are new migrants faring in the major cities, where the cost of living is high? And how can we encourage settlement in regional areas?

This inquiry will allow the parliament to hear directly from individuals, business and community organisations. It is an opportunity to hear about their experiences, listen to their ideas and produce fresh ideas that will maximise the benefits of migration for Australia as a whole. I ask every member of this

House and the Senate to promote the inquiry in their own electorate and I also ask members who have any further questions to ask the secretariat, myself or indeed the deputy chair, the member for Macquarie, who I note is in this place at this time.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (10.35 am)—I wish to join with the Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration, the member for Calwell, in making a statement with regard to the inquiry into the economic, social and cultural contribution of migration to Australian society. We are a nation of diversity that celebrates and values the contribution that each individual makes. We are a strong, resilient nation, built by the skills, energy and goodwill of generations of migrants, of Australian born citizens and of Indigenous communities working together. The measure of our maturity as a nation is that Australia remains a free and open society where people of all backgrounds, race and creed, are able to make a valuable contribution. We are a compassionate nation, with opportunities for all Australians.

The coalition have always supported, and will continue to support, a non-discriminatory migration and refugee policy. From Robert Menzies' time, through successive Liberal-National coalition governments, we have initiated and supported services for migrants and humanitarian refugees to help them build their lives and become part of this great nation—programs such as the Humanitarian Settlement Services; the Settlement Grants Program; the Adult Migrant English Program, where each person is able to access up to 510 hours of English lessons; the Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors program; and financial support for the National Translators Accreditation Authority. All of these programs contribute under outcome 5 and make up the excellent settlement services programs Australia currently provides. The coalition place great emphasis on employ-

ment as a way of lifting people towards a better life, and this strategy has been successful—but, of course, there is always room for improvement.

A Department of Immigration and Citizenship study shows that migrants entering through the skills stream are more likely to have higher work participation rates. The record also shows a remarkable success rate for participants in the New Enterprise Initiative Scheme, where incentives support entrepreneurial activities. It is important to foster and encourage that spirit of entrepreneurship to create employment opportunities for all. When we build on the talent and ingenuity of our new arrivals, we are a better nation for it.

At the same time, the coalition is mindful that people need to be supported at the beginning, during and after their journey to citizenship. Australia is a compassionate country and our record of accepting annually a significant number of humanitarian refugees per capita has been acknowledged as world class. Under a coalition government, humanitarian refugees are selected on need and eligibility for protection, in an organised and orderly way. Support is given through settlement programs that address the challenges of social isolation, language, education, discrimination and eventual employment.

Australia is great country and will become greater. It is important that we take heed of the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council's statement that 'Australia is an international role model when it comes to settling new migrants.' That is not to say we cannot do better, and this inquiry is an opportunity for us to identify ways where we can improve.

There are many contemporary issues that challenge us today and government has a responsibility to identify the issues and develop an appropriate response. We welcome

and value the input from the Australian community as this inquiry looks at issues such as social inclusion, the effectiveness of settlement programs, how to maximise the skills of migrants and what incentives can be developed to encourage small business development. Working together we can overcome the challenges.

Australia needs and wants migrants to come; to bring their skills, their families and their ambition for a better life. Our population of approximately 22.27 million people identifies with around 250 diverse ethnicities, and around 200 other languages are spoken. In the 2006 census, 45 per cent of the resident population were people who were born overseas or had a parent born overseas.

The Australian model of multiculturalism has served many purposes in the 30 years since its inception. It is both a concept of cultural diversity and a framework for a series of programs designed to support, serve and deliver nation building and social cohesion. It is built on a common set of values and a shared responsibility to abide by Australia's Constitution, its laws, freedom of speech and religion, language and equality.

I join with the chair in commending this inquiry to the House and I encourage all members to urge members from their community and ethnic leaders from all walks of life and backgrounds to submit submissions.

**Infrastructure and Communications
Committee
Statement**

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (10.40 am)—I wish to make a statement on the committee's inquiry into the role and potential of the National Broadband Network. I want to take the opportunity, with my deputy chairperson, the member for Hinkler, to bring the House up to date on the progress of the inquiry currently underway by the Infrastructure and Commu-

nications Committee into the role and potential utilisation of the National Broadband Network. This was a referral made to the committee on 6 November last year by Minister Albanese, with a target for a report by the middle of this year, which we are aiming to achieve by August of this year.

The important thing is that committee has been asked to look at a very broad range of areas in which the National Broadband Network can be utilised in order to provide new transformative ways of delivering services across a number of government areas, including health, education and local government. We have already had a few submissions from local councils and regional divisions of local councils joining together and giving evidence—these are up on the website—about the sorts of improvements in delivery of their own services that they are looking to utilise the National Broadband Network to deliver. Also, we will look at broader agenda items such as environmental sustainability and regional growth and development.

It would be fair to say that if you look at the submissions to date that are on the website you will see that there is an overriding tone to the submissions received so far about how soon the rollout can get to them as they have all sorts of proposals that they want to get underway. So we are very keen to get out and talk to those communities and have a look at what they are looking to do. It will also give them the opportunity to indicate to us where they may see problems or additions that are required in government policy to enable them to utilise those opportunities. So we are particularly appreciative of some of the more technical and specialist submissions that have been made to the committee about the development of products, services and applications that will be utilised on a fibre-to-the-home national broadband.

At this point in time there are about 47 submissions on the committee's website. I am advised that, given that submissions closed last Friday, there was a significant rush on the Friday to lodge additional submissions. In fact quite a few extensions have been granted to allow people more broadly to participate. The committee is particularly keen to hear from a wide cross-section. As chair, I particularly would like to encourage anyone who has evidence dealing with what I think is the important social and community benefit of a national broadband network fibre-to-the-home model. Something that international experience has highlighted is the capacity to give connection and participation opportunities to people who have mobility problems. This might be because of social isolation resulting from disability or because of ageing or infirmity issues. I have a simple example in my own area. I visited some social housing where a lady in her 70s took us in to show us her new unit. She said, 'Don't worry about the computer. That is my Skype connection on which I talk to all my friends in the US.' She said that a particularly important part of moving into a new facility for her was the upgraded infrastructure for communications so that she, despite her mobility issues, could stay connected with friends around the world. To me it epitomised how significantly important from a social perspective this sort of infrastructure is. I particularly encourage people who have evidence or issues to raise with us about that to contact the committee. I invite them to participate as we begin the journey of our visits around the nation to capitals and regions. *(Time expired)*

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (10.45 am)—I rise to support the chair of the committee as her deputy on this progress report into the administrative side of the inquiry into the NBN. As you all know, the NBN and broadband in general is a controversial but very

important matter that the parliament is now looking into in a variety of ways.

Minister Albanese gave us the terms of reference for this particular inquiry on 16 November last year, and we have been asked to look into the role and potential of the NBN with particular reference to government and service delivery; health; education; environmental sustainability; management of built and natural resources; regional growth and employment; business efficiencies; export opportunities, including for small business; research and innovation; and community and social benefits.

In the context of the above areas, the focus of the committee will be to examine the optimal capacity and technology required by the NBN. You can talk about the theory of it. What we want to see is whether this thing can deliver on the ground and, if it needs tweaking, what will need to be done. It is inevitable that it will involve discussing the primary fibre-to-the-home approach preferred by the government and the range of alternative technologies, including DSL and its variants, hybrid fibre-coaxial cable, fixed wireless, mobile wireless and satellite.

As the chair has said, we have had a rush of submissions. We had 47 as of our last meeting, and that has jumped by another 70, which we will be authorising this week. As she said, we have granted some extensions. Some things are emerging—for example, regional councils and RDA bodies are making submissions, as you would expect. Although we closed submissions on 25 February, I think the committee will be fairly accommodating if people still have something to say.

It is a very extensive program that the committee has mapped out. We will do Hobart, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Sydney and Perth and then a range of provincial cities such as Scottsdale, Launceston,

Ballarat, Townsville, Willunga, Kiama and Geraldton. The first public hearing will be in Canberra this coming Friday. At that particular meeting we will have people like the National Rural Health Alliance, the AMA and Department of Health and Ageing.

As we move around Australia, you can see other themes starting to develop. For example, in the education area, the Australian Council for Private Education and Training, Adult Learning Australia and Australian ICT and education wish to appear before us as well as the ANU and the CSIRO. There is an expectation of big things from NBN and broadband in general, so it will be interesting to hear what these people have to say. Tasmania will be important as we will be going to two of the centres where the NBN has already been connected and talking to people like the Dorset Council, the North East Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce, which are both based in Scottsdale. In Hobart we will hear from the University of Tasmania and the electronic commerce centre. There is also a strong community ICT and neighbourhood cable aspect when we go to Ballarat. No matter which part of Australia we go to, there are emerging themes and expectations of the NBN.

I wish to take a fairly cooperative view of this. I have been ambivalent to the NBN but I will go into this inquiry with an open mind. As I said, the fibre-to-the-home approach will be one of the tests that we look at in this inquiry. I look forward, as the chair has said, to everyone participating fully and I invite people who have not put submissions in to do so quickly.

Regional Australia Committee

Statement

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (10.40 am)—As chair of the Standing Committee on Regional Australia, I rise to inform the House of a committee decision to relate cer-

tain areas of concern to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities and the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government.

On 9 February I wrote to both ministers conveying the concerns of all committee members which arose from a series of hearings and inspections we had undertaken as part of our inquiry into the proposed guide to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Specifically, the committee has sought that the ministers investigate three matters. The first relates to the impact of the so-called Swiss cheese effect of water buybacks on irrigation districts. We are of the view that the government needs to urgently consider a more strategic buyback arrangement that may be implemented. The second matter relates to the impact of the current taxation arrangements on irrigators as a result of water reform such as grants for investment in water efficiency. The third relates to the implications of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's consideration of overbank flows in their modelling of the water requirements of the environmental icon sites and, in consultation with stakeholders, opportunities for engineering alternatives.

These issues were consistently raised during a nine-day program of site inspections and hearings we held across the southern basin in January. I thank all members of the committee, some in the parliament at the moment, for the way in which they gave up a great period of their normal break in January to participate in the hearings.

The committee is concerned that the issues that I have just mentioned need to be addressed as a matter of priority. The committee is of a consensus view that these issues be brought to the government's attention prior to the tabling of its report. The Minister for Sustainability, Environment,

Water, Population and Communities has since indicated that the government has commenced action on the first and second matters raised by the committee. The third matter, amongst other things, will be discussed at a meeting between the Commonwealth minister and his counterparts for state and territory jurisdictions scheduled in April.

The committee has now visited and taken evidence in each of the basin jurisdictions except Queensland. We are due to visit St George, Cubbie Station near Dirranbandi and Goondiwindi in that state in mid-March. We will conclude our evidence gathering by honouring a commitment to visit Swan Hill on 30 March. The committee had previously intended to go to Swan Hill in January but cancelled the visit due to the recent Victorian floods.

In concluding, I thank all members of the committee for their continuing strong support for the inquiry. As has been mentioned on a number of occasions, as we have travelled around various parts of the basin the committee has worked very well together. The fact that we have come up with some interim recommendations, two of which have already been accepted by the government, I think is recognition of the work that the committee is doing.

I also thank the many, many communities—whether they be entitlement holders, community leaders or just concerned businesspeople—who we have met during this period. We have had an extraordinary reception, in my view, from people many of whom were frightened by the initial 'Guide to the proposed Basin Plan' that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority put out. The way in which the committee members—Labor, Liberal, National and independent—have worked together in a semi-osmotic process suggested to people within the communities that we are serious about trying to resolve

this and we believe that there may be other ways of resolving ways it than the fairly blunt instrument that the authority put in place. I think with community support there can be a solution that will be delivered later in the year or early next year.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (10.55 am)—I thank the member for New England for his excellent chairing of the Standing Committee on Regional Australia. It is nice to have some of our colleagues, the member for Barker and the member for Makin, with us today. It is a hardworking and dedicated committee made up of mainly regional members who are both affected by and live in the basins that are subject to the initial guide and some of its recommendations.

I remind colleagues of the importance of the Murray-Darling Basin itself. It 'is an area of national environmental, economic and social significance'. This is certainly recognised by the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Mr Burke, and the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, Mr Crean, in their interpretation of what should happen in the basin.

It contains Australia's three longest rivers, the Darling, the Murray and Murrumbidgee—as well as nationally and internationally significant environmental assets, such as wetlands, billabongs and floodplains ... The Basin is Australia's most significant agricultural area, and produces around \$15 billion of produce annually. It extends across four states and the Australian Capital Territory, and is home to over two million people.

The committee itself has been burrowing away fairly productively since December. Indeed, something like 600 submissions have been received by the committee and its hardworking secretariat. I must pay tribute to the secretariat, the terrific work they are doing and the support that they are giving the committee. We have been on the road for 14 days going to 13 major locations spread

across New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. As the chair mentioned, we are soon to go to Queensland and laer, to make sure we honour our commitment to go to Swan Hill, in Victoria.

We have been to Broken Hill, the Menindee Lakes, the Coorong, the Lower Lakes and the mouth of the River Murray, Murray Bridge, Mildura, Bendigo, Shepparton, Deniliquin, Griffith, Tamworth, Gunnedah, Bourke and Dubbo. We are soon to go to St George, Dirranbandi and Goondiwindi in Queensland. That gives some appreciation of where we have been and where we are going. The committee has also had numerous meetings—in fact, we now meet twice a week—to take submissions and to hear directly from witnesses. We thank all those people who have gone out of their way to makes submissions; they have been excellent in their concern. They share that with the committee.

As the chair mentioned, the committee were concerned to get some of the issues that we had picked up time and time again on the road communicated to Minister Burke. I have been really pleased that the minister responded in his Dubbo irrigation meeting forum on 18 February. I think it indicates that there is not only a willingness to make sure that we arrive at some consensus to deal with the environmental, the economic and the social but also a preparedness to act. I believe the tone within the Murray Darling Basin Authority has changed, particularly with the change in chair, and our meetings with them seem to indicate a preparedness to substantially look at the implications of their recommendations. We find that very important and encouraging.

The chair has alluded to some of the issues raised from going around the country and getting submissions, particularly the use of strategic buybacks. I think a greater recognition of prior works and measures in-

vested by communities and state governments is important. Other issues are the roll-out of infrastructure in investments, including the resolution of the taxation issues that the chair commented on earlier, and accounting and measuring environmental works. Measures as a means of reducing the gap required to achieve the SDLs are really important. It is okay to have accountability on the use of irrigation waters, for instance, but we also need similar measures and accountability on the use of environmental waters, just to name some. I think the committee is working well and I thank all my fellow members for their hard work.

**Privileges and Members' Interests
Committee
Statement**

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (11.00 am)—On behalf of the Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests, I wish to make a statement concerning the committee's inquiry into a draft code of conduct for members of parliament. At the outset, I want to thank the Standing Committee on Procedure for the change to the standing orders that actually allows us to discuss committee reports as they are going along and not just at the end, when all the hard work is done and you are relegated to five minutes in this place. I think this is a terrific initiative and I commend the parliament and those involved in the change.

I rise today to bring to members' interest—particularly members of the House, because this is their inquiry—a really important inquiry that could have a great deal of impact of them. We have been given a reference by the House which is a different style of reference: we have been directed by the House to inquire into a code of conduct. This has arisen out of the various agreements that were struck at the beginning of the new paradigm that we are in between the Independents and the Greens. Having been given

this inquiry, I think we need to deal with it sensibly and intelligently. We have been granted an extension of time for the reporting date, and I want to thank the Leader of the House for that, because it was getting too close to do something in a meaningful manner that could impact so greatly on all members of this House and indeed on our colleagues in the other place.

The inquiry directs us to develop a draft code of conduct for members of parliament and, in considering that, the committee must give consideration to the operation of the code in other parliaments, who could make a complaint in relation to breaches of the code, how these complaints might be considered, the role of the proposed parliamentary integrity commissioner in upholding a code, how a code might be reinforced and what sanctions could be available to the parliament. So we are looking at a range of things: who can actually bring a complaint against a member of parliament, how that complaint will be investigated and how a sanction—if the breach has been found to be true—could be imposed. We have struggled for many years over these issues and to date we have not come to a resolution. This inquiry is actually forcing us to ask: 'Will we or won't we adopt a code of conduct for members in this place?'

We have written to numerous state counterparts who have such commissioners and integrity situations already set up, and I want to thank all of those jurisdictions for supplying some fantastic information. I also wrote to all members of parliament, asking them to make submissions to the inquiry, and I want to thank the member for Berowra—because he is the only one who has actually written back in respect of the matter—for taking the time to provide us with some useful information. We have also been in touch with our counterparts in the UK parliament, who have such a code of conduct and an integrity commis-

sioner already in place. We hope to, at a later stage, conduct a teleconference with our colleagues in the UK to thrash out some of the information they have provided.

We are now going to move to a roundtable discussion, and today all members should receive a letter from me inviting them to participate in a roundtable discussion in Canberra on Monday, 21 March 2011. It is the Monday of that sitting week, between 9 am and 12 pm here in Parliament House, and I really do encourage everyone to participate in that roundtable. Otherwise, we will be coming back and thrashing out something that nobody has ownership of and, if we do resolve to have a code of conduct, I cannot see how we can impose something on members if they have not had a part to play in these discussions. It is also vital that our colleagues in the other place participate in that roundtable. We have written to members of their equivalent committee asking them to come along, because I think we would be in a delicate situation if we had members of the House with one code and senators without a code or with a different code. That is vital that if we are going down this path.

At this stage we are to come back with a draft code that would then need to be endorsed by the parliament. As I have said before, this has been tried on numerous occasions and to date nothing has succeeded. Whether or not it is needed is something members should come along to the roundtable and put to us as part of the committee inquiry into this issue. As I said, we have been granted an extension of time for the reporting date, and we will now report at the end of the budget sitting week. I ask all members to be involved in this inquiry, as it directly affects all members of the House. I thank the Deputy Speaker and the chamber.

**ABOLITION OF AGE LIMIT ON
PAYMENT OF THE
SUPERANNUATION GUARANTEE
CHARGE BILL 2011**

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Mrs Bronwyn Bishop**.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (11.06 am)—I present the Abolition of Age Limit on Payment of the Superannuation Guarantee Charge Bill 2011 and the explanatory memorandum. In doing so, I am honouring a commitment that I made during the lead-up to the last election as the shadow minister for seniors that we would abolish the superannuation guarantee age limit. We did this for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, it is one of equity, fairness and recognising the importance of the mature-age worker in the workforce and our need to remove impediments to having people continue to participate in the paid workforce should they wish to do so. One of those impediments is this limit on the payment of the superannuation guarantee charge.

Currently, the legislation provides that it is only compulsory to make this payment until a worker turns 70. Clearly, there are many people who remain in the paid workforce—and we would like more of them to remain in the paid workforce—who are discriminated against, because they do not receive the superannuation payment. The purpose of this bill is very simple: it removes the section of the existing legislation which states that it is not compulsory to pay it.

If we look at the arguments that go on currently, we see that the *Intergenerational report* is often used as a tool by this government to beat older workers about the head and to tell them that the future for them is doom and gloom, that they are a burden on society and that they are a problem that has to be dealt with. The reality is that the ma-

ture-age worker, a category which begins at 45—and if you have ever met someone who has lost their job at 45 and had difficulty getting back into the workforce, you will understand why that is the period we count mature-age workers from. We need to see people who are in their 50s, in their 60s and, indeed, in their 70s, if they wish, use their skills and their abilities for the benefit of the whole of the economy and the people of Australia as well as for themselves.

In 2001 Access Economics did an excellent piece of research entitled *Population ageing and the economy* in which they said:

... tax reform may add somewhere in the region of 2.5 per cent to the annual national income of Australians', and that promoting national competition policy may add 5.5 per cent to the national income. The desire to ensure mature workers are not encouraged out of the workforce simply as a result of their age – as opposed to their competence – has the potential to raise the income of all Australians by a similar amount. Average per capita incomes of Australians could be lifted by 4 per cent if workforce participation by 55–70 year olds rose by just 10 percentage points.

So there are good economic reasons to see the encouragement of mature-age workers in the workforce, and changing this legislation is a removal of a barrier and an indication to the Australian people that we value their skills.

There are key reasons for employing and retaining mature-age workers. There is no evidence that productivity declines with age. Indeed, I refer to an experiment that is being done by BMW in Germany to deal with its ageing workforce considerations. It has built a new plant that takes the stress off the body on the process line by having things like a softer floor, which means that joints, ankles, knees and so on are less impacted when people are standing for a long time. They are have been given additional training and skills. The outcome of the experiment that

they conducted with a particular group saw an increase of seven per cent in the productivity of those mature-age workers. They are adopting this policy across the whole of their enterprise.

It is countries which have had a very low birth rate which are experiencing the lack of skilled workers far more than countries which have maintained a reasonable birth rate. Germany is down to around 1.4, whereas Australia has risen from 1.7 to 1.9 births per female. That plus our immigration policy means that we continue to grow. Those countries that have low birth rates and have seen that they simply do not have young workers coming on have had to reach this position earlier than we have perhaps had to. But the reality is that the great boom of the baby boomers that existed from the fifties to the eighties simply does not exist anymore. Indeed, last year the number of people who turned 55 was exactly the same as the number of people who turned 15. The old dynamic, where we used to have a large cohort of young people who were much cheaper to employ, versus an older workforce that saw early retirements, particularly in the eighties and nineties, simply does not exist anymore. That early retirement phenomenon that we went through in the eighties and nineties has led to a greater problem in dealing with the question of benefits than would otherwise have been the case if we had had a more thoughtful policy of keeping people in the workforce.

When looking at the so-called skills shortage that we often hear discussed in this place, if we stop talking about those people who are eligible to participate as being between the age of 15 and 65 and open up the opportunity for people who wish to remain in the paid workforce to do so then we would see the utilisation of skills that currently we are not tapping into. We hear that we have a very low unemployment rate, and that is very

largely due to the fact that we have fewer young people leaving school and coming into the workforce than used to be the case. If we retire at the same rate of early retirement, we exacerbate the problem. If we are really looking to the shape of the 21st century and really being forward thinking then we will take out of our mindset the concept of age—just as we have taken out the concept of sex—in employment and the only test will be one of competency. We will see people remain in the workforce for as long as they wish, because they are competent in that job.

I would like to see it be just as offensive to talk about people in terms of ageism as it is with both sexism and racism. They are equally offensive. If we really want to see an inclusive society where all talents are used then this is the way we should proceed. This bill can be the first step in pursuing that aim of seeing a truly inclusive society which values the skills of all people who wish to continue to use those skills in the paid workforce. The simple facts are that if you work for yourself you will work a lot longer than other people. If you are in small business you will work longer. If you work in a large firm or for a big employer you are more likely to find yourself out the door prematurely, when you have years that you want to give and you want to continue to serve.

By saying that we will remove this impediment of not having the superannuation guarantee charge paid past the age of 70, we are making a very strong statement. When we were in government and when I was the minister for aged care, we did abolish the Public Service compulsory retirement age of 65. So we now have people in the Public Service who are working well into their 70s and giving splendid performance.

I would urge all members across this chamber to recognise that the government's

promise to raise that age limit to 75 is not adequate. It is in the interests of inclusiveness, justice and the economic prosperity of the nation to remove that age limit altogether, and I would encourage all in this chamber to allow this bill to have a second reading and allow it to proceed into the law.

Bill read a first time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—In accordance with standing order 41(c), the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

AUDITOR-GENERAL AMENDMENT BILL 2011

First Reading

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

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (11.16 am)—I present the Auditor-General Amendment Bill 2011 and the explanatory memorandum. Value for money and efficiency come from accountability and transparency in the decision-making chain. I would hope that is a given that all members of parliament would agree with. I would hope that keeping an eye on taxpayers' dollars through to final program delivery is an important part of our brief. It would therefore surprise many, as it surprised me when I first found out about it, that the Auditor-General is limited in jurisdiction in doing this exact job on behalf of the parliament and, by extension, on behalf of the 22 million Australians, many of whom are hardworking taxpayers. This bill tries to address this problem and would allow the Auditor-General to follow the money trail.

This bill is based on recommendations from the Joint Standing Committee of Public Accounts and Audit Committee report No. 419 and allows for expanded jurisdiction for the Auditor-General. This bill expands the ability of the Auditor-General to follow the money trail from the point of receipt to the

point of delivery and will improve accountability and efficiency in the use of taxpayers' dollars.

Currently the Auditor-General is limited in jurisdiction in the following three areas. Firstly, he is limited in auditing government business enterprises—NBN Co., for example, one of the main talking points in the community at the moment and one of the main areas of expenditure for government over the forward estimates. Secondly, he is limited with respect to money allocated to states and territories through national partnership agreements and other means, such as natural disaster payments or Building the Education Revolution payments. The Auditor-General is limited in jurisdiction in following the money trail and making sure that value for money and efficiency are being delivered. Thirdly, the Auditor-General is limited in auditing moneys received by contractors. A recent and more controversial example is the Home Insulation Program. Again, the Auditor-General is unable to really drill down on the questions of value for money and efficiency.

There are no retrospective elements in the bill, and each clause in the bill performs the role of expanding the jurisdiction of the Auditor-General under the Auditor-General Act 1997. I believe it to be an important reform. Indeed, I believe it to be an essential reform—one that I was certainly surprised was a handbrake on the Auditor-General with regard to his ability to audit the money trail and therefore to provide frank advice on those questions of value for money and efficiency for all of us to consider and reflect upon.

I urge the parliament to accept and support this bill, and I hope we will also get more value for money and efficiency in all our government programs delivered through this place.

Bill read a first time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—In accordance with standing order 41(c), the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

**ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND
BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION
(ABOLITION OF ALPINE GRAZING)
BILL 2011**

First Reading

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

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (11.20 am)—I present the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (Abolition of Alpine Grazing) Bill 2011. Every day that the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities does not use the powers available to him under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act to remove cattle from Alpine National Park is another day of damage to threatened and endangered species and precious ecological communities in Victoria's high country.

This parliament cannot, in good conscience, wait for the bureaucratic navigations through the EPBC Act to play out in painstakingly slow time before anything is done to put an end to this damage. The minister may argue that he is held back by the act—and he and I could argue at length about whether or not he is being too cautious before using his powers—but, given the unsatisfactory speed with which the department is required to work through the EPBC in relation to alpine grazing, one thing is clear: this parliament has the opportunity to decisively act to protect what it knows to be threatened and endangered species and ecological communities, and it can do so now. It can act now to abolish cattle from what is meant to be a pristine national heritage place.

Before I explain the provisions of the bill, I want to go back to the origins of the failure of governance that allows cattle to continue to graze in Victoria's pristine high country. Cattle were removed from the Alpine National Park in 2005 by the Victorian Labor government, following an investigation by the Victorian Alpine Grazing Parliamentary Taskforce. Before 2005, 61 licences were used by approximately 45 operators, allowing almost 8,000 cattle to graze in the national park.

Last month the Victorian Baillieu coalition government reintroduced cattle grazing under the guise of scientific research into the alleged benefits of cattle grazing for fire control. Up to 400 cattle have been introduced to six 'research' sites in the Alpine National Park. There is no scientific justification for allowing the return of cattle to the park. The excuse of scientific research has absolutely no validity. In an earlier speech to this place, I suggested that the rationale surrounding this practice has about as much legitimacy as that of the Japanese government when they claim to be conducting whaling for so-called scientific research purposes.

The most significant peer reviewed scientific research on alpine grazing was carried out shortly after the 2003 fires in the park. Approximately 100 kilometres of transects across grazed areas of the Bogong High Plains were measured. The conclusion was that grazing cannot be justified on scientific grounds. The report concluded:

There was no statistically significant difference between grazed and ungrazed areas in the proportion of point burnt—

and that—

the use of livestock grazing in Australian alpine environments as a fire abatement practice is not justified on scientific grounds.

That is a report that coalition members in this chamber might wish to look at. Despite

this peer reviewed research and despite the findings of the Alpine Grazing Taskforce, the Victorian coalition—barely one month into their term of government—proceeded to meet highly political promises that they made to minor players and lobby groups in the lead-up to the 2010 state election. Cattle are in the high country again not because the state government have determined the scientific research to be inconclusive; cattle are there only for the basest of political reasons.

So shaky were the grounds of reintroduction of cattle to the high country that the Victorian government concocted this so-called trial only at the highest levels of the state Department of Sustainability and Environment and the newly elected government and then proceeded to argue that the trial was of such insignificance that it did not need to refer it to the federal minister for the environment, although the EPBC clearly requires it. In fact, this legally cute arrangement even avoids the provisions of the state's own National Parks Act. Clearly the state government is going to extreme lengths to meet its political promises.

At the federal level it is a failure of the EPBC legislation—an act that is long overdue to be rewritten—that Minister Burke is now having to direct the federal department to examine every legal loophole and every last piece of information relevant to this activity before he can even begin to question the Victorian government's decision not to refer the action of cattle grazing to him. The EPBC cannot be reviewed and improved soon enough. In the meantime, though, the alpine grazing matter is of utmost urgency and the parliament needs to overturn this irresponsible decision by the state government as soon as it can.

There should be no doubt about the constitutional basis for this bill: internationally listed threatened and endangered species and

ecological communities are being damaged right now. It is therefore the responsibility of the Commonwealth to protect these species and ecological communities. Given the cynicism and irresponsibility with which the coalition state government has attempted to fly under the federal radar, the inevitable claims by the Victorian government of federal interference in state affairs should be rejected for what they are: excuses and hypocrisy.

The Victorian state government's return of cattle grazing to the Alpine National Park is an act of environmental vandalism and this bill puts an end to it. My bill amends the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act to provide that the minister is deemed to have received from the government of Victoria a referral of its proposal to allow the controlled action of grazing in the national park—that is, it does that which the Victorian government has been too irresponsible to do. The bill goes further to deem the minister to have decided that the controlled action of alpine grazing is clearly unacceptable under the act due to the significant impact of grazing on threatened species and ecological communities. This in itself is enough to stop the trial. However, the bill goes further to specify other reasons for rejecting the trial, including that grazing on a scale actually necessary to achieve any fire control objectives would have a much larger impact.

The effect of deeming the minister to have made these decisions will be to require the minister, under section 74C of the EPBC Act, to notify the Victorian government as soon as practicable of the deemed decision, including the reasons for the decision, thus finally putting an end to the practice of alpine grazing. The bill does not attempt to undermine the good work of the department in putting together the case against alpine grazing. The bill merely requires, instantly, the removal of cattle from the park and

avoids the time-consuming process of getting the same outcome through the flawed process currently in the act.

I hope the minister appreciates the urgency of removing cattle from the park. After all, he was in the national park only a few days ago. His rhetoric is commendable but it needs to be matched with action. I ask the minister to join me in condemning the action of cattle grazing in Alpine National Park and join me in saving further destruction of threatened and endangered species and ecological communities by supporting this bill. As the minister himself said to the House as recently as question time last Tuesday, the Alpine National Park is a park, not a farm. Parliament needs to act now to prevent further damage in this national heritage listed place. I commend the bill to the House.

Bill read a first time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—In accordance with standing order 41(c), the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Evidence Based Policy Making

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (11.28 am)—I move:

That this House:

- (1) reaffirms this Government's commitment to evidence-based policy making;
- (2) notes that:
 - (a) the Productivity Commission has highlighted the importance of rigorous evaluation in assessing the impact of social, educational, employment and economic programs; and
 - (b) randomised policy trials are increasingly being used as an evaluation tool in developed and developing nations; and
- (3) supports measures to increase the quality of evaluations, and calls on the Government to consider whether randomised policy trials may be implemented to evaluate future Government policies.

No government has been more committed to evidence driven policy than ours. In areas from water reform to climate change, foreign aid to schools reform, activity based health funding to fiscal stimulus, Labor has drawn on the best knowledge of experts in the field. What drives us on this side of the House is not a love of particular programs but a hope that our time in public life will help leave Australia more prosperous and more tolerant, with a cleaner environment and jobs for the future.

To achieve these goals we need to keep finding better ways to evaluate our policies. As a former economics professor, I can assure the House this is particularly hard in the case of social policies. Unlike scientific experiments, evaluations of social policies are particularly tricky. We do not always get the right answer from simple before-and-after evaluations, nor from comparisons of those who opted in with those who opted out. A great advantage of randomised trials is that participants are allocated to the treatment or control groups by the toss of a coin. The beauty of randomisation is with a sufficiently large sample the two groups are very likely to be identical, both on observable characteristics and unobservable characteristics. The only difference between the treatment group and the control group is the intervention itself, so if we observe statistically significant differences between the two groups we can be sure that they are due to the treatment and not some confounding factor.

In Australia our farmers have used randomised evaluations for over a century and our medical researchers have used randomised evaluations for over half a century, yet social policy randomised evaluations are much rarer. One exception is the New South Wales Drug Court trial conducted from 1999 to 2000. Offenders were referred to the Drug Court by local or district courts, underwent a detoxification program and were then dealt

with by the Drug Court instead of a traditional judicial process. At the time it was established the number of places in detoxification was limited, so participants in the evaluation were randomly assigned either to the treatment group or the control group. They were then matched to court records in order to compare re-offending rates over the next year or more. The evaluation found that the Drug Court was effective in reducing the rate of recidivism and that while it was more expensive than the traditional judicial process it more than paid for itself.

In the case of the Drug Court, many of us probably had an expectation that the policy would reduce crime, but high-quality evaluations do not always produce the expected result. Staying for a minute with criminal justice interventions, take the example of Scared Straight, a program in which delinquent youth visit jails to be taught by prison staff and prisoners about life behind bars. The idea of the program, originally inspired from a 1978 Academy Award winning documentary of the same name, is to use exposure to prisons to frighten young people away from a life of crime. In the 1980s and 1990s several US states adopted Scared Straight programs. Low-quality evaluations of Scared Straight, which simply compared participants from a non-random control group, had concluded in the past that such programs worked, reducing crime by up to 50 per cent. Yet after a while some US states began carrying out a rigorous, randomised evaluations of Scared Straight. The startling finding was that Scared Straight actually increased crime, perhaps because youths discovered jail was not as bad as they thought. It was not until policymakers moved from second-rate evidence to first-rate evidence that they learned the program was harming the very people it was intended to help.

Being surprised by policy findings is perfectly healthy. Indeed, we should be deeply

suspicious of anyone who claims that they know what works based only on theory or small-scale observation. As economist John Maynard Keynes once put it when asked why he had changed his position on monetary policy during the Great Depression: ‘When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?’

One common argument made against randomised trials is that they are unethical. Critics ask: when you have a program that you think is effective how can you toss a coin to decide who receives it? The simplest answer to this is that the reason we are doing the trial is precisely that we do not know whether the program works. The great benefit of a randomised trial is that it gives us solid evidence on effectiveness and allows us to shift resources from less effective to more effective social programs. We should not lightly dismiss ethical concerns about randomised trials but they are often over played.

Medical researchers, having now used randomised trials for several decades longer than social scientists, have grown relatively comfortable with the ethics of randomised trials. Certain medical protocols could be adapted in social policy—such as the principle that a trial should be stopped early if there is clear evidence of harm, or the common practice of testing new treatments against the best available alternative.

One example, again from New South Wales, helps to illustrate this. Since 2005 an NRMA CareFlight team led by Alan Garner has been running the head injury retrieval trial—HIRT—which aims to answer two important questions: are victims of serious head injuries more likely to recover if we can get a trauma physician onto the scene instead of a paramedic; and can society justify the extra expense of sending out a physician or would the money be better spent in other parts of the health system? To answer these

questions Garner’s team is running a randomised trial. In effect, when a Sydney 000 operator receives a report of a serious head injury a coin is tossed—heads you get an ambulance and a paramedic; tails you get a helicopter and a trauma physician. Once 500 head-injury patients have gone through the study the experiment will cease and the results will be analysed.

When writing a newspaper article about the trial I spoke with Alan Garner who told me that although he had spent a decade working on it even he does not know what to expect from the results. In a phone conversation, he told me:

We think this will work but so far we only have data from cohort studies.

Indeed he even said:

Like any medical intervention, there is even a possibility that sending a doctor will make things worse. I don’t think that’s the case, but—

until HIRT ends—

I don’t have good evidence either way.

What is striking about Garner is his willingness to run a rigorous randomised trial and listen to the evidence. Underlying HIRT is a passionate desire to help head injury patients, a firm commitment to the data and a modesty about the extent of our current knowledge. High-quality evaluations help drive out dogma. As US judge Learned Hand famously said:

The spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right.

Naturally, randomised trials have their limitations. Not all questions are amenable to randomisation. Like the kinds of pilot programs that we run all the time, randomised trials do not necessarily tell us how the program will work when it is scaled up, and they are not very good at measuring spill-over and displacement effects. Because of these limitations, it is unlikely that we would ever want 100 per cent of government

evaluations to be randomised trials. Most likely, the marginal benefit of each new randomised trial is a little lower than that of the previous one. At some point, it is indeed theoretically possible that we could end up doing more randomised trials than is socially optimal.

However, this is unlikely to ever occur, at least in my lifetime. My best estimate is that less than one per cent of all government evaluations are randomised trials and that, excluding health and traffic evaluations, the proportion is probably less than 0.1 per cent. Another way to put this is that, to a first approximation, Australia currently does no randomised policy trials. Governments throughout Australia could safely embark on a massive expansion of randomised policy trials in Australia before we come close to the point where the costs exceed the benefits.

Finally, one way that we might expand randomised policy trials is to learn from the US, where federal legislation sometimes sets aside funding for states to conduct randomised evaluations. The Second Chance Act for rehabilitating prisoners, the No Child Left Behind school reform law and legislation to improve child development via home visits are just some of the US laws in which the federal government explicitly puts aside a portion of program funds for states to run random assignment evaluations.

What we need in Australian policy today is not more ideologues, convinced that their prescriptions are the answer, but modest reformers willing to try new solutions and discover whether they actually deliver results.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Is the motion seconded?

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

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (11.38 am)—I rise to speak on the member for Fraser's motion:

That this House:

- (1) reaffirms this Government's commitment to evidence-based policy making;
- (2) notes that:
 - (a) the Productivity Commission has highlighted the importance of rigorous evaluation in assessing the impact of social, educational, employment and economic programs; and
 - (b) randomised policy trials are increasingly being used as an evaluation tool in developed and developing nations; and
- (3) supports measures to increase the quality of evaluations, and calls on the Government to consider whether randomised policy trials may be implemented to evaluate future Government policies.

I expect that the member for Fraser did not intend to do so, but, in effect, he has used words that I am sure will be part of the motion of no confidence in the government that will surely ensue this week—because this motion highlights exactly the problem that has existed with the government over the last 3½ years. The policies and programs they have implemented have not only been a trial which has so badly failed; they have cost this country billions and billions of dollars along the way, they have resulted in massive mistakes and errors in public administration and they have resulted in the Australian public losing faith in the ability of this place to deliver reasonable programs for the future of our country. It all comes from the government's inability to implement policy programs, whether they be via trials or in practice.

We do not need to look far for the list of complete disasters and policy failures that have been implemented by the government since they were elected. We start with the failure to address the serious issue of ensuring our borders are protected. The changes that have been made were driven by ideology. I heard the member for Fraser say at the

end of his speech that we do not need more ideologues; we need more policy based on modest reform. On the issue of border protection, the government have for many years alleged that the opposition has been playing so-called dog-whistle politics, when they should realise instead that the changes put in place by the Howard government addressed the issues related to people smuggling in our region. The changes that the current government have made have led to such a massive increase in unauthorised boat arrivals in the northern parts of our country that we see at this time a complete lack of faith by the community in the government's ability to manage Australia's borders.

In 2007, the government promised 2,650 trade training centres. Since then, we have seen the delivery of 22. Before the 2007 election, the then Rudd opposition—which has become the Gillard government—promised one million computers in schools. Computers were promised for every student in years 9 to 12 in Australia by December 2011. As at 21 October last year, just over 300,000 new computers were on students' desks and the program has blown out by \$1.2 billion. Of course, \$1.2 billion pales into insignificance when you look at the waste and mismanagement in the Building the Education Revolution program.

We have sat in this place during questions without notice time after time and been lectured by the Treasurer about how he knows best. I suspect that the member for Fraser would have a better grasp of how to manage the Australian economy than the Treasurer of the country. I must say, that would not be all that hard, but people I respect in this place do claim that the member for Fraser has a great deal of ability, and I am sure we will see that.

I think this motion is a cry from the back bench of the Labor Party—a desperate plea

to the executive of the government—to take seriously the need to implement policy on the basis of evidence, not because of some poll driven party hack that they have brought in from Sussex Street in New South Wales telling them how to manage their government. It did not work all that well in New South Wales and it is not working well at the moment. In New South Wales they are trying to see whether a major party in this country can get itself under 20 per cent of the primary vote at a state election, which is a tough challenge. The New South Wales Labor Party state primary vote is like a limbo competition—they are trying to get as far under the bar as they possibly can compared to what should be expected from a major party. But the same people have been brought here to implement policy in this place. The outcome is billions and billions of dollars of waste—not evidence based policy but policy by Sussex Street in New South Wales.

Last week we saw the worst case of policy by Sussex Street when the Prime Minister broke the most rolled-gold election promise of all time—the 'I shall not implement a carbon tax' promise. She said, 'Under my government there will never be a carbon tax.' It is interesting. Some research came into my hands this morning in the form of previous speeches that the now Prime Minister made in this place, when she was a mere opposition spokesperson, in relation to truth in government. The reading is not good for the Prime Minister. During the second reading debate on the Health Insurance Amendment (Medicare Safety-nets) Bill 2005, she said:

The question of truth in government is not a game—and it is not my game; it is about the essence of our democratic institutions and it is about what a government should do and say to the Australian people when it is seeking their trust and their mandate at an election. Anybody in the Australian community, if asked, would say with-

out any hesitation that what they want to know before the election is just the simple truth.

Just the simple truth—that is all they want to know. They want to know whether or not you are going to implement a carbon tax. When you say you will not implement a carbon tax and you turn around and do so just after the election, they think that is a breach of trust.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—The member should remember to address his remarks through the chair.

Mr BRIGGS—That will hang over this government for the rest of their term. I know the members of the Labor Party backbench here during this speech are thinking, ‘How am I going to explain that this was evidence based policy?’ The evidence prior to the election was that we would not have a carbon tax, but after the election the evidence is that we will have a carbon tax. No matter what she says, you cannot trust this Prime Minister. You cannot trust this Labor Party; you cannot trust that they will implement policy on the basis of evidence based policy, which of course is what this motion is about.

This is an area of the Labor Party that is purely and utterly ideological driven, because they are driven by funding from the trade union movement and by former bosses of the trade union movement. I see one sitting in front of me at the moment. He may be a good man but that does not negate his past. They are driven wholly and solely, on labour market reform, by their pay masters. No matter what the evidence based policy is in this area, they will refuse point blank to look at it, to address it or to touch it. In fact, they will implement policy which will make the economy harder to manage and put pressure on inflation, which will put pressure on interest rates in the coming months and years ahead.

It interesting that the motion quotes the Productivity Commission—and I will too. Gary Banks from the Productivity Commission just before Christmas said in relation to evidence based policy:

If we are to secure Australia’s productivity potential into the future, the regulation of labour markets cannot remain a no-go area for evidence-based policy making.

I am sure the member for Fraser in his quieter moments, away from some of his colleagues, would agree with that statement. I imagine he would quietly sit and reflect upon the challenges this country will have with inflation and interest rates and he would say, ‘What the chair of the Productivity Commission said is probably true, but just don’t let my mates hear that.’

It is evidence based policy. It is a reform which this government implemented and which will make this economy harder to manage, which will mean fewer people get opportunities at jobs, which will put pressure on ordinary Australians’ interest rates—all because the government is driven by the ideological backgrounds of their backbench, by their frontbench and by those who pay their bills.

This motion is a shot at the executive of the government by those on the backbench who are far more talented than what sits on the front bench at the moment. This government should be condemned for the lack of evidence based policy that it has implemented, and it has been highlighted by the member for Fraser.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (11.48 am)—I would like to start by welcoming the member for Mayo back and congratulating him on the new addition to his family. It is always a very exciting time. I know that he must have been up very long hours doing all those sorts of things that happen when a new child comes into the family. I would also like

to suggest that perhaps he has returned to Canberra a little sleep deprived, because only that could explain the outbursts in his contribution here today, which, quite frankly, was an ideological ramble. If we ever wanted examples of areas where the previous government operated without any evidence based policy, the contribution from the member for Mayo just now highlighted those areas absolutely magnificently.

We have come to expect better from the member for Mayo. If ever there were someone on the backbench of the opposition who deserves a place down on the frontbench it is the member for Mayo. He must be sitting there wondering what he actually has to do to get on the frontbench when he looks at the dearth of talent sitting there in front of him. I am sure when he was back at home he would have been sitting there looking at the mess that the opposition frontbench makes in relation to almost every issue and he would have been saying to himself, 'How is it that I am on the backbench and these people who are talking such nonsense are sitting there on the frontbench?'

Two of the examples he brought up were Work Choices and reforming the labour market. I do not think there has ever been a more ideologically driven piece of legislation than Work Choices. It lacked any evidence based research and was brought in purely on ideological terms. Pursuing that policy cost the former Howard government office. In some ways the contribution of the member for Mayo has been illuminating, because he has pointed out the sorts of policies that the opposition put forward when they were in government as reasons to have evidence based policy. They did not do it when they were in government, and look at the ideologically driven policies that they came forward with. Work Choices was one of those.

Of course border protection was probably their biggest ideologically driven policy. Border protection and immigration are areas that have been, from the opposition side, driven by the extremes of One Nation for many years now. The position of the opposition is purely ideological and one that I expected the member for Mayo to do a little better on. I welcome the comments he made when he was concentrating on his family. Away from this place and away from the influence of some of those around him, he was able to make some very sensible contributions—about the need to continue funding for Indonesian schools for example—and he should be congratulated for making that stand. But on his first day back here he is on some ideological rant about border protection and the need to re-regulate the labour market.

This motion talks about using evidence based policy and randomised trials, but how would we do that for border protection? The member for Fraser made the very good point that while it is optimal to use evidence based policies and randomised trials—which we have not yet done in this country—those things do not apply in every case. How would we operate on border protection? Would we say, 'For the next three months, we are going to let everyone come in and see what effects that has—open up the borders'? The next month, would we turn boats away? Would we sink them? The use of those things is a ludicrous proposition for some policy areas, and the member for Mayo really does undermine his contribution by trying to make cheap political points through his use of the catchcries that we have heard from the opposition on border protection.

Evidence based policy decisions are an important thing for both government and opposition to look at in the formulation of their policies. It is something that we should be encouraging all legislators to look at. This

is a good motion to make sure that evidence based policy suggestions are brought to attention of the House. I commend the motion to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—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.

**WATER EFFICIENCY LABELLING
AND STANDARDS AMENDMENT
BILL 2010**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 24 February, on motion by **Mr Martin Ferguson**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (11.53 am)—The Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Scheme, known as the WELS Scheme, was established by the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act 2005. The scheme's objectives are to conserve water supplies by reducing water consumption, to provide information for purchasers of water-use and water-saving products and to promote the adoption of efficient and effective water-use and water-saving technologies. The scheme requires that specified products offered for sale be registered and labelled to indicate their assessed water efficiency. This efficiency is indicated by a star-rating system of up to six stars, with six stars being awarded to the highest-performing products. The labels inform purchasing decisions in the same way as do energy rating labels on electrical appliances.

Since the scheme was introduced in 2005, there has been good evidence that it is positively influencing consumer preferences. Studies have estimated that, by 2021, 800 giganlitres of water will have been saved through the scheme. That is more water than is in Sydney Harbour. The Minister for Sus-

tainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities determines which products will be included in the scheme and the standards they must meet. Currently, WELS products are showers, toilets, urinals, taps, dishwashers, clothes-washing machines and flow controllers. The plumbing products currently covered by the scheme are also subject to the WaterMark certification scheme, which operates under state and territory plumbing regulations.

WaterMark testing and certification is intended to ensure that plumbing products are fit for use and will not threaten the safety of the reticulated water supply. WaterMark certification is required before a plumbing product can be legally installed, while registration and labelling is required before a product can be offered for sale. This regulatory difference means that in some cases consumers may unknowingly purchase WELS plumbing products which, while legally available, cannot legally be installed. In addition, the presence of WELS labels on products which are not WaterMark certified may be misconstrued by consumers as suggesting that the products are government endorsed as fit for use.

The proposed change to the scheme in the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Amendment Bill 2010 will remove these concerns by enabling additional plumbing requirements, such as those established by the states and territories, to be included as requirements in the WELS Scheme by ministerial determination. There is industry support for this amendment, which will enable the provision of positive outcomes for consumers and for plumbers. The plumbing industry is a vital component in driving a sustainable future. Water is the key. Plumbers are involved in almost every aspect of water delivery and have in their hands the ability to advocate energy- and water-saving devices

and strategies to both domestic and commercial applications.

As I have mentioned in the parliament before, in my own electorate of Wills the Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre is undertaking great work to train and skill tradespeople in energy efficient and green-collar jobs. At the opening of this facility, the former Victorian Premier John Brumby commented:

Green plumbing is the number one skills issue for Victorian plumbers, with a recent report estimating that no more than 10 per cent of the State's 20,000 plumbers have sufficient green skills to meet the growing demand for environmentally sustainable plumbing. To date, 3,000 Victorian plumbers have attended Green Plumber's courses. This number will grow considerably as the Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre rolls out its programs to the broader plumbing workforce. The centre will play a leading role delivering sustainability skills for the Victorian plumbing industry and will be critical for driving growth in the Victorian green plumbing sector and creating jobs.

The Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre will provide plumbing training to practising plumbers with a focus on sustainability, energy saving, waste reduction and water conservation. The training centre's facility is a five-star Green Star rated building that will trial and promote new technologies. It is a working example of innovative design and sustainable plumbing. The centre is helping people reduce their energy and water consumption around the home and playing a vital role in helping us combat climate change at the grassroots level.

Some of the training programs include providing recommendations and advice on effective plumbing solutions to improve energy usage and reducing the use of water in domestic and commercial properties, on the selection and installation of solar heated water systems, on the use of on-site natural wastewater treatment systems to improve

environmental sustainability and on alternative sources of water available for urban use to reduce demand on the drinking water supply. Environmental plumbing inspections and inspection reports for domestic buildings are also provided.

Another service is determining pump systems suitable for suburban applications, planning the system pipe work and sizing the pump to meet client requirements. This unit applies specifically to simple systems used to pump rainwater and greywater in suburban areas. Plumbers have a huge role to play in making our environment cleaner. Over 70 per cent of all energy consumed in the home is related to work carried out by plumbers. In commercial buildings, the greenhouse gas emissions are principally due to cooling, lighting and heating, and over 60 per cent fall under the watch of the plumber. So industry will expect that the sector be able to provide the best advice and processes to comply with government targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

The centre's website points out that there is general consensus that buildings produce 40 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. The Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre offers a solution to deal with this issue swiftly and economically. I want to congratulate the Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre on their fantastic work and look forward to working with them and the wider community to help the Wills electorate reduce its carbon footprint.

Another important example of a commercial building demonstrating water efficiency is the Australian Conservation Foundation's headquarters, known as the 60L Green Building. The 60L Green Building provides the fundamentals of smart design, an open-plan layout, natural ventilation, lighting and energy efficiency, and the Australian Conservation Foundation has followed through

with green furniture, fittings and materials for the office.

When it was built, the 60L building set a significant new benchmark for water efficiency in commercial buildings with an approach to water conservation that minimised the demand for water by providing water efficient fixtures and fittings, including waterless urinals and low-flush volume toilets; by the use of collected rainwater to replace 100 per cent of normal mains water consumption whenever possible; and by 100 per cent on-site treatment and reuse of greywater through basins and sinks and blackwater, sewage, streams to produce reclaimed water for flushing toilets and irrigating the roof garden and landscape features.

There are three basic subsystems which make up the 60L water system. Firstly, there is the potable water system—harvesting, collection transfer and sterilisation of water for use by tenants and building systems. Then there is the sewage treatment system involving biological breakdown, membrane filtration and clarification of waste water for use within the building and transport of treated waste to the city system. Finally, there is the reclamation system—reclaimed water, treated to appropriate standards, is used on 60L's roof garden, in toilets and in the final part of the system there is a reed-bed water feature in the atrium which filters water before it returns to the city system.

In an average rainfall year, the only water that must be sourced from external, mains water is that required for testing the fire sprinkler system. 60L uses 90 per cent less mains water when compared to a traditional commercial building of similar size and function. The building relies principally on rainwater. This is collected from the roof, stored in two 10,000-litre tanks on the ground floor, filtered and then sterilised prior to use by tenants in taps and showers.

Three stages of microfiltration remove any particulate material and large organisms and an ultraviolet sterilisation unit kills any residual bacteria and other organisms. This treatment plant has automatic monitoring for conductivity and is subjected to routine monitoring and testing for microbial activity. UV sterilisation makes it possible to kill potentially hazardous organisms and bacteria without the need for chemicals such as chlorine. Ultraviolet light destroys the cell structure of pathogens making it impossible for them to reproduce and pose a risk to water users. UV systems have become widely accepted for drinking water sterilisation. More than 500 kilolitres of rainwater will be collected in an average rainfall year and despite lower than average rainfall over previous years 60L has been able to collect and use about 400 kilolitres every year.

Water is of course an incredibly important issue in Australia and I am very pleased that the ACF decided to place this system on show for tenants and visitors to 60L. Thus the two 10,000-litre storage tanks and ancillary pumping, filtration and water sterilisation equipment are clearly visible on the ground floor. Throughout the construction process, wherever possible, it was decided to make water use a prominent aspect of the built environment. Pipes that collect and transport water are clearly marked. Some collection pipes have transparent panels that enable tenants to see the flow of water into the rain tanks when it rains.

I am told that the siphonic rainwater collection system is a highly efficient way of moving water into the storage tanks via gravity and siphoning; it minimises downpipe sizing and saves on materials usage. The rooftop garden is designed to be watered with reclaimed water from the on-site waste water and sewage treatment plant.

As the ACF has outlined, from a construction viewpoint, it was important to have a completely integrated design from the outset, so that synergies in saving, both during construction and afterwards, could be realised. This is basic sustainability theory—plan, design, specify and build with the avowed intent of using less resources at all stages.

Water is a precious asset which we should never take for granted. It has been heartening to see water storages in Victoria increase over what has been a bumper period for rainfall. However, we should not allow this to diminish our awareness of the need for continued water conservation vigilance. I commend this bill for its intention to deliver a heightened awareness for consumers.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (12.05 pm)—In my brief speech in the second reading debate for the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Amendment Bill 2010 I want to touch on a couple of matters. Firstly, I commend the member for Wills for his comments that he has just made to the House. He gave some excellent examples of how communities are becoming far more water efficient—a matter that I will touch on briefly. One of the positive fallouts of the prolonged drought was that we saw communities around the country, whether individual householders, industries, irrigators or broader communities generally, not only become much more water wise but truly acknowledge the value of water.

Water became a tradeable commodity. We saw it become a marketable product and we also saw the consumption of water around the country fall quite markedly not only in households. I commend the work that households around the country have done to achieve that decline in consumption not only because water restrictions were imposed but because people quite genuinely understood the importance of conserving water and the value that it should have always had. Along

with that change came the use of products that saved water.

This bill specifically deals with providing consumers with clear information about the water efficiency rating of a product. It also ensures that that same product with the water efficiency rating is linked to the WaterMark certification. This is important because, prior to this, we could have had a product that was rated for its water efficiency but in fact was not allowed to be installed within homes, businesses or wherever because it had not been WaterMark certified.

One of the areas where we have seen the most efficiencies in water use in recent years has been across the irrigation sector. That is, of course, where most of the water is consumed. But I have to say as a member of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia that as I toured the many communities throughout the Murray-Darling Basin I was indeed impressed with the level of investment, the local knowledge and the efforts being made by irrigators across the country to use less water, whether it was through their investments in efficient irrigation systems or through the different varieties of crops they used or simply the way they managed their farms. It was wonderful to see, and I commend them for that. In fact, I suggest that many of them probably survived the drought because of their innovation.

We know that a lot more needs to be done if we are going to ensure we get the best use of our water, certainly across our irrigation sectors. In that respect I applaud the government's commitment of \$5.8 billion for investment in water efficiency measures. Water efficiency investment can and should also be linked to strategic water buybacks. I want to comment briefly on this matter because it was raised in the course of this debate by the member for Murray, who is also

a member of the regional Australia committee. She was somewhat critical of the government because it had not adopted some of the interim recommendations the committee had put to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. I will touch on those three interim recommendations, which were brought to the attention of this House only this morning by the member for New England, the chairman of that committee, when he was reporting on the work of the committee.

The three matters we brought to the minister's attention were: firstly, the water buyback itself; secondly, the management of overbank flows; and, thirdly, the tax treatment of government investment in efficiency schemes. The minister has acknowledged each of these as legitimate concerns and has in fact taken them on board. In a speech to the Murray Darling Association in Dubbo on 18 February this year he outlined what the government response to each of those matters was. I want to start with the question of water buybacks.

The regional Australia committee supports the strategic buyback of water. It is an important component of restoring the balance within the Murray-Darling Basin system. To date, the federal government has bought back 863 gigalitres of water. The issue that has been raised is one that has been referred to as the Swiss cheese effect of buying water indiscriminately. What this effectively means is that if you buy water in an ad hoc way throughout the basin you create an inefficiency within the distribution system for those growers who are left. There are a number of matters that need to be taken into account when you start talking about the Swiss cheese effect. Firstly, the government is not the only buyer in an open market where water has become a tradeable commodity. The market continues with or without government intervention, and the choice as to where

water is bought from is not under the control of the market in that open system. In fact, I suspect that the Swiss cheese effect has been caused as much by private buyers as it has been by the government. Also, the water purchased by the government has been predominantly water that has been surplus to the licence requirements of the individual landholders—surplus because those landholders have probably invested in irrigation efficiencies themselves and as a result have surplus water to sell or because they have changed their farming practices and, again, have surplus water to sell. In fact, two-thirds of the water bought by the government has been from sellers who have sold what you would refer to as their surplus water.

The government recognises the importance of the buyback program and that it needs to be strategic, it needs to be targeted and it should not distort the market. In response to all of that, the government has announced with regard to funding in the future—and this is the matter that the member for Murray was critical of—that the government will buy water on the basis, firstly, of rolling tenders. That means that the tender process continues and you do not get hikes in the price of water because the government comes in at one time and then disappears from the market for a long period of time. As I said, it will be on the basis of a rolling tender. Secondly, the government will buy back water in smaller quantities at a time. It is interesting to note after the announcement made by the minister, who I see is in the House today, that for the next round the allocation is \$40 million. Contrast that with the \$200 million used in the previous round, before the new policy came in. It is a clear distinction in the process under which the government will buy back water. It will mean that there will be a much more level market and that a lesser amount of money will be put into the market by the government at any

one time. It will also mean that anyone who, for one reason or another, has missed out on being able to sell their water to the government because they missed out in a particular tender will have a continuing opportunity to put their water on the market. The rolling tender process will ensure there is much more evenness and fairness in the market for everybody concerned.

The buyback process will be led by the irrigation authorities. It is important that that is the case because the irrigation authorities best understand how to manage the water in their area. They best understand where the inefficiencies are and what needs to be done to correct those inefficiencies, so the process must be led by them. It will also ensure that there will not be exploitation of the government and inefficiencies will not be created as a result of the government coming in wanting to buy water and in effect being put in a situation where it needs to pay much more than it should for that water. The local authorities clearly understand the best schemes that need to be supported. I would expect that, on the basis of their recommendations, the minister and the department will take advice as to where the water buybacks take place.

That, in my view, shows that the minister and the government are taking on board the views of the regional Australia committee and, I suspect, others that have been having discussions directly with the minister on this matter. So clearly it is the case that the water buyback program must be a program that is targeted, and that is exactly what the government is doing.

I will just say very briefly in respect of the other two matters that were put to the minister by the committee—the taxation treatment and the overbank flows—that I was pleased that the minister also announced that the anomaly in respect of taxation deductions

will be fixed up by this government. My understanding is that any legislation that will need to go through the parliament will be backdated to April 2010 to ensure that those farmers who were supported by way of government grants or similar investments made by the Commonwealth will not be disadvantaged in their tax treatment. In the past—or up to date—what was happening was that, if they got any form of grant and there were a tax liability associated with that, that would have to be paid for in the first year of the grant, whereas their tax deductions would not apply until after the first year. That meant that they were effectively disadvantaged. That anomaly, I understand, is to be rectified, and again I commend the minister for that.

The last matter that I will very briefly touch on is the question of overbank flows, which was also raised with the committee on several occasions by different authorities and by members of the communities as we took evidence around the country. The minister has announced that in April of this year there will be a forum of the basin states' ministers to discuss this very matter. We understand that there are some engineering solutions which could be adopted to ensure that we much more efficiently manage our environmental waters. Again, it is up to each individual state, each individual locality and the particular catchment management authorities to come up with the solutions that need to be adopted in order to do that, and it is good to see that that will happen in April this year.

As I said from the outset, this bill is all about water efficiencies. Water efficiencies can take many forms in many areas of community life, but certainly, in respect of the work being done across the Murray-Darling Basin, I believe that we are on the right track. What this bill does to individual householders is that it empowers them with the knowledge of which products they ought

to buy if they want to save water. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (12.17 pm)—I want to thank all members who have contributed to the debate on the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Amendment Bill 2010. There have been areas of agreement and areas of extreme disagreement. Fortunately, in this debate all the areas of agreement have been the ones about the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act 2005 and the amendment that is before the House, and the disagreements that have been part of the debate have been about entirely different issues. The Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Scheme, or WELS Scheme, is making a valuable contribution to conserving water and informing consumers about the water efficiency of products. This bill will foster greater confidence in the products covered by the scheme. I want to thank all members for their considered remarks on this matter, and I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (12.18 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

TOBACCO ADVERTISING PROHIBITION AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 19 November 2010, on motion by **Ms Roxon**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (12.19 pm)—I would like to speak on the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010 and make some remarks on behalf of the opposition. The opposition will be giving its support to this bill. Everyone understands the importance of promoting positive health outcomes and encouraging healthier lifestyles amongst all Australians. We in this House all have a common desire to achieve a healthier society. The coalition believes that it is important to focus on preventative health. Treating people with chronic, preventable diseases helps alleviate the substantial economic and social costs and helps alleviate a very significant burden on our health-care system.

Approximately a third of Australia's burden of disease is attributable to modifiable risk factors, and tobacco smoking is one of the leading causes of preventable chronic disease amongst Australians. The National Preventative Health Taskforce identified that tobacco is currently the single biggest preventable cause of death and disease in Australia. Over three million people—that is, approximately 18 per cent of Australians aged 14 years and over—still smoke, with almost 2.9 million people smoking on a daily basis. About half of these smokers who smoke for prolonged periods will die early. This cost the community \$31½ billion in 2004-05. Incredibly, almost one in five pregnant women report smoking during pregnancy, including 42 per cent of teenagers and 54 per cent of Indigenous women. This poses serious risks to the mothers and has long-lasting and far-reaching effects on their offspring. For every 1,000 smokers who quit, at least 40 will be spared a diagnosis of chronic illness.

So the figures are very clear. While reducing the incidence of smoking has been one of the success stories in health promotion over the last 20 or 30 years, it is clear that it has

not all been in one direction. When the effort is not substantial, the smoking rates do plateau. It is obvious that the successes in health promotion here have been the result of actions by government, by the health professions and by individuals themselves in reducing the rates of smoking.

Australia has, overall, one of the lower smoking rates in the OECD and one of the lower smoking rates in the world. But, as the Preventative Health Task Force identifies, there are wide variations in the prevalence of smoking. Smoking remains very high in our Indigenous population, it is high in lower socioeconomic groups and it is high in groups with low education as well.

Of the actions that have been taken in the past, I am very proud that the coalition, when in government, changed the taxation of tobacco from a per weight basis to a per stick basis. That was a recommendation in the context of the new tax system in 2000, which was supported by all of the health groups and was seen as an important tobacco control measure. We, in opposition, also proposed an increase in the tobacco excise per stick in the Leader of the Opposition's budget reply in 2009.

What this bill does is to update the legislation with regard to tobacco advertising. The Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act was introduced in 1992 at a time when advertising on the internet was much less widespread. This legislation makes it an offence to advertise tobacco products on the internet and in other electronic media. By restricting internet advertising of tobacco products in Australia, this goes some way to targeting smoking and its harmful effects. At present there is a lack of clarity over the regulations governing advertising on the internet. This legislation aligns tobacco advertising in the electronic media with restrictions in other media and at other retail points of sale.

This bill does not ban sales on the internet but bans advertising on the internet. It also makes it a requirement that the health guidelines and the health warnings are included in internet sales. For example, Coles and Woolworths do sell tobacco in their online sales, but this legislation will make clear the requirements for those online sales. Logos, pictures of packages and so on are not allowed under this legislation.

The Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act, which this is amending, currently governs the advertising of tobacco products in Australia. Currently, it bans advertisements via print and electronic media such as TV, radio, film et cetera. However, when the act was passed back in 1992, the use of the internet was not nearly as widespread as it is now. Consequently, the regulation application of the legislation was designed for more conventional media platforms.

On behalf of the opposition, I have engaged in extensive consultation with key stakeholders and there was widespread support for this legislation. Of course, the health groups and the anticancer groups are very supportive of tighter regulations for tobacco. The tobacco companies also did not see any issues with this legislation for them.

The coalition are supporting the passage of this legislation because we recognise there is more to be done in the area of preventative health and there is still more to be done in the area of tobacco control. We will be supporting this legislation and its objectives.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (12.26 pm)—While recently flicking through the pay TV sports channels—and my wife always chides me for doing that far too often—I noticed that they were running highlights of an old one-day cricket match, a World Series match between Australia and Australia A. I was firstly captured by the host of iconic names such as Merv Hughes, Shane

Warne and Glenn McGrath who were out there strutting their stuff. But it was not so much the big names of Australian one-day cricket that stood out. What was also impossible to ignore on the TV screen was the large ad for cigarettes in the background. These prominent banners plastered over the fence at the ground were placed strategically in the line of the TV cameras to gain maximum visual impact amongst the viewing audience.

It was not that long ago that this tobacco advertising was being beamed into the lounge rooms of millions of Australians during prime time sports programs. It would not have been thought of as out of the ordinary to see these big cigarette ads filling so much of the TV screen because they were still permitted then. The cricket highlights I spoke about were part of the 1994-95 World Series, just 15 years or so ago. Part of the reason tobacco advertising stood out in those old cricket highlights is that the norm now is that such advertising is nowhere to be seen, at least not on television.

Australia has made great progress in preventative health when it comes to smoking, and much of that has been attributed to the crackdowns on tobacco advertising. Smoking rates in Australia have been declining since the mid-1970s when advertising bans first started—down from around 35 per cent to around 18 per cent to 19 per cent today. But, despite what may be seen as a dramatic drop in the rate of tobacco use, it remains Australia's single largest cause of premature death and disease, killing 15,000 Australians a year and costing our economy \$31.5 billion.

Quite a revolution has been occurring in the way that sellers of any products get their message across to potential buyers. As digital technology evolves at a rate which is sometimes difficult to keep up with, advertisers are constantly finding new and innovative

ways to sell products. This advertising, unfortunately, includes tobacco. Cigarettes are now being heavily promoted on the internet and there are serious concerns and growing concerns that both online advertising and social network sites are being used to promote tobacco to young Australians. Young people, especially those between the ages of 24 and 29, currently have the highest rate of smoking amongst Australians. Just as tobacco marketers have in the recent past infiltrated youth-friendly venues, it is most conceivable that they would have a presence on youth-friendly websites.

While the internet is being used extensively to sell cigarettes, its largely unregulated status holds much potential as a vehicle for both promoting smoking and advertising tobacco products. Internet use by young people is part of their everyday life. More than half of Australia's youth and young adults use the internet on a daily basis. Many popular youth websites rely on users to provide content in the form of videos, diaries, photographs and music. There is the potential for the anonymous exploitation of these sites, including by tobacco marketers and retailers, to reach a large audience, particularly youth, by both promoting and culturally undermining smoking.

One study examining the tobacco content on the video-sharing website YouTube found that tobacco imagery is 'prolific and accessible' on the site. Videos with pro-smoking content ranged from images of young men and women smoking, to smoking fetish scenarios, to magic tricks featuring cigarettes. Additionally, vintage cigarette advertisements appear on the site. While the research was unable to determine whether the tobacco industry had posted any of this material on the website, there was evidence that distributors of the Swedish smokeless tobacco had posted promotional videos on the site. A content analysis study of pro-tobacco websites

revealed that tobacco has a pervasive presence on the internet, especially on e-commerce sites and sites featuring hobbies, recreation and fetishes. Only 11 per cent of the sites examined contained health warnings. The pro-tobacco sites frequently associated smoking with glamorous and alternative lifestyles and with images of attractive, young males and females. Many of the websites offered interactive site features that are potentially appealing to young people.

Several Australian websites also sell cigarettes. These sites often do not post health warnings, nor do they comply with state and territory based legislation surrounding point-of-sale advertising. In May 2005, following media reports about internet tobacco sales, the Australian Federal Police announced an ongoing investigation as to whether owners of tobacco sales sites are breaking laws prohibiting tobacco advertising. We are now further toughening our laws on tobacco advertising. Our internet tobacco legislation will mean that online sales, advertising and promotion of tobacco will now be subject to the same kinds of restrictions that are placed on over-the-counter sales. This is an important step in reaching the benchmarks set under the COAG National Healthcare Agreement of reducing smoking rates to 10 per cent by 2018 and halving the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smoking rate. Together with our efforts to mandate the plain packaging of tobacco products from 2012, Australia is on track to have the world's toughest measures against tobacco.

The main impact of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010 will be on retailers who advertise their products without the required health warnings, and as being 'tax free'. Retailers, including the major supermarket chains and specialist tobacco and cigar retailers, will be consulted on a draft of the regulations once developed.

Let us have a quick look at some of the background to this bill. On 29 April 2010, the Minister for Health and Ageing announced that the government would legislate to restrict Australian internet advertising of tobacco products, bringing the internet into line with restrictions already in place in other media. This followed consultation with stakeholders on the legislation conducted from 2007 and was part of a package of measures to tackle smoking which also included increasing tobacco excise by 25 per cent above normal CPI adjustments; legislation to require plain packaging for tobacco products; and a targeted social marketing campaign to curb smoking among high-risk and disadvantaged groups.

This bill addresses an ambiguity that exists regarding internet advertising of tobacco products, amending the act to specifically include advertising over the internet and other electronic media. Regulations will be made under the amendment act to prescribe specific requirements as to the size, content, format and location of tobacco advertisements; the inclusion of health warnings, including graphic health warnings; warnings about age restrictions on the sale of tobacco products; information about any fees, taxes and charges payable in relation to tobacco products; and age restricted access systems for access to tobacco advertisements.

Part 8 of schedule 5 of the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 provides carriage service providers—for example, internet service providers and internet content hosts—with legal protection from civil and criminal proceedings in relation to the content they provide. This protection will be unaffected and the proposed legislation does not seek to impose any obligation on internet service providers for monitoring content accessed via their sites. It is expected that the proposed amendments will have little or no impact on the three major tobacco companies. The

main impact will be on retailers who advertise their products without the required health warnings and as 'tax free', therefore advertising 'cheap' cigarettes. Retailers, including the major supermarket chains and specialist tobacco and cigar retailers, will be consulted on a draft of the regulations once developed.

While the amendments will apply to the promotion of tobacco on social networking sites, the identification of the publisher of a tobacco advertisement on a social networking site is difficult. Many of the advertisements or promotions on sites such as Facebook, YouTube and MySpace are placed by anonymous users, so identifying or prosecuting the publisher can be difficult.

This bill is an important bill in relation to the progressive nature of trying to make sure that we can reach the targets of reducing smoking in Australia. It makes it an offence to advertise tobacco products on the internet and in other electronic media such as mobile phones or computers unless the advertisement complies with state and territory legislation or Commonwealth regulations. The offence provisions contained in section 15A of the proposed amendments will apply to any person who publishes a tobacco advertisement on the internet or via any electronic means.

The meaning of 'published in Australia' has been extended in the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Act 2010, the amendment act, to apply to circumstances where the advertisement did not originate in Australia, or its origin cannot be determined and the advertiser had a significant Australian connection. Such a connection would be where a publisher who may or may not be the defendant publisher is: an Australian citizen; a permanent resident; an entity that was incorporated or formed in Australia; a foreign person in Australia; or a foreign entity

or unincorporated body with its central management and control in Australia. Therefore, the offence provision would have, to some extent, extraterritorial operation. This is justified on the basis that the internet and other electronic media are potential means of publishing material that is accessible to the public in Australia that would be prohibited under the amendment act if other means of publication were used. This extraterritorial operation of the provisions is restricted by the fact that there must be an Australian connection, as explained.

It has been proven through much research and by way of a range of studies and gathering of facts and figures that tobacco advertising does encourage people to smoke, especially younger Australians. Therefore, we must do everything we can to limit the opportunities tobacco marketers have to increase the sales of their products through the new media, mainly via the internet, on social networking sites, and through personal communication devices such as mobile phones.

It is important that the coalition support this, and I note that the shadow spokesman has. We hope the opposition take the next step, like the Australian Labor Party, and ban donations from tobacco companies as well because that is part of making sure we do everything we possibly can to discourage Australians from smoking. I would welcome that announcement from the opposition some day soon.

This bill will make it much tougher for tobacco retailers and marketers to exploit the vulnerability that younger people in particular may have in trying their products and potentially becoming addicted to smoking. Smoking, as I have already said, costs the Australian economy \$31.5 billion a year and sees 15,000 Australians dying every year. We need to be doing everything we possibly can

to encourage people not to take up this habit. This bill is an important step in making sure that that happens, and I commend it to the House.

Dr STONE (Murray) (12.38 pm)—The Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010 is very important. As you have heard from our shadow spokesman, we certainly agree with the government that we need to do all that we can to reduce the number of Australians starting to smoke and to help those who are already addicted to drop this very unhealthy habit. We need to ensure that the intentions of all governments to continue restrictions on tobacco product advertising extend to the internet and other electronic media. As the member for Dobell has just said, so many interactions now take place in the electronic media. It is not simply enough to ban billboard, paper, television and radio advertising. We need to understand that a lot of modern communication takes place via the internet, on Facebook and other social networks, via electronic media and, therefore, tobacco advertising must also be banned from those mediums.

Tobacco advertising restrictions have been in place since 1973 in Australia. The health hazards associated with smoking have been known for a very long time. Since 1973, Australian governments, one after another, have tried to make sure that Australians were aware of the health hazards and have curtailed advertising. We have come a very long way since the First World War and Second World War, when cigarettes were given as part of a serving man's rations and tobacco smoking was seen as a harmless relaxation and in fact was thought to do some therapeutic good in helping to calm the nerves and helping people through difficult and stressful situations.

We now understand that tobacco has an enormous human toll, not just for those who

smoke but for people who are in the way and inhale cigarette smoke second-hand. We have been very successful in reducing smoking rates in Australia. We have seen a drop in the number of Australians smoking from 30.5 per cent in 1988 to 16.6 per cent in recent times. That is a very substantial drop in the numbers. This means that many more Australians are having a chance to lead a healthy life. However, 15,000 Australians still die from smoking related diseases every year and that costs the economy some \$31.5 billion, not to mention the sadness and distress associated with losing a loved one who has died as a consequence of their smoking habit.

In 2007, some 16.6 per cent of Australians aged 14 and over were smoking daily. That is a very sad statistic because it is the young, particularly young females, who are now taking up smoking, even though the cost of a packet of cigarettes is very substantial.

This bill is part of a package which included the 25 per cent tobacco excise increase introduced in April 2010, record investment in antismoking social marketing campaigns, and legislation to mandate plain packaging of tobacco products by 2012. This is a very important part of that package. In 1992 a very rigid ban on tobacco advertising was passed—the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992. This act is the primary vehicle governing advertising of tobacco products in Australia. It makes it an offence to give publicity to or to promote tobacco products. Giving away samples also needs to be banned, given the vulnerability of the very young. The act applies to all tobacco products, including pipes, cigars, pipe tobacco, loose tobacco and cigarette papers. It is very important to remember that tobacco does not just come in ready-made cigarettes.

Since the passage of the act in 1992 the use of the internet as an advertising medium

has become increasingly widespread. That is why this 2010 bill, which we are debating in 2011, is so important. The internet is clearly a major vehicle by which young people in particular can be exposed to tobacco advertising. Clearly, Australia has always been concerned about the effects of tobacco advertising since the health impacts became well known. We are now, today, seeking to strengthen the arm of the government in ensuring we do not have tobacco advertising continuing in the electronic media.

While we are strong on trying to help people give up tobacco smoking and strong on trying to stop people taking up smoking, which is so addictive, as we know, on the other hand we ignore the harmful effects of alcohol and the advertising of alcoholic products. For example, we still do not have labelling on alcohol which warns that it is a significant health risk particularly for women who are pregnant, that alcohol abuse is harmful to your health and that alcohol is harmful for minors in particular. Other countries that have health warning labels on alcohol include the United States, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, India, Sweden, Taiwan, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

So we have to wonder: why is Australia dragging the chain when it comes to advertising the harms of alcohol on products such as beer and other alcoholic beverages? A lot of our wineries and beer producers export their products to the countries that require label warnings. Those bottles or containers of alcohol must be labelled according to the other country's laws before the product can enter into those countries. It seems extraordinary that we stick a label on Australian products so that they can go into the United States—a government warning that says 'According to the Surgeon General women should not drink alcoholic beverages during

pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects', and if we send wine into France it must say, 'Alcohol abuse is dangerous to health', but we do not make it absolutely clear in Australia to those who pick up a bottle or a container of alcohol that alcohol is damaging to the health in the same way that smoking of cigarettes is dangerous to health.

A review of food labelling law and policy, called *Labelling Logic 2011*, has just been delivered to the Australian government. It is in remembrance of Dr Trevor Beard OBE, whose passionate contribution to this review and food reform more generally is acknowledged and appreciated. The panel members included Neal Blewett, Nick Goddard, Simone Pettigrew, Chris Reynolds and Heather Yeatman. They have put a number of recommendations to this government and one of them, recommendation 24, is:

That generic alcohol warning messages be placed on alcohol labels but only as an element of a comprehensive multifaceted national campaign targeting the public health problems of alcohol in society.

I could not agree with that recommendation any more strongly. I think it is an important recommendation. I repeat, it is extraordinary that in a country like Australia—where we have comprehensively understood the dangers of cigarette smoking, have sought to prevent people taking up cigarette smoking in the first instance and have tried to help people give up smoking—we ignore another product, which causes serious health effects. Alcohol causes serious problems for family members in terms of alcohol fuelled violence. It causes serious problems with accidents, lack of productivity and non-genetic birth defects in children. In fact, foetal alcohol syndrome is a serious problem amongst Australian children, particularly in some Indigenous communities. That condition is a consequence of the mother consuming alcohol during the early stages of her pregnancy.

The sad thing about the permanent intellectual and physical disabilities that are manifest in foetal alcohol syndrome in the newborn is that this condition is totally preventable. If the mother had not consumed alcohol during her pregnancy the baby would not have been born with permanent, irreversible intellectual and physical handicap.

Surely a country like ours must bite the bullet. We must now pick up the task of trying to make sure that Australians—despite a great drinking culture that is well entrenched in our society—tackle alcohol abuse. We must do this, in particular, through labelling, in the way that we sought to reduce the harm from tobacco smoking with a very effective ban on advertising and through quit smoking campaigns.

I commend this bill to the House. This bill makes sure that tobacco advertising will also be banned if it occurs in the electronic media. I strongly urge this government to consider also the need to ban alcohol advertising and to ensure—in line with other countries, both developed and developing, who want to protect their citizens from the harms of alcohol abuse—that labelling on alcohol products reflects that it is a health hazard.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (12.49 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010, and I do so as a former smoker. I know only too well the damage that I have done to my own body by smoking and I firmly believe that the government has a responsibility to encourage smokers to quit and to discourage people—especially young people—from taking it up.

At the core of this bill is the unfortunate reality that every time you smoke a cigarette you are contributing to your own demise. Recent anti-smoking ads tell us that if you are smoker, lung cancer does not discriminate. We should not exempt tobacco advertis-

ing from the prohibition simply because that advertising it is delivered on a particular platform.

I also support this bill due to an unfortunate reality that exists in my electorate of Greenway. According to the New South Wales Department of Health, Western Sydney, where most of my electorate lies, experiences some the highest rates of avoidable deaths from causes amenable to health care. This research shows 77.4 per cent of males under the age of 75 will die of avoidable deaths. A study undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in 2007 compared lung cancer mortality rates amongst people living in Western Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales and Australia. This study found that people in Western Sydney experienced the highest lung cancer mortality rate when compared to the aforementioned regions, and this is why I have a special responsibility to my electorate to support this bill.

Labor has a proud anti-smoking record. In April last year, the government announced its plans to increase tobacco excise by 25 per cent. We have invested record amounts in anti-smoking social marketing campaigns and we have proposed legislation to mandate plain packaging of tobacco products. But we can always do more to reduce smoking rates and that is why I am very pleased to speak in support of this bill.

This legislation builds on the government's proud record of taking action against smoking, making it an offence to advertise tobacco products on the internet and in other forms of electronic media, such as mobile devices or computers. As the bill's explanatory memorandum states:

The offence provisions contained in section 15A of the proposed amendments will apply to any person who publishes in Australia a tobacco advertisement in the Internet or via any electronic means.

The bill extends the definition of the term 'published in Australia' to include circumstances whereby the advertisement did not originate in Australia or where the origin is unknown and the advertiser had a significant Australian connection. This could include a situation in which the publisher is an Australian citizen, a permanent resident, a foreign person in Australia or a foreign entity. Consequently, the offence provisions would have, to some extent, extraterritorial operation. The maximum penalty offence under these amendments is \$13,200.

As members would be aware, the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992 banned most forms of tobacco advertising, specifically the broadcasting and publication of messages and images promoting the use of tobacco products. This was a response to an increase in incidental advertising by tobacco companies, specifically through the sponsorship of major sporting events and competitions. For example, the Cancer Council highlights the fact that in 1980 the biggest sponsors of sport in Australia were Phillip Morris, Amatil and Rothmans, who also happened to be the three largest tobacco companies in the country at that time.

Like the member for Dobell, I remember growing up and watching the cricket on TV over the summer holidays and the Benson & Hedges logo was plastered in nearly every shot. In fact, the Cancer Council's research reports that the Benson & Hedges name received a full 88 minutes of televised coverage on just one day of the Sydney test in 1988. Similarly, a longstanding sponsorship arrangement between Rothmans-Winfield and the New South Wales Rugby League required the league to assist Rothmans in the advertising and promoting of Rothmans' products. To achieve this objective, the league was required to fly the Winfield flags at all competition matches, to play the Winfield theme music at matches, to refer to

the competition as the Winfield Premiership, to display the Winfield and Rothmans logos at match venues, and to display floats and other visuals featuring Rothmans' products during the grand final.

Such a blatant means of promoting tobacco now seems highly inappropriate; however, at the time it was considered the norm. It was a dangerous norm that directly contributed to an uptake of smoking by many people, especially young people. Considering the popularity of sport in Australia, the close connection between tobacco companies and sporting competitions would have glamorised smoking. Indeed, there is a paradox in linking tobacco advertising and sport. As Stephen Martin, who as a member of this place in 1992 and who introduced the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Bill to the House, said:

There can hardly be a more bizarre association than that between a product which is known to be a killer and the health giving nature of sport.

The bill that was introduced in 1992, and subsequently passed, put an end to this insidious practice. However, there is no way that the law-makers of 1992 could have foreseen the rapid expansion of the internet and the development of online advertising. The growth of the internet and online advertising has in turn created an element of ambiguity as to how the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act should be applied. I am pleased that this legislation addresses this ambiguity.

Study after study shows a clear link between tobacco advertising and rates of smoking, and in turn there is a clear link between tobacco advertising and smoking related diseases. For instance, it is estimated that banning tobacco advertising could lead to a reduction in smoking by six per cent. It is also clear that incomplete or ambiguous bans on tobacco advertising have a limited effect on reducing smoking levels. A 2000 study pub-

lished in the *Journal of health economics*, 'The effect of tobacco advertising bans on tobacco consumption' argued that incomplete bans have had:

... little or no effect (on smoking rates) because companies transfer expenditure to media in which advertising is still allowed.

There is one other point I would like to raise—that is, the issue of political donations from tobacco companies. I believe it is wrong. Despite the fact that tobacco is a known killer, the coalition knows that it receives money from tobacco companies. I would like to note that the Labor Party does not receive funding from the tobacco industry. This industry makes a product that is responsible for the deaths of over 15,000 Australians every year, costing the economy \$31.5 billion per annum. This loss of life and the social costs can be prevented by a reduction in the level of smoking across our community. This issue requires leadership and this is the government to provide that, as was evident in Labor's decision to stop taking money from tobacco companies in 2004. I urge those opposite who have been touched by preventable deaths from cancer—and statistics tell us that it is just about all of us—to make a principled stand on the issue. I assure you the community will back you, those on this side of the House will back you and the children of those parents who will die from lung cancer will also back you.

The prohibition of tobacco advertising has a central role to play in reducing the rates of smoking, particularly amongst young people. Young people who smoke occasionally or socially become heavier smokers as they become older and have greater difficulty quitting. This becomes even more alarming when we consider the fact that only five years ago seven per cent of young people aged 12 to 15 years and 17 per cent of young people aged 16 to 17 years were smokers.

The popularity of new media technology amongst our youth has allowed advertising to access our young people in extremely pervasive and indirect ways. Targeted ads are a form of internet marketing. Using sophisticated data-collecting technologies, websites can combine a user's personal information with surfing preferences to create ads that are specifically tailored for that user. On Facebook alone there are over 200,000 people who list smoking as an interest, allowing advertisers to specifically target this group of people and their friends. It is no secret that those besieged by smoking advertisers are our young people. I believe this worrying reality can be curtailed by passing this bill.

Blacktown City Council, in which much of my electorate lies, has the highest number of smoking attributable hospitalisations compared to any other local government area in New South Wales. For this reason I believe I have a special obligation as a member in this place to support measures that reduce the rates of smoking across our community, and that is what I will be doing by voting in favour of this bill.

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (12.58 pm)—Like my Labor colleagues, I am very pleased to be able to add my support for the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010. I am sure they, like me, are very proud to be part of a government that has made tackling smoking rates and tobacco one of the major priorities in our health reform package. A lot of what we are doing to regulate tobacco, including prohibiting advertising and increasing the excise on tobacco products last year, have come out of the recommendations of the National Preventative Health Strategy. This is definitely something that is part of our broader health reform program—where preventative health is seen as a key to not only improving the quality of life of people but also making sure that our health budget in Australia is able to

meet the future demands that are going to be placed on it. We really need to make sure that as a government we send clear signals and provide relevant assistance to people right across the community so they can take more responsibility for their health and improve their own health and wellbeing.

The bill before us today is the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010. This bill takes Australia further down the road that we have been on for some decades now in restricting and regulating the advertising of tobacco products. Australia has had a really good record in bringing down smoking rates over the past few years, and it is common sense that a big part of that reduction in smoking rates could be attributed to the tightening of tobacco advertising that has happened through successive pieces of legislation.

We have heard from previous speakers that this very much goes back to the 1970s when the first national ban was imposed on direct tobacco advertising on radio and television. There were all sorts of loopholes and ways around that particular regulation in those days, and so there have been iterations over the following decades to try to tighten these up. In 1989 the Commonwealth government imposed a ban on print advertising of tobacco products, and in 1992, an attempt was made through the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act to close some of those loopholes and to get some uniformity across Australia because different things were appearing in different states and this allowed advertising of tobacco products to happen through the backdoor. So in 1992 the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act was introduced, and since then it has become the primary vehicle governing the advertising of tobacco products in Australia. It makes it an offence to give publicity to or to promote tobacco products.

Since then we have seen the explosion of new media technologies. Advertising and communication can now happen in ways that were not even dreamt of in 1992. Of course the use of the internet and social media sites have become very popular ways of communicating, particularly in getting messages across to young people, so that is where the Australian government has seen a need to act and that has brought about this bill. This bill is about clearing up any ambiguity that might still be in place about the legality of people advertising tobacco products on the internet. The amendment we are debating today makes it a specific offence to advertise tobacco products on the internet and all other electronic media and future technologies, unless such advertising complies with state or territory legislation or with Commonwealth regulations.

Section 34 of the act allows:

The Governor-General may make regulations prescribing matters:

- (a) required or permitted by this Act to be prescribed; or
- (b) necessary or convenient to be prescribed for carrying out or giving effect to this Act.

It is proposed that regulations will be made under the act to prescribe specific requirements as to the size, content, format and location of tobacco advertisements; the inclusion of health warnings; warnings about age restrictions on the sale of tobacco products; information about any fees, taxes and charges payable in relation to tobacco products; and age-restricted access systems for access to tobacco advertisements. The maximum penalty for each of those offences is \$13,200.

We see this as an important part of our overall strategy in reducing smoking in Australia: 2.9 million Australians smoke each day and smoking continues to be the leading

cause of preventable deaths in Australia. Each year smoking kills 15,000 Australians and costs the economy more than \$31 billion. The Labor government has made this a priority in our preventative health strategy, and we have already taken the lead in things like the increase in tobacco excise. It was the first increase in tobacco excise, above inflation, in more than a decade—an increase of 25 per cent.

We are really trying to tackle the use of tobacco with everything at our disposal as a government, and we need to make sure that everything is pointing in the same direction, so we are increasing the cost of tobacco products as an incentive for people to give up smoking. We are also, through the legislation that is before the House today, making sure that we strictly regulate the advertising and promotion of tobacco, particularly to young people. As has been well-publicised, we have also foreshadowed that legislation will come before this House later this year to introduce plain packaging of cigarettes and tobacco products—a world first. That is going to be a major step forward in the regulation of tobacco in this country, and another part of the government's determination to bring smoking rates down below the already internationally low rates that we have here in Australia.

We have also seen the start of a major advertising campaign. We saw the start of the new ads focusing on the health effects of smoking earlier this year. These are all things that have been recommended by the National Preventive Health Taskforce, and we really do remain committed to bringing down the smoking rates and doing everything we need to do as a government to make that happen.

There is one important thing I have neglected to mention which also came into effect earlier this year, and it underscores the fact that this is a very comprehensive policy

agenda. At the start of the year we also added nicotine patches to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, making sure that people who want to reduce or quit smoking are given every assistance to do so. If they are low-income earners they are able to get those products very affordably, thanks to the subsidy under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

As I have said before, I am very proud to be part of a government that has made this a priority. As the member for Greenway pointed out, it is often the people in our electorates who can least afford tobacco products and the kinds of treatment that would be required if they were diagnosed with cancer or other health effects of daily smoking. We really owe it to them to stand up to tobacco companies and make it as difficult as possible for them to get their message out and recruit new smokers and new consumers for their products. This is what this legislation today is all about. I am really pleased that it is part of a comprehensive package of measures, including the excise increase last year and the addition of nicotine patches to the PBS. I cannot wait to debate the bill later on in the year. That will see Australia take the lead in this area of tobacco regulation, by introducing the plain packaging of cigarettes. In the meantime, I commend this current bill to the House.

Mr LYONS (Bass) (1.09 pm)—I rise to speak about the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010. The bill addresses an ambiguity that exists regarding internet advertising of tobacco products, amending the act to specifically include advertising over the internet and other electronic media. This bill makes it an offence to advertise tobacco products on the internet and other electronic media such as mobile phones and computers unless the advertising complies with state and territory legislation or Commonwealth regulations.

The Gillard Labor government is committed to reducing the effects of tobacco on Australia's population. We acknowledge that tobacco remains one of the leading causes of preventable deaths amongst Australians. Our message is clear: smoking kills. Research tells us that people who begin smoking in their teen years are more likely to become regular smokers, smoke more heavily, have difficulty quitting and are at greater risk of getting smoking related diseases. The majority of adult smokers say they wish they had never started and that they would like to stop. In fact, around 80 per cent of Australian smokers have made attempts to quit. Tobacco causes more illness and death than any other drug. In 2004-05, 14,900 died from smoking related diseases, which accounts for around 89 per cent of all drug caused deaths. Research estimates that one in two lifetime smokers will die from a disease caused by their smoking.

Current marketing practices by the tobacco industry may be contributing to an increased rate of smoking amongst children. Whilst tobacco users are quitting every day, they are replaced by new smokers, most of whom are adolescents. The fact that adolescents smoke the most highly advertised brands indicates that they are responsive to these marketing campaigns. Research tells us that 70 per cent of young people are receptive to tobacco advertising. The tobacco industry's advertising and promotional products are filled with messages and images that reflect the qualities teenagers value, such as popularity, independence and 'coolness'. The marketing approaches imply that these qualities can be achieved by using their tobacco products.

There is a strong linkage between tobacco promotional activities and the uptake of smoking among adolescents. Brand loyalty is usually established with a child's first cigarette. Children relate their brand selection to

the influences of advertising, free sampling, promotional items, package design and the implied health benefits of low-tar, low-nicotine cigarettes.

Large promotional pushes by cigarette marketers have been linked with increased levels of daily smoking among adolescents. Tobacco marketing is a stronger influence in encouraging adolescents to initiate the smoking uptake process than peer, family or other social influences. There is clear evidence that children's attention is attracted by cigarette advertising and that they remember it. A comprehensive ban would have the largest impact on youth and young adult smoking.

On average, people smoke their first cigarette at the age of 16. Therefore, we need to target mobile phone and internet forms of advertising to ensure this age group are not bombarded with pro-tobacco marketing. This bill does exactly that. The media platforms that are accessed by young people today are continually evolving. The internet is a major vehicle through which young people can be exposed to tobacco advertising. Unregulated internet marketing and the promotion of tobacco products undermine the effectiveness of the TAP Act. That is why this amendment is so important.

We need to change the perception that is portrayed in advertising that smoking is the norm and bring retail and internet sales in line with each other. ComScore, a global leader in measuring the digital world, has estimated that nearly nine million Australians visited a social networking site in June 2009, making it one of the most popular content categories on the web. This includes websites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. Facebook was the most visited social networking destination, with more than six million visitors, growing 95 per cent from the previous year. MySpace ranked second, with 3.5 million visitors, up by five per cent,

followed by Windows Live Profile with nearly two million visitors. Twitter witnessed the most substantial growth, surging to 800,000 visitors in June, up from just 13,000 a year ago. It is concerning that tobacco products are advertised and targeted on the internet using social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook. It means that young people can easily be exposed to cigarette advertising that may not contain any health messages at all.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of social network marketing, information on advertising on Facebook can be found in the 2010 Nielsen online Asia-Pacific report. From this report we learn that social media is having an increasing impact on consumers' purchasing decisions. In the Asia-Pacific, online product reviews are the third most trusted source of information when making purchase decisions, behind family and friends. A survey of 117 companies in September 2009 by E-tailing shows that Facebook, blogs, Twitter and customer reviews are considered the most effective tactics for mobilising consumers to talk up products online. Tobacco companies know online advertising works.

While the amendments will apply to the promotion of tobacco on social networking sites, we acknowledge that the identification of the publisher of a tobacco advertisement on a social networking site is difficult. Many of the advertisements or promotions on sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Myspace are placed by anonymous users, so identifying or prosecuting the publisher can be difficult. This should not deter the passing of this legislation.

We need to do all we can as a government to limit the harmful advertising that is already available. The cost of tobacco use in Australia is high. According to Quit Victoria, in the financial year 2004-2005, the total social cost of tobacco use in Australia was

\$31.5 billion. This accounted for 56.2 per cent of the total social costs of all drugs, including alcohol and illicit drugs. Social costs include costs to government, business, smokers and their families. The figures include some costs of involuntary smoking, such as second-hand smoke exposure in the home and the exposure of unborn children to the effects of their mothers' smoking. These costs are mostly imposed upon the young. Children under 15 years account for 25 per cent of deaths, 96 per cent of hospital bed days and 91 per cent of hospital costs attributable to involuntary smoking.

In my research into smoking, I came across a harrowing phrase: 'imagine if a passenger airplane crashed in Australia each week'. This is approximately how many people die from smoking each week: 290 people. I will say it again: smoking is the largest single cause of death and disease in Australia. We as a government have a responsibility to try to curb smoking levels.

Consider the health effects: Some of the diseases caused by smoking include: cancer of the lip, lung, tongue, mouth, throat, nose, nasal sinus, voice box, esophagus, pancreas, stomach, kidney, bladder, cervix and bone marrow, along with heart disease, stroke, emphysema, asthma and blindness. As a former administrator at the Launceston General Hospital, it is evident to me that smoking not only has a terrible effect on health but also is a strong addiction that is hard to kick. Too many patients in every hospital around this nation are suffering because of tobacco. World renowned medical practitioners agree. Former US Surgeon General Dr Charles Koop once stated:

... cigarette smoking is clearly identified as the chief, preventable cause of death in our society ... Some 20 years earlier, Dr Luther Terry, another US Surgeon General, released the first Surgeon Generals report on smoking and

health. This landmark report linked smoking with cancer, heart disease and emphysema. He stated:

... no reasonable person should dispute that cigarette smoking is a serious health hazard.

I wanted to speak on this very important bill today because in my home state of Tasmania there is evidence that smoking rates have increased despite decreases in national trends. Alarming, a large number of Tasmanian women continue to smoke during pregnancy. In 2005, 27.6 per cent of pregnant women were found to have smoked during pregnancy—15.8 per cent having smoked fewer than 10 cigarettes per day and 11.8 per cent having smoked more than 10 a day. The high rate of smoking by women of child-bearing age is a major concern, not only for the health and wellbeing of young women but also because of the impact on fertility rates and on babies and small children exposed to environmental tobacco smoke. In 2004, 50 per cent of the Tasmanian Aboriginal adult population were found to be current smokers. This is far too high.

I am most pleased to say that, in my local community, the Launceston City Council has taken a proactive approach to curb smoking in public areas such as the mall and near bus stations in the city centre. I extend to them my thanks and congratulations. The move was not without community debate, but it was the right decision. Our state Labor government was the first in Australia to introduce a ban on indoor smoking, such as in restaurants, pubs and clubs. What a great difference that made. They followed this by enacting legislation making it an offence to smoke in a car with person under the age of 18.

Tobacco use is Australia's single largest cause of premature death and disease, killing 15,000 Australians a year and costing our economy \$31.5 billion. Now is the time to

act. This amendment should not be delayed. Our internet tobacco legislation will mean that online sales, advertising and promotion of tobacco will now be subject to the same kinds of restrictions that are placed on over-the-counter sales. This, in my opinion, is a great step forward. As VicHealth CEO Todd Harper said of tobacco companies:

We must ensure they aren't able to use the internet to recruit young smokers.

I wholeheartedly agree with this statement. Companies promoting cigarettes on the internet currently do not have to display the same health warnings on their products as retailers with a physical point of sale. The legislation shuts this loophole. That amendment is also an important step in reaching the benchmarks set under the COAG National Healthcare Agreement of reducing smoking rates to 10 per cent by 2018 and halving the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smoking rate.

Together with our efforts to mandate the plain packaging of tobacco products from 2012, Australia is on track to have the world's toughest measures against tobacco. Australia's comprehensive approach to tobacco control, with sustained and coordinated actions from the Commonwealth and state governments—including excise bans, advertising bans, bans on smoking in workplaces and public spaces as well as anti-smoking advertising campaigns—over several decades, has seen smoking rates cut from 30.5 per cent in 1988 to 16.6 per cent in 2007. This is a fantastic achievement.

The main impact of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010 will be on retailers who advertise their products without the required health warnings and as being 'tax free'. Essentially this amendment fosters a level playing field because restrictions placed on over-the-counter sales of tobacco products and online sales will no

longer be different. I am pleased the Gillard Labor government is taking a strong stance on smoking. We have much more to do, particularly with educating our young people so they do not start smoking in the first place. I commend the bill to the House and I hope those on the opposite do the same.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (1.23 pm)—I speak in support of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010. Growing up in a sports-mad household in Ipswich, as I did, playing rugby league, soccer, basketball and cricket, as so many of my friends did and my brothers—we were absolutely fanatics when it came to sports in my area; that is perhaps one of the reasons you see me jogging around the lake and in the gym—one of the things I remember doing when I was in high school, at what is now known as Bundamba State Secondary College, was an assignment in biology on the short-term and long-term effects of smoking on the respiratory and circulatory systems of the human body. At that particular time I recall that many of my mates in basketball and soccer smoked. Indeed, I recall that for one or two of them the last thing they did before they got on the court to play basketball was to light up a cigarette. In those days our coaches did not think anything of it. Indeed, we had sports idols smoking and promoting cigarettes.

I can recall as a young fella going to the cricket at the Gabba and seeing advertising for tobacco companies—and at Lang Park for rugby league. The rugby league Bulimba Cup games between Ipswich, Toowoomba and Brisbane usually had tobacco advertising festooned around North Ipswich Reserve, Lang Park or up at Toowoomba. You did not think anything of it. Looking back it just appalls me that we knew from the early 1950s the effect of smoking on the human body. Now we have seen the evidence from large tobacco companies in the United States be-

fore congressional committees denying their knowledge of the impact of tobacco on people's health and the deaths caused from cancer initiated by tobacco.

We have come a long way with respect to these issues, but in so many of our trading partners in the East—in Asia, North Asia and South Asia—you can see, when you travel through them, the advertising that was common in Australia for a long time continuing over there. These tobacco companies are insidious when they target young people, vulnerable people and people who could be influenced by sports stars. They will use every form of media and every opportunity they can take to get into hearts and minds and to influence people—whether it is sports stars, media stars or even the way they do it in product placement in movies. How many heroes in our movies light up? Whether it is after acts of copulation or courage, it does not make any difference—they light up in the movies. These companies engage in those sorts of activities to promote their products. In this particular piece of legislation we are trying to close another loophole, because they will take any opportunity to promote their products in this way.

Smoking is the greatest cause of preventable death in the developed world. That is the reality. If people stopped smoking, 15,000 Australians would simply cease to die prematurely. We have made a big effort with respect to smoking in this country. I outline the fact that you no longer see the Benson & Hedges World Series Cricket and you no longer see the Winfield Cup in rugby league. You do not see tobacco company advertising festooned or labelled across football teams. You do not see it and that is terrific.

We have seen the smoking rates cut, as the minister said in her second reading speech, from 30.5 per cent in 1988 to 16.6 per cent in 2007. But we do know—the facts are there—

that smoking and deaths from smoking cost \$30 billion each year. We are talking about 16.6 per cent of Australians aged between 14 years and over smoking daily. We know as federal members when we go to a railway station to hand out our pamphlets—some would call it propaganda—during a campaign, how many young people smoke, how many young girls smoke, how many young pregnant women smoke. We can see it. This is damaging not just to themselves but to their unborn babies.

Every time a person lights up it impacts on their health, and, often, impacts on the health of their loved ones and their friends. So I am pleased we see smoking banned in so many hotels, motels and public places. I think it is a good thing. We need, of course, coordinated efforts from state and federal governments to introduce tough anti-smoking laws. I am proud of the fact that I represent not just the constituency of Blair but a political party that refuses to take donations from tobacco companies. I am proud of the fact that we have taken this stance, because I think it is the honourable thing to do—and I urge all political parties, including those opposite, to similarly take that stance.

The Cancer Council of Queensland has advocated strongly that we should take steps to fight tobacco consumption across the country. They have urged smoke-free cities and towns in the lead-up to the World No Tobacco Day each year. They have endorsed and supported, of course, federal and state government decisions on tobacco control, stamping out these types of activities. Cancer in Queensland is a serious issue. Each year nearly 21,000 Queenslanders are diagnosed with cancer and over 7,000 Queenslanders die of the disease. It is a tragedy in my state. It is a tragedy nationally as well. Thousands of Queenslanders refuse to give up, but I am pleased that we were able to announce at the end of last year that nicotine patches would

be subsidised under the PBS, and the Cancer Council of Queensland endorsed that activity.

We have had clear evidence since the 1950s of the dangers of smoking, but still there are nearly three million Australians smoking. Cancer of the lung is one of the most deadly killers of both genders. The National Preventative Health Taskforce has set a national target to reduce smoking rates to less than 10 per cent; that is a reduction of about a million smokers each year. This would prevent the deaths of so many Australians.

This legislation is part of a package that we have undertaken that includes the 25 per cent tobacco excise increase which was introduced on 29 April 2010, the record investments we have undertaken in antismoking social marketing campaigns that you can see when you watch the media, and the legislation which we propose to bring in to mandate plain packaging of tobacco products by 2012. I think that is a good initiative. I know that some people have concerns about the handling of plain packaging products by retailers, in relation to the design, but I think this is an important measure. The changes will not be popular with everyone, but I think we have a responsibility to encourage smokers to quit and to discourage people, particularly young people, from taking up this filthy habit.

I was pleased to hear the announcement by the Minister for Health and Ageing on 29 April 2010. It is a good initiative that she released in terms of the package. This bill will make it an offence to advertise tobacco products on the internet or in any other electronic media such as mobile phones and computers, unless we have compliance with state and territory legislation or Commonwealth government regulations. The meaning of 'published in Australia' has been extended

in the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Act 2010 to apply in a variety of different circumstances where the advertiser has a significant connection to Australia or is an Australian citizen or a resident of Australia. Where it is an entity or a company, a connection would be where it is incorporated or formed in Australia, is a foreign person in Australia, a foreign entity or an incorporated body with its management or control—such as its board of directors—in Australia. I think that extra territoriality is a good thing to broaden the opportunity and scope for the legislation to apply. Of course, the internet knows no borders and Australians buy goods and services over the internet across the world.

The bill looks at an obscure provision regarding the internet advertising of tobacco products and amends that legislation specifically to include advertising over the internet, so it closes the gap with respect to that and other electronic media. I think that this legislation brings internet advertising into line with television, radio and print advertising. We have legislation to restrict advertising in those areas in cultural and sporting activities, whether it is horseracing, rugby league, AFL, or even at the movies.

We do anticipate that there will be some opposition to even these types of amendments, but we think—and I am sure the minister has made this plain to the large tobacco companies—that it will not really have much impact on tobacco companies' activities. They will continue to sell their product; I wish they did not, but they will continue to do it. The main impact will be on the retailers who advertise tobacco products without the requisite health warnings and tax free—advertising what they would describe as less expensive or cheap cigarettes. Those retailers will be consulted; we will not do this in the absence of having some discussions with them. They will include the big chains that

we buy our goods from each day. You can imagine that organisations like Woolworths and Coles will be consulted and other tobacco and cigar retailers will also be in the loop in discussions in relation to those issues.

I urge all the schools and community groups in my electorate to think clearly about the need to address this issue. I really welcome the initiative and the establishment of the Medicare Locals. On Friday I met Kim Morrish, the CEO of the Ipswich and West Moreton Division of General Practice. That division works closely with the Brisbane South Division of General Practice. Vicki Poxon is the CEO of that particular division. One of the aspects I would urge the Medicare Locals in the West Moreton and Oxley region to take up is the idea of funding and targeting services in terms of not just local diabetes care, which is a big issue in the western corridor, but also some antismoking activities and targets. I think that is an opportunity for the Medicare Locals in my area who work with primary health care, particularly doctors.

The Division of General Practice in the western corridor do a great service. We have got the psychology clinic attached to the University of Queensland, where the GP superclinic is. But improving patient care by dealing with antismoking activities in our schools, in our community groups, across the medical practices in the western corridor in the Ipswich and West Moreton area is a good focus for the Medicare Local which will be established. I welcome the new boundaries in that area, and I think this is a great opportunity for the new Medicare Local to undertake some antismoking activities by advertising and really reaching out with doctors, allied health professionals and nurses in the schools and the various groups.

The Prime Minister made it plain in her press release on 22 February 2011, when we released our new guidelines for the Medicare Locals, that they would help health practitioners. They will improve the patient journey through developing integrated and coordinated services. I can think of no better activity for the new Medicare Local in the West Moreton and Oxley region than to undertake an antismoking activity and coordinated campaign.

I think this is a good opportunity to do that because it will get doctors and allied health professionals from the south-west of Brisbane, the Brisbane Valley, the Lockyer Valley and the Boonah Shire involved in this particular case. There are people, doctors and other allied professionals in that corridor with particular expertise in this area, so I would urge Kim Morrish, Vicki Poxon and all the people associated with the new Medicare Locals, which will be established in my region, to think about this type of campaign. I think this is a very effective way for primary health care to be delivered in the West Moreton region and I strongly urge them to do this. The primary healthcare service confronting the issues of smoking and the use of tobacco is so important. This legislation is good legislation which will help my community and communities across the whole of Australia.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (1.38 pm)—I too rise to speak in support of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010. This bill brings internet advertising of cigarettes and tobacco products in line with advertising of tobacco products via other methods. Over the years governments around the world have imposed advertising restrictions as part of their antismoking strategies. It seems, however, that there are always new and sometimes very clever tactics used by tobacco manufacturers and retailers to market their products. We are all familiar with

many examples, whether that is by using retailers to promote different products, having films and celebrities effectively being advertising agents for them, being associated with a whole range of sports events or, as we are seeing now, marketing via Facebook and the internet.

No product that I am aware of is as regulated by governments as is tobacco. One has to wonder, given that we go to such extents to regulate tobacco use in this country and around the world for that matter, why we continue to allow it to be a legally sold product. The World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which was adopted on 21 May 2003 and came into force on 2 February 2005, has been adopted by 171 parties. It was ratified by Australia on 27 October 2004. Article 13, which I will not go into detail on because it is a fairly lengthy section of the framework, specifically relates to advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

The intention of this bill is to clarify the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act by, firstly, making it a specific offence to advertise or promote tobacco products on the internet and all other electronic media and future technologies unless compliant with state or territory legislation or Commonwealth regulations; and, secondly, enabling the making of regulations in relation to internet tobacco advertising to, firstly, prescribe the size, content, format and location of tobacco advertisements, secondly, to include health warnings, age restrictions on the sale of tobacco products and information about any fees, taxes and charges payable in relation to tobacco products, and, thirdly, to implement age restricted access systems for access to tobacco advertisements.

Existing legislation has simply not kept up with technological change in this regard, with cigarettes being marketed to children and teenagers through websites and social

media networks. This bill will remove ambiguity regarding internet advertising of tobacco products. This bill also forms part of a raft of measures enacted by the government to reduce the harm caused by tobacco. Other measures enacted include the 25 per cent tobacco excise increase, investments in anti-smoking marketing campaigns, and legislation to mandate plain packaging of tobacco products by 2012.

I want to touch on a range of matters associated with the use of tobacco products. Other speakers in the course of this debate have highlighted the fact that smoking in Australia leads to some 15,000 deaths per annum and that it costs this nation around \$31.5 billion per year. What is interesting is that, following World War II, throughout this country about three-quarters of the male population smoked and about a quarter of the female population smoked. By the mid-1970s the number of male smokers had dropped to around 43 per cent of the population, but the number of female smokers increased to 33 per cent and hit its peak around that time. It is interesting to follow those trends.

A range of campaigns associated with the promotion of cigarette products clearly appeal to different sectors of society. Today, about 19 per cent of the population are smokers, but what is particularly important in that figure of 19 per cent is that most became smokers at a very young age. It has been suggested that around 80 per cent of smokers are addicted at below the age of 18 years. In fact, on the flip side of that, it has also been suggested that only about five per cent of smokers took up the habit after the age of 24 years. That is critical and interesting to this legislation because it highlights that it is in those years that the most effective marketing campaigns by tobacco companies will occur—the campaigns that specifically target younger people.

We all know—and statistics will bear this out—that young people are the most likely to use the internet. They are the most familiar with it and the most likely to spend more time on it than any other age group in society. Therefore, it is not surprising to see the internet being used as a marketing tool by the tobacco companies. The people whom they need to target to become addicted to smoking are the very people who use the internet most. This particular bill is so important because it begins to provide some restrictions on the kind of advertising that is available through the internet. I have no doubt that tobacco companies will always continue to find smart ways of trying to get to that age sector, but this is one step that we need to take in order to try and reduce their ability to influence young people before they take up the habit.

Debate interrupted.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Aston Electorate: Rowville Rail Link

Mr TUDGE (Aston) (1.45 pm)—A little over a week ago a significant announcement was made in my electorate by the Victorian transport minister—that is, that the Rowville rail feasibility study would soon be underway. The Rowville rail project has been talked about for decades, but we have never got traction on it and now we finally will. With a rapidly growing population and rapidly increasing congestion, this project is critically important. It would link up Monash University and allow local residents to travel into the CBD within 30 minutes. It would take the equivalent of a lane of traffic off the Monash Freeway.

This feasibility study is the critical next step to making this rail project happen. It was promised by the Bracks government in 1999 but it was not delivered. Now this study will be delivered. I was campaigning for the Rowville rail link prior to being elected and I

am continuing to do so now. If the feasibility study finds that the project stacks up, I will be doing everything I can to ensure that it gets funding.

The rationale the Gillard government has given for investing in urban rail projects in Brisbane and Sydney is equally applicable to the Rowville rail link. This is a very important project that would benefit thousands of people in the outer east. With the feasibility study underway, we are one step closer to seeing this project being realised.

Snowy Hydro SouthCare Rescue Helicopter

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (1.46 pm)—I rise today to pay tribute to the staff and volunteers of the Snowy Hydro SouthCare Rescue helicopter based in Symonston in my electorate. I was fortunate enough to attend the presentation awards to those people involved with the SouthCare system by the Governor-General Friday a week ago. The award recipients were recognised for the great service they provide to the people of the ACT and southern New South Wales. At the awards the Governor-General spoke about the ‘golden hour’—the time following an accident, where swift medical attention increases the chances of survival. Snowy Hydro SouthCare is vital in ensuring that medical attention can be rendered during this golden hour.

Over 4,000 missions have been performed by the SouthCare chopper. This service saves the lives of people each day through airlift and search and rescue services. I pay tribute to the medical crew, air crew and staff who ensure this service is able to save the lives of so many. I particularly want to congratulate those members of the service who volunteer. Volunteering is such an important part of our society, and so many events and organisations would be paralysed without their tireless work. Snowy Hydro SouthCare is no

different. I pay tribute to Mal and Marg Grimley, Dana and Russ Whitty, Randy Kellar and Nic Wienke for their superb volunteer efforts in ensuring that this service continues to be provided to the people of Canberra and the capital region. Again, I congratulate all the award recipients and thank them on behalf of the people of Canberra.

Smith, Mr Harold William

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (1.48 pm)—I rise this afternoon to recognise and remember the wonderful life of Harold William Smith—known to all of those who knew him in the local area as Harry Smith. Harry passed away on 8 February at 80 years of age. He was married to his wife Barbara for 58 years. He was a devoted husband and father to their seven children. He lived for 60 years in our local community. He was a family man and a community man. He was a great servant of this country. He was a Korean War veteran and served Australia with distinction. He followed up that service with still further service to the RSL, serving on the state executive for many years and at the community level working hard to re-establish the Lilydale RSL, which today is such a strong organisation. In his later years he also worked with the Monbulk RSL. He will be sadly missed by his family and his community. As I said, he was a family man, a community, a quintessential Australian who will always be remembered for his wonderful contribution to our local area and our nation. (*Time expired*)

Lyons Electorate: New Horizons

Mr LYONS (Bass) (1.50 pm)—I rise to talk about a function that I attended at Windsor Park, at the Launceston Football Club on Friday night. It was the presentation of the New Horizons awards. New Horizons is a club that creates sporting opportunities for people with a disability. I was absolutely amazed at the enthusiasm of the bocce,

bowls, athletics and swimming competitors presented with awards. It is a fantastic organisation that has been going for a long time in northern Tasmania. I would like to pay tribute to Belinda Kitto, a wonderful young person who runs most of the sports in that organisation. It is a fantastic group of people with tremendous enthusiasm. I would like to particularly mention Mrs O'May, who was granted life membership on Friday night. Mrs O'May has been with New Horizons for a long time. She and her husband have been involved in taking rowing with a disability. She was treasurer for 11 years and has been on the board for such a long time. I pay tribute to the enthusiasm of these people, who are really keen on sport and have done a fantastic job. The New Horizons Club has done a fantastic job for the people of northern Tasmania, and I congratulate them on the effort that they put in.

Carbon Pricing

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (1.51 pm)—The new carbon tax of Labor and the Greens will increase costs and create even more uncertainty in the agricultural sector. Irrespective of whether agriculture is being excluded from the carbon tax, farmers will be exposed to much higher input costs—whether for electricity, fuel, fertiliser, transport or machinery—which are critical to the viability of the farming sector.

Our farmers will not be able to compete with cheap imports or exports that are not subject to a price on carbon. Whether they be the orchardists in my area or anywhere around Australia, the dairy farmers from Gippsland, New South Wales, WA or Queensland, the cane growers in Bundaberg or grain growers from the central west of New South Wales all the way to WA, profitability will plummet and more farmers will be squeezed from the industry.

During the election campaign the Prime Minister said, 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead,' but she has broken her promise. The Prime Minister has broken her promise for Senator Bob Brown and the Greens, so we know that any claim that agriculture will be excluded cannot be trusted. As sure as night becomes day, Labor and the Greens will include agriculture in this great big new tax. Labor may be in government, but the Greens are in power and the Greens will bring us all down if they can.

Throsby Electorate: Warrawong High School

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (1.53 pm)—I take this opportunity to congratulate one of the winners of this year's ABC *Heywire* competition, Miss Babli Rawat, a student of Warrawong High School in my electorate of Throsby. Miss Rawat's winning entry for the *Heywire* competition was a video telling the story of her arrival in Australia as a displaced person from northern India and her battle to make a new beginning here. The video cleverly matches her struggle to settle in to her new environment with that of establishing a permaculture garden at Warrawong High School which was striving to put down roots at the very same time that she was.

As members would be aware, *Heywire* is a great competition run by the ABC that enables young people from regional Australia to share their stories and opinions on issues that affect them and their lives. The 33 winning entrants from this year's competition, including Miss Rawat, have received an all-expenses paid trip to the *Heywire* Youth Issues Forum to be held this month at the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate Miss Rawat's teachers at Warrawong High School for their ongoing support of so many students who come to the school from a mul-

ticultural background with the challenges that this entails. The teachers do a wonderful job not only for Miss Rawat but also for the entire school community. Again, I congratulate Miss Rawat on her win and wish her all the very best for the future. *(Time expired)*

Durack Electorate: Law Enforcement

Mr HAASE (Durack) (1.54 pm)—I rise to draw to the attention of the House an ongoing and almost permanent practice in regional communities across Western Australia. In the Middle East we are trying to establish democracy, across the globe we are trying to stamp out racial practices and yet, when an Indigenous funeral is held in a regional centre in Western Australia, the Western Australia Police, because of either the misguided nature of the police force or their inability to contain law and order in these communities, impose their draconian attitudes upon liquor purveyors in these towns.

It is not acceptable. We must not kowtow to the tiniest group in the community simply because of the tree-huggers' attitude when it comes to the consumption of alcohol. We have to get back to the basics and have democracy for one and all and freedom to trade. If you buy a business, you must be able to keep your doors open. Because of a simple attitude of one part of the community, you must not have your commercial opportunities to make a profit in a legitimate business restricted.

More and more we are finding that, because authorities have no satisfactory explanation for the consumption of alcohol to excess in our communities, they shut establishments down and simply send the guilty elsewhere to purchase their alcohol at inflated prices at the penalty of the innocent who are denied the opportunity to buy a legal substance.

Blair Electorate: Bundamba State Secondary College

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (1.56 pm)—I am pleased to congratulate school leaders at my old high school, Bundamba State Secondary College. I attend there on 15 February 2011. I congratulate Andrew Peach, the new school principal who took over this year. The guest speaker on the day—in fact, the school principal for the day—was former Ipswich, Canberra, Queensland and Australian Rugby League great Steve Walters. I have known Steve for a while—he grew up in the same suburb as me. Steve assured me that he did not hand out too many detentions that day. He gave a good speech congratulating the school leaders.

I particularly congratulate college captains, John Bond and Holly Wilson, school vice captains, Sarah Bosel and Ellie Keim, the student council president, Skye Ebert, the environmental chairperson, Laikin Hutchison, and the social chairpersons, Sophie Fynes-Clinton and Rebecca Cochran. A number of other people were also involved.

I congratulate the house captains, including one particular house captain, William Stoneman, who is the captain of Wombats. William is a great young fellow. Unfortunately, he has an interesting mother who works for me as an electorate officer. Kylie does great work in my electorate and William is taking after her. He is a wonderful young fellow who works hard in his local community and deserves to be the Wombats house captain. Congratulations to all the school leaders at Bundamba State Secondary College.

Wright Electorate: Dairy Industry

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (1.57 pm)—I rise to protect the interests of and stand up and represent the dairy farmers in my electorate, I rise to protect my corner shops, cafes and milk bars and I rise to protect milk

vendors who have recorded up to 30 per cent decreases in route trades. In the electorate of Wright these are uncertain times with the current situation of Coles pushing two litres of milk for \$2. The uncertainty of the market is due to a direct push by the retailers to gain market share in the grocery sector. Whilst we operate in a free market and it is the right of any company to turn a profit, those lines should be funded by profits and not at the hands of smaller business. We as a nation have the protection mechanisms in place to stop big business from pushing out small business. This protection is provided by the Competition and Consumer Act 2010—previously the Trade Practices Act—under section 46A(1) Misuse of market power.

I will not accept any throwaway comments by John Durkan, Coles merchandise director, that:

Coles has no direct influence over farm gate prices because Coles buys milk from processing companies, not from dairy farmers.

He knows that when he starts negotiating with our processors the downward pressure on those prices will end up with lesser prices at our farm gates. Last week I had two meetings with Coles and I made several phone calls to the Queensland dairy farmers' organisations. As recently as Saturday, I visited the Dennis family's dairy farm in my electorate. They are struggling to make ends meet.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being approximately 2 pm, members' statements are interrupted.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (1.59 pm)—I inform the House that the Minister for Foreign Affairs will be absent from question time this week as he is attending the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. The Minister for Trade will answer questions on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Carbon Pricing

Mr ABBOTT (2.00 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Today, Prime Minister, I was in Queanbeyan, talking to a bus proprietor who said that a carbon tax on petrol would not only push up fuel prices by at least 6½c a litre but also push up ticket prices and put more cars on the road. I ask the Prime Minister: why should small businesses like Deane's Buslines trust the Prime Minister on anything when she could not keep her promise not to introduce a carbon tax?

Ms GILLARD—I presume when the Leader of the Opposition was having this discussion that he was also talking about whether or not that small business person wanted to see a strong economy and that he was also talking about whether or not that small business person wanted to see us have the clean energy jobs of the future. I hope he was also talking to that small business person about the way in which the Leader of the Opposition, in the last few days, has gone around trying to mislead Australians about this important debate in pursuit of a fear campaign, because the only thing the Leader of the Opposition ever came to this parliament to do was to stop things, wreck things and destroy things.

As the Leader of the Opposition well knows, what the government has announced is a mechanism to price carbon. What the Leader of the Opposition well knows is that a carbon price has not been announced yet; nor has the household assistance package. Yet despite that, the Leader of the Opposition and members of the shadow cabinet are wandering around trying to create fear amongst Australians about what impact this will have on them. Every day they go around with different figures. The shadow minister earlier said \$1,100—he just made a figure up. The New South Wales opposition leader

is wandering around with \$500—he just made a figure up. The Leader of the Opposition is wandering around with figures like \$300 and 6½c. All of these figures have been made up by the Leader of the Opposition in pursuit of his fear campaign.

But what the Leader of the Opposition has never done and what he will never do is become honest with the Australian people and say to them that he himself has personally endorsed a carbon tax as the simplest way of pricing carbon and that he himself has said that every decision he has ever made about this has not been about the policy or what is in Australia's national interest, but about the politics—pure and simple. The only judgment he has ever made about this has been as a weathervane, holding his finger up to see how he could politically profit from this rather than have the nation profit from it.

The Leader of the Opposition should also come clean with the Australian people and explain to them that he wants to saddle on their shoulders \$10.5 billion of ineffective measures, ripping money out of their purses and wallets to use in pursuit of his ineffective direct action measures. That is what the Leader of the Opposition should be honest about. Let's have this debate. Let's have it loud and clear, in this parliament and beyond. We stand for action; you stand for inaction. We stand for giving businesses certainty; you stand for uncertainty. We stand for generously assisting households; you stand for rising power prices with no assistance. We stand for making sure we make a difference to our economy and create a clean energy economy for the future; you stand for no prosperity, no jobs and no prospects.

Carbon Pricing

Mr CHAMPION (2.04 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. How will a carbon price help Australia become a clean energy nation, and why is this reform needed?

Ms GILLARD—I was in the electorate of the member for Wakefield today, and I was there for a very important announcement. I was there for the rolling off of the production line of the first Holden Cruze—a smaller, greener vehicle being manufactured by Holden in this country. When I had the great privilege of actually turning the key and driving that first Holden Cruze off the production line, I reflected to myself on fear campaigns past. The member for Wakefield and other members of this House would recall when the Hawke government set about modernising our economy and cutting tariffs. People were out there beating the drums of fear. They were saying, 'What this means is Australia will be a bankrupt place. Industry will suffer. There will be no jobs. We will never manufacture things in this country.' But cutting tariffs sent a price signal to Australian industry to get more efficient. Here we are, all these years later, and what has Holden done? It has got more efficient and it is a great tribute to its workforce that it has engaged in those efficiencies, a great tribute to management and a great tribute to the relevant unions, all of which have worked together to keep Holden manufacturing here—and now proudly manufacturing the new Holden Cruze.

What we should learn from this is the lesson of history, that fear campaigns are just that and that fear campaigns appeal to people because they want them to be afraid of the future. But, really, we want to build a future that has a clean energy economy with jobs. We are a confident people. We have engaged in major economic reforms before, and the legacy of those major economic reforms is a more prosperous country with higher-skilled jobs—an Australia that can make its way in the world. We are up to doing that again. Carbon pollution is the challenge of our age, just the way tariffs were the challenge of the

Hawke-Keating era, and we are up to meeting this challenge.

That is why I am determined that we will price carbon, that we will cut carbon pollution. That will send a price signal, which means people will respond. Businesses will innovate; they will become cleaner and greener. We will have a clean energy future with all of the jobs that go with it. I can confidently say to this parliament today that, after we have priced carbon and this system has come into effect, people will look back at this fear campaign by the Leader of the Opposition and they will look at him the way the future always looks at people who miss the wave of history—people who misjudge the big calls. They will look at him as an ultimately hollow person who sought to profit from fear but ultimately did not. We will get on with creating the clean energy jobs of the future, the Australian prosperity of the future. Australians are too smart, too confident, too worldly and they have been through too much in terms of major economic reform to succumb to this cheap, empty fear campaign.

Carbon Pricing

Mr TRUSS (2.08 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the statement by the member for Melbourne on Friday: ‘The agreement that we’ve reached has transport as being included in a carbon price mechanism.’ Has the Greens member for Melbourne been more honest than the Prime Minister with the Australian people by at least admitting that the Greens have forced her to include petrol in her carbon tax?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the Leader of the National Party for his question. What I would say to the Leader of the National Party is what I have said publicly on a number of occasions now, which is: decisions will be worked through by the government

and in the multiparty climate change committee about sectors of the economy that the carbon price will apply to, including whether or not it will apply to petrol. Those decisions are still to come. I indicated when statements were made, and reported in the media, on Saturday by the Deputy Leader of the Greens that it was inappropriate to be making those statements when those decisions and discussions were yet to come. But, given that the Leader of the National Party has raised with me statements made by people about carbon pricing, I have actually got a few of them he might be interested in. The Leader of the Opposition said:

If you want to put a price on carbon why not just do it with a simple tax?

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—Yes, we know you are embarrassed—

Mr Pyne—A point of order, Mr Speaker—

The SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his place. The Manager of Opposition Business is warned—on the fact that he was at the dispatch box for a point of order and did not take the point of order; that is why he is warned. To anticipate the point of order: the words used by the Prime Minister are very much the old parliament. If a statement was referred to, it used to be able to be construed as relevant to a question to then refer to other statements. But for statements to be used they must refer directly to the question and not be used just because they are statements.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and thank you for that clarification. Of course, the words of the Leader of the Opposition are always strictly irrelevant to national debates; I do understand and accept your guidance on that.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will go to the question.

Ms GILLARD—The Leader of the National Party raises with me decisions that are yet to come on questions like carbon pricing and petrol. I can assure the Leader of the National Party that, as we go about making these decisions, we will do it in Australia's national interest. I can also assure the Leader of the National Party that that approach will be in stark contrast to the approach ever taken by the opposition, because whether you make decisions in the national interest or in the political interest has been clarified by the Leader of the Opposition. He said about climate change:

I don't think my assessment of the science or of the policies ever changed that much. I think all that really changed was my assessment of the politics of the issue.

Hollow to the core.

Carbon Pricing

Ms O'NEILL (2.12 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Why is setting a carbon price the most efficient way to cut carbon pollution, and why is it vital for creating certainty for future investment?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for her question. I know that she is deeply concerned, living as she does in a very beautiful part of the world, about carbon pollution and she is also very concerned about economic prospects for the future.

We live in a country that has abundant sources of renewable energy: solar, wind, geothermal, tidal—abundant sources of renewable energy. As a country, we therefore can profit by having a clean energy future, by innovating and by having the jobs of the future. It is not in the interests of our nation to be left behind as the world changes. We need to cut carbon pollution. Despite the Leader of the Opposition's ability to wreck and destroy things, one thing he has not

wrecked as yet is a bipartisan commitment to a minus five per cent reduction in carbon pollution by 2020. In order to reach that reduction in carbon pollution, we need to price carbon. To do anything else would be costly and inefficient. I refer of course to the words that were written in the incoming government briefs, and the Leader of the Opposition received this and would have seen their words: 'Direct action measures alone cannot do the job'—that is, of cutting carbon pollution by minus five per cent—'without imposing significant economic and budget costs.'

Indeed, the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency has estimated that even with the Leader of the Opposition's direct actions measures emissions will rise 17 per cent above 2000 levels, whereas the target is minus five. What does that mean for the difference? That means the Leader of the Opposition's plan to deal with climate change is to buy \$20 billion in carbon credits to meet the gap between where his direct action measures take you to and the minus five per cent target. That is in addition to the \$10.5 billion he has pledged in direct action measures and, of course, it is in addition to his \$11 billion black hole from his reckless election accounting.

When you add all of that up it means the Leader of the Opposition's strategy for climate change is to make households worse off by around \$600 a year. There is no such thing as a no-cost approach, and what the Leader of the Opposition wants to do is make households worse off by \$600 a year.

On this side of the parliament we stand for pricing carbon in the most efficient way. If you are pricing carbon in the most efficient way then you are putting a price on carbon through a market mechanism, through trading permits to release carbon pollution. That is what the government went to the last election saying to the Australian people we

should do and that is exactly what we are going to do.

Today before question time the Leader of the Opposition has confirmed that he now holds the most reckless political position taken by a national leader in the last 15 years. After we have priced carbon, given businesses certainty and households assistance, he is committed to ripping all of that up—the most reckless political position taken by a national leader in 15 years. We will be holding him to account for that every minute of every hour of every day of every week of every month of every year, and Australians will see exactly how wrong and reckless he is.

Carbon Pricing

Ms JULIE BISHOP (2.17 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the minutes of the special caucus meeting of 24 June 2010 and I quote from then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's address to ALP colleagues:

As you know, I changed our position on the emissions trading scheme, and I'm responsible for that change in position. I wish to place on record here that Lindsay Tanner and Penny Wong strongly argued to me against taking that position. Equally strong was the advice from Wayne and Julia that the emissions trading scheme policy had to be abandoned.

Why did you advise the ex Prime Minister to abandon the emissions trading scheme in 2010 when you are now proposing to introduce a carbon tax? (*Time expired*)

Ms GILLARD—I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for her question. It enables me to say that the Liberal Party are the party of the past—mired in it as they are—whilst we talk about the future. It is not surprising they gave this question to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition because, whenever I have a casual word with one of her backbench colleagues, they say she is

history. So it is no surprise that they have given her the question that is about history because they all know she is history.

I have always believed that climate change is real, that it is caused by human induced activity, that in order to cut carbon pollution we need to price carbon and that the most efficient way of doing that is through a market based mechanism—and through the carbon pricing mechanism I announced last week we will do precisely that. During the time I have had those beliefs day after day, hour after hour, week after week, month after month, there has been the Leader of the Opposition. He accepts the science? No. It is 'absolute crap'. He believes in pricing carbon? No, he does not believe in pricing carbon. Yes, he believes in pricing carbon? No, he does not believe in pricing carbon. The only thing the Leader of the Opposition has ever stood for in this debate is what he believes to be the political interests of the Liberal Party. That is not good enough for someone who contends to be Prime Minister in this country. That is not good enough for someone with the responsibility of national leadership on their shoulders.

What Australians send us here to do is to take charge of the issues that are most important to this country's future. I am doing that job. The government is doing that job. The Leader of the Opposition is incapable of doing it and he shows it day after day.

Ms JULIE BISHOP—Mr Speaker, I ask a supplementary question to the Prime Minister to follow on from the last question: if Kevin Rudd could not trust her, why should the Australian people?

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The House will come to order!

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I suggest Australians rush to

their kitchens and check that their spoons aren't bent after that performance!

What I would say to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, on the question of who Australians can trust to deal with the big issues, is let us just go through the scoreboard. Tackling climate change, pricing carbon through an efficient mechanism and assisting households along the way? Mired in the past and division. Building the National Broadband Network so we have the jobs of the future? Trying to wreck the National Broadband Network. Delivering health reform? Trying to wreck health reform. Delivering education reform to overcome the days of neglect overseen by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition? Trying to wreck education reform. Rebuilding the country with a responsible financing package—

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on direct relevance. The Prime Minister is talking about everything except the trust that people should have in the Prime Minister of this country.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The House will come to order. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I can't wait for a rock solid, iron-clad guarantee from the Leader of the Opposition—I really can't wait for one! I was talking about who Australians could trust to deal with the issues this nation has to get right if we are to be a prosperous country in the future, if we are to have the jobs of the future, if we are to have the health services we want in the future, if we are to give every Australian child a chance in the future, if we are going to give Australians the benefits and dignity of work and if we are going to be a peaceful and multicultural country.

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—I would suggest to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that, rather than screaming interjections, she should reflect on her deep failure to contribute to us being a multicultural country when she let One Nation write the economic policy of the opposition.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will refer to the question. Has the Prime Minister concluded?

Ms GILLARD—Yes, Mr Speaker.

Trans-Australian Railway

Mr CROOK (2.23 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. In light of the closure of the trans-Australian railway as a result of yet more flooding, this time on the Nullarbor Plain of Western Australia, could the minister advise the House as to what action the Australian government is taking to reopen this vitally important transport link and when we can expect the backlog of trains to commence operations once again?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for O'Connor for his question. I am glad I can get a question from the other side somewhere! Indeed last Wednesday there was another heavy downpour in the region of the honourable member, some 500 kilometres east of Kalgoorlie, resulting in the main east-west line being cut. I am advised that the flooding occurred over an 80-kilometre section of track, with 12 separate locations becoming impassable, some under more than a metre of water. This caused damage to the track, but I am pleased to advise that today I have spoken to John Fullerton, the head of the Australian Rail Track Corporation, and they have acted swiftly and reconstruction work has already commenced.

On Saturday the material to rebuild the track arrived on location by special trains. Customers have been advised of the suspension of services and they are being briefed on

a 12-hourly basis on the progress of the track recovery. I am advised that the ARTC is aiming to reopen the track late on Wednesday afternoon. ARTC has plans in place to restart services and clear the backlog of trains which has built up on the network and it is hopeful that by the end of next week operations will have returned to normal.

Of course the member would be aware that the government committed over \$120 million of investment to upgrade the track through rerailing and also installing passing loops around the Kalgoorlie area. That has made a big difference. Travel time between Sydney and Perth has been cut by almost an hour already. By the end of the process we will have rebuilt more than a third of the national network, reducing travel times, increasing productivity but also—and very importantly given today's debate—as part of the whole-of-government response to dealing with climate change, getting trucks off the road and getting freight onto rail. That is more productive, good for the economy and also good for the environment.

Carbon Pricing

Ms SMYTH (2.27 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. What is the basis for the government taking strong action on climate change? What other sources could be drawn on to inform a policy position on climate change and what are the dangers to our national interest of forming policy on anything less than a well-informed basis?

Mr COMBET—I thank the member for La Trobe for her question. Climate scientists—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister has the call.

Mr COMBET—Thank you, Mr Speaker. Climate scientists are telling governments all

over the world that carbon pollution is contributing to climate change. The scientific consensus is overwhelming and the government respects the climate science. A government in that circumstance has a public policy responsibility to act upon that advice in everyone's interests and we simply need to make a start in reducing carbon pollution in our economy. As the highest per capita emitter of carbon pollution amongst the developed countries, and being a nation that is especially vulnerable to the impact of climate change, we must tackle this issue.

Mr Ewen Jones interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Herbert is warned!

Mr COMBET—It is a public policy responsibility. The alternative would be to ignore the national interest, to ignore the science and to act solely in one's political interest. Of course, that is exactly what we see from the other side of politics. And, of course, the Leader of the Opposition—

Dr Jensen interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Tangney is warned!

Mr COMBET—has notoriously described the science as 'absolute crap'. Indeed, Liberal Senator Cory Bernardi has argued that the science has been fabricated. Of course, Senator Minchin famously blamed it on the communists! But the Leader of the Opposition has come up with my favourite. He said the following back in November 2009:

If you look at Roman times, grapes grew up against Hadrian's Wall—medieval times they grew crops in Greenland. In the 1700s they had ice fairs on the Thames.

That was the Leader of the Opposition. Given that he was not around—

Mr Simpkins interjecting—

Mr COMBET—in those days, one would—

Mr Simpkins interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Cowan is warned!

Mr COMBET—wonder what the authority is for that particular statement. It does not take long to find a very similar remark, and I will name the source in a minute:

There have been times when it is a lot warmer than now, when Greenland was ice free and you could grow melons in the open in England ... and even in the 1600s when the Thames River in London froze over.

Where is it from? It is from the One Nation party climate change policy. The One Nation party seem very influential in the policies of the opposition. What a disgrace. You call that accepting public policy responsibility? It does not take much more googling to find out where the concept of the ‘people’s revolt’ comes from either: it is the Tea Party, the far right of US politics. No ideas, nothing to say, nothing to contribute on one of the most critical policy issues that we face. On reflection, the stand-off that we witnessed between the Leader of the Opposition and Channel 7 journalist Mark Riley provided us with an important insight into what is going on here. He is all menace, all aggression, with nothing to say, no ideas—it is ‘no, no, no’—nothing to contribute.

Carbon Pricing

Mr HOCKEY (2.31 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to his statement on 15 August last year, when he said:

Well certainly what we rejected is this hysterical allegation that somehow we are moving towards a carbon tax from the Liberals in their advertising. We reject that.

Treasurer, why have you changed your mind? And, Treasurer, are you the first Treasurer of Australia not to attend a press

conference announcing a nationwide and an economy-wide tax?

Mr SWAN—I really do thank the shadow Treasurer for that question. There is a very basic reason why I take the position that I take and the government takes the position it takes: it is in the national interest. It is in the interests of a prosperous economy. What those opposite are doing is putting their political interests, through a scare campaign, ahead of the need to reduce carbon pollution and make our economy more prosperous for the future. The populism of those opposite is evident in the question from the shadow Treasurer. The shadow Treasurer used to believe, once upon a time, in markets. The shadow Treasurer, I know, goes around the place saying he is a great man of principle. In fact, he made this statement about what a great man of principle he was shortly after he was defeated in the Liberal Party leadership contest: ‘I believe in a market mechanism’—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the question was very straightforward, and the Treasurer’s answer is bearing no resemblance at all to a relevant question. I would ask you to draw him back to the question.

The SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Treasurer is required to directly relate any statements that he is using to the question, and he should consider that in making his response.

Mr SWAN—Like the shadow Treasurer says he is, I am a believer in a market mechanism. What we are going to do is move through a fixed price to a market mechanism, and that was made very clear the other day. But, when the shadow Treasurer was defeated in the leadership contest, he made this point, because he said then that he was a believer in a market mechanism:

I'm a believer. I want action for not only this generation but for my children, grandchildren.

So he, like the Leader of the Opposition, is a hollow man. He says he believes in a market mechanism and opposes it in this House. He says he is a believer in the science of climate change—

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will come back to the question.

Mr SWAN—and opposes it in this House. The government have moved, in the national interest, to make sure that we can protect jobs, direct investment into renewable energy and protect the prosperity of our economy, and every step of the way we are opposed by those opposite, who would rather see the country fail than see us succeed in battling climate change and investing in renewable energy. It just shows that all of those opposite would say anything and do anything to win a political action, but they will not stand up for the political interests of this country. They are only looking after their own.

Carbon Pricing

Ms ROWLAND (2.35 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Why is a market mechanism the best way to tackle climate change?

Mr SWAN—A market mechanism is the best mechanism because it produces the least cost, most efficient reduction in carbon pollution. So we on this side of the House think markets have an essential role in dealing with market failure when it comes to carbon pollution. Now, Mr Stern, the most pre-eminent economist in this area, has made the observation that this is the greatest market failure in history—the failure to price carbon pollution. The failure to price carbon pollution means that carbon pollution continues to be emitted, with devastating consequences for the planet, for the global economy and of course for this country. Those opposite do not believe in climate change anymore, so

perhaps they are not concerned with that market failure, but we do know that a number of those opposite do believe there has been a market failure, that it does require a price mechanism. The member for Wentworth believes that. The shadow Treasurer used to believe that, once upon a time. But we on this side of the House understand how important market mechanisms are in dealing with substantial economic problems.

Of course, the Prime Minister spoke before about tariff reform—utilising changes in the price of goods, changes in the market—to bring about greater prosperity. But, of course, those opposite do not favour market mechanisms anymore. They want central government direction. They want regulation. This would not be odd if they were not the Liberal Party of Australia, on whose basis it was form to say that they believed in the market. But they no longer believe in the market. This is a very big challenge for their economic credibility. It was not that long ago that the former Prime Minister Mr Howard believed in the market. This is what he had to say:

It is fundamental to any response both here and elsewhere that a price is set for carbon emissions. This is best done through the market mechanism of an emissions trading system.

It was a belief held by all of those towards the end of their period in government but now repudiated by those opposite. It is a belief which is held by many other countries in the world that are moving to put in place emissions trading systems. But, of course, now we have this incredible spectacle where those on the other side of the House, who professed to believe in markets, now believe in the heavy hand of regulation against free markets. Is that where the Liberal Party of Australia now believes they are—regulation over markets? We on this side of the House believe in markets. They believe in having a bureaucrat—

Mr Christensen interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Dawson is warned!

Mr SWAN—in every boardroom to deal with this question. They believe in saddling the budget with billions of dollars worth of expenditure. We on this side of the House believe in a market mechanism to deliver the best value, the most efficient outcome, so that we can get the investment in renewable energy to make our country prosperous.

Carbon Pricing

Mr ABBOTT (2.38 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I ask whether the Prime Minister recalls saying:

... the Labor Party is the party of truth telling. When we go out into the electorate and make promises, do you know what we would do in government: we would keep them. When we say them, we mean them. That is the difference between you and us.

Given the carbon tax lie she told before the election, how can Australians ever again trust this Prime Minister?

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: there was an element of the Leader of the Opposition's question that was clearly unparliamentary.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Order!

Mrs Mirabella interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Indi is warned! I invite the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw the remark and offer him the opportunity to replace the word.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, on the point of order raised by the Leader of the House, he must identify what he believes to be unparliamentary before it can be dealt with.

The SPEAKER—The member for Mackellar will resume her seat.

Mr Perrett interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Moreton is warned! The member for Mackellar would be the exception in the House if she did not know which word has been objected to.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I am sorry if you are in the minority, but I am just mentioning that.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The use of the word has been a longstanding problem in the House.

Ms Roxon interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Minister for Health and Ageing is not assisting. I inform both sides of the House that I can walk away from this problem and you can descend into even greater chaos. What I have to do is give a ruling that is consistent. An objection having been raised, I have asked the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw the word and I have offered him the opportunity to replace that word. That would, I hope, allow the House to consistently debate the actual gist of what is to be debated, not do sideshow things to *Parliamentary Practice*.

Mr ABBOTT—Mr Speaker, may I say that I appreciate the opportunity. Instead I ask: when did the Prime Minister decide to break her word not to introduce a carbon tax? Was it on election night after she had spoken to Senator Bob Brown?

The SPEAKER—Order! That took a bit of leeway with my generosity, but the Prime Minister now has the call and she will be heard in silence.

Ms GILLARD—I very much welcome the Leader of the Opposition's question. To the Leader of the Opposition, I say this: if he wants to have a debate about political honesty, bring it on. This is the man that on the *7.30 Report* basically said, when he was

struggling under questioning from Kerry O'Brien, 'If I say it, don't believe it because it's only anywhere near the gospel truth if I write it down.' They were the words out of the mouth of the Leader of the Opposition. This is the man that went to an election giving a rock solid, ironclad guarantee and then broke his word immediately afterwards. This is a man who is on the public record as saying from time to time he gilds the lily. This is a man who created some of the most spectacular election footage ever shown on Australian TV when interviewed on *Lateline* and asked about his visits to Cardinal Pell. We all remember what happened. It looked a little bit like he looked with Mark Riley the other week—deadset looked down the camera at Tony Jones and told an untruth and then caught in that untruth looked filthy and aggressive the way we know the Leader of the Opposition can when he is at his most hollow.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt will withdraw from the House for one hour under standing order 94(a).

The member for Sturt then left the chamber.

Ms GILLARD—If the Leader of the Opposition wants to have a debate on political honesty, well, bring it on. I am happy to debate that any day of the week. The Leader of the Opposition's track record on these questions is absolutely clear. He has gone to election campaigns and not been truthful with the Australian people. He has tried to defend on TV his lack of truthfulness with moving excuses and with odd excuses.

Mr Simpkins interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Cowan will leave the chamber for one hour under 94(a).

The member for Cowan then left the chamber.

Ms GILLARD—His lack of truthfulness has come to an absolute head on the question of climate change. The Leader of the Opposition has had every position on climate change it is possible for a human being to have. Climate change science—do you accept it or not accept it? The Leader of the Opposition has said and believed both. One day he accepts it; one day he does not. Do you price carbon or not price carbon? The Leader of the Opposition has said on different days different things about that. Some days he wants to price carbon; other days he wants to not price carbon. Do you want a carbon tax? The Leader of the Opposition is on the record as saying that he wants a carbon tax.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! There are others in the place that I have warned as well. Perhaps I have to go to the default setting and use warnings for what they were originally put in place for, and that was to go directly to naming rather than putting out people that have been warned, for one hour.

Mr Randall—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order going to relevance. Quite clearly, the question was about the Prime Minister, not the Leader of the Opposition. I ask her to come back to the question.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will respond to the question.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I was asked a very broad question on political honesty and I am answering it. On the question of pricing carbon and climate change, are you for it or against it? The Leader of the Opposition has had both positions: yes, he accepts the science; no, he does not. Should you price carbon? The Leader of the Opposition has had both positions: yes, you should; no, you should not.

Should you support a carbon tax? Let me quote the words of the Leader of the Opposition—his words, not mine—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will relate them to the question.

Ms GILLARD—He said:

I also think that if you want a price on carbon why not just do it with a simple tax?

And he goes on:

It would be burdensome, but it would certainly change the price of carbon—

He went on:

Why not ask motorists to pay more? Why not ask electricity consumers to pay more?

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will relate her material to the question.

Ms GILLARD—Mr Speaker, what is vital about this carbon price debate is that people come to this place and put a position in our national interest. That is what I am focused on, that is what the government is focused on, and all we see from the Leader of the Opposition is his track record of untruthfulness and political opportunism on display.

GILLARD GOVERNMENT

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (2.48 pm)—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Member for Warringah moving immediately the following censure motion:

That this House censure the Prime Minister for breaching faith with the Australian people and introducing a carbon tax because she is now beholden to the Greens and in particular:

- (1) for stating on 16 August, five days before the election, that “there will be no carbon tax under the Government I lead”;
- (2) for stating on 20 August, one day before the election, that “I rule out a carbon tax”;

(3) for declaring that a necessary pre-condition to any carbon tax was the support of the Australian people in her statement on 24 June, that “I also believe that if we are to have a price on carbon and do all the things necessary for our economy and our society to adjust we need a deep and lasting community consensus about that; and

(4) we demand that the Prime Minister first seek a mandate from the people before introducing her carbon tax which is set to destroy jobs, damage our economy and hurt families at a time when there is no global low emissions agreement.

Today we had the Prime Minister driving a Holden off the assembly line. Good on her for driving a Holden off the assembly line, but why didn't she tell people that running that Holden is going to cost at least 6½c a litre more every time the tank is filled, as a result of her policies? She talks about living in the past and here she is in a self-conscious echo of good old Ben Chifley, driving the first Holden off the assembly line. I did not think there was too much similarity between this Prime Minister and good old Ben Chifley, because to start off with, Ben Chifley would never have gone to the Australian people telling them a barefaced lie about his policy.

But there is this similarity between this Prime Minister and Ben Chifley: Ben Chifley loved petrol rationing and this Prime Minister loves the carbon tax. Ben Chifley wanted to stop people driving their cars and this Prime Minister wants it to be more expensive for people to drive their cars. Petrol rationing and bank nationalisation cost Ben Chifley an election and the carbon tax and the mining tax and all the other taxes that this Prime Minister wants to impose will cost her the next election. Let us remember the words of the Prime Minister that will haunt her every day of her political life:

There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.

Just what was the Prime Minister thinking when she said that? Was it idealism? Was it principle? Was it the need to be an altruistic reformer? Was it the need to be on the right side of history? No, it was political desperation. It was political panic which led her to tell a barefaced lie, to put a barefaced lie to the Australian people.

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am reluctant but I draw your attention to your previous ruling that the Leader of the Opposition is defying.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition will withdraw.

Mr ABBOTT—I do. The interesting thing is that, in response to the claim that this was nothing but blatant, naked deception of the Australian public, all this Prime Minister can do is act like an alternative opposition leader. There is nothing remotely prime ministerial about the person in the most important job in our country.

Why did she make that statement? She made that statement because I had been saying day in and day out that, as sure as night follows day, if this government is re-elected, there will be a carbon tax. On the one hand, I was saying there would be a carbon tax if this government were elected; on the other hand, this Prime Minister was saying, 'There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead.' I say to the Australian public: I submit myself to your verdict as to which of us—the Prime Minister or the leader of the coalition—is the more truthful person in Australian politics.

This Prime Minister brought in a carbon tax. She did not consult the people. She did not consult the caucus. I tell you what: she certainly did not consult her cabinet. Just imagine the cabinet discussion that they had about the carbon tax: the Prime Minister says to the cabinet, 'I think I'm going to introduce a carbon tax.' You can imagine the Minister

for Foreign Affairs, can't you? You can imagine the foreign minister saying: 'Yes, a carbon tax, Prime Minister. What a good idea. You politically assassinated me over wanting to introduce an emissions trading scheme. Sure, Prime Minister, you have your carbon tax.' I tell you what: he would not have been just rushing to catch the 6.55 plane.

You can imagine this Lady Macbeth of Australian politics, the person who just killed Banquo, saying to the cabinet: 'A little water clears us of this deed.' You can imagine this Prime Minister saying to the cabinet: 'A little carbon price clears us of this bloody deed.' Well, it does not clear her of this bloody deed, because Banquo is still ghosting around the capitals of Europe. He is still here hovering and waiting and he has his knife out for the Prime Minister, as he should because this Prime Minister has betrayed not just her predecessor but all of her colleagues whom she did not consult, her colleagues whose electoral offices are now besieged by angry Labor voters wanting to know why their petrol prices are going to go up by 6.5 cents a litre and why their power bills are going to go up by \$300 a year.

She has betrayed the Australian people because she has broken the solemn obligation of the truth, which prime ministers owe to the Australian public. Let me quote the Prime Minister on standards of honesty. She said:

If the minister had been a businessman and offered a promise like that and not kept it, he would have been sued. If the minister had been in a court of law and made a statement like that and it turned out not to be true, he would have been tried for perjury. If the minister had been in a church—

and she knows a lot about that, doesn't she?—

and made a statement like that and it turned out not to be true, the congregation would have

known that he had broken the ninth commandment.

This is the Prime Minister of this country:

I do not see why the standard should be different in business, should be different in churches or should be different in courts from the standard in public life. If anything, the standard in public life should be higher.

She is right: the standard in public life should be higher, and that is why this Prime Minister deserves to be condemned by this parliament and that is why she will be condemned by the Australian people at the first available opportunity.

There is more than a slightly desperate quality in the Prime Minister's shrill rationalisations of this breach of faith. No amount of brazen repetition can hide the desperate quality that has entered the Prime Minister. I refer to the infamous interview where she says:

... rather than play any semantic word games I was frank enough with the Australian people to say that the first few years would work effectively like a tax.

She still cannot quite bring herself to admit that it is what it is, but she wants credit for being frank. This Prime Minister is not frank; she is a fraud. That is what she is.

She even had the hide to somehow liken this campaign for a carbon tax to the former Prime Minister's campaign for tax reform. I tell you what: that Prime Minister did not lie to the Australian people before an election. He had the guts to go to the people promising to bring in a new tax. Those guts constitute real leadership. Those are the guts that this Prime Minister does not have. Because she lacks those guts and that honesty she should be condemned by this parliament.

The SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (2.58 pm)—I second the motion. The day before

the election this Prime Minister sought to differentiate between a carbon price and a carbon tax. It was this Prime Minister who sought to lead the Australian people to believe that she would not introduce a carbon tax; that she would introduce a carbon price. She was the one who used the semantics. It was this Prime Minister, in an effort to win the people at the very last moment before the last election, who sought to rule out emphatically a carbon tax. It is this Prime Minister who has deliberately deceived the Australian people with her words and with her actions.

By doing that very deed the day before the election this Prime Minister has now laid down before the Australian people her bankrupt integrity, because the Prime Minister not only emphatically said that she would not introduce a carbon tax; she said to the Australian people, 'Trust me, I'm telling the truth.' Therefore, this Prime Minister is setting a benchmark after only a few months in her term of office. She has been the Prime Minister of this nation not even for one year. But it does not give us any good wind—it gives us no satisfaction—to be here less than a year into her prime ministership debating her core integrity and whether she is honest and fit for the job.

The Prime Minister has set the terms of this debate. We will stand up for the Australian people here. We will stand up for the honesty that is so absolutely necessary when it comes to the issue of everyone dealing with the cost of living in their homes. We have a Prime Minister and a Treasurer who have set out to deliberately deceive the Australian people. He is sitting there with a new smirk but this Treasurer, before the last election, described allegations of a carbon tax as hysterical. He lied to the Australian people on *Meet the Press*. He lied to the Australian people in an interview with Kerry O'Brien on *The 7:30 Report*. He sits there with a

warm smile because he is like no other Treasurer: he has introduced more taxes than any person in memory.

And he did not have the courage to front the press conference. He did not have the courage to look the Australian people in the eye and say, 'I am going to increase your cost of living. I am going to do that.' No, this is not a man with the ticker for the job. This is a weak and insipid man—a man who always takes the easy options. He is following a Prime Minister who is equally weak and insipid, because at the very moment the Australian people are asking for trustworthiness we have a Prime Minister who sets out to mislead the Australian people and to seek their support based on an untruth.

Some people might call it a 'terminological inexactitude'. It is a tax. As Lord Byron said:

After all, what is a lie? 'Tis but the truth in a masquerade.

So I say that this is a Prime Minister who is engaging in a deceitful game. She is a Prime Minister who is determined to wing her way to power and to preserve power on the basis of a lie. At this very moment, when the Australian people are trying to deal with higher interest rates, increased tobacco prices, increased alcohol prices, higher petrol prices and all the challenges of modern life, the Labor Party is introducing a carbon price, a mining tax, a flood tax. They are doing so with absolute disregard for the challenges that every household has at the moment in meeting their daily bills. That is because we have a liar as a Prime Minister.

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will withdraw.

Mr HOCKEY—I withdraw. We have a Prime Minister who has set out to mislead the Australian people. She has set out to gain power in a partnership with the Greens that is based on an untruth. I say to you, Prime

Minister: if you have any courage—if you have any guts or core principles—go to the Australian people now and get a mandate for your bad tax.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (3.03 pm)—There are times when this parliament is called upon to consider what it takes to lead the nation—what national leadership means. There are times in the life of this nation when you have to make a decision on whether you stand for hope and change or whether you stand for fear. There are times in the life of this nation where you have to decide if you stand for the national interest or your political interest. On each of those decisions the Leader of the Opposition is decided. He stands for fear. He stands for his political interest. He does not stand for the national interest.

In the Leader of the Opposition's position there are three important things to recognise: there is no principle in it; there are no facts to support it; there is no future in it. On the question of there being no principle the Leader of the Opposition has had five different positions on pricing carbon. There is no principle in anything he says to the Australian people or to this parliament. He has had five different positions on pricing carbon. Even the former Leader of the Opposition said that the current Leader of the Opposition has had all of these different positions and that he is a weathervane in politics.

First the Leader of the Opposition said that he respected the mandate of the government to introduce it. Then he said that the coalition should not be browner than Howard. Then he said that if amendments were accepted the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme should go through. Then he said that you cannot have a climate change policy without supporting this ETS at this time. And then he backflipped, described climate

change science as absolute crap and decided his political interests lay in a fear campaign.

In the Leader of the Opposition's position there is no principle. No Australian could actually know what this man believes about climate change. I suspect the worst thing of all: the absolute truth about it is that he has no beliefs. He is so hollow and so devoid of understanding what is in this nation's interests that he has no beliefs. So he waits for a focus group, he waits for polling and he waits to see what the newspapers are running and then he decides what he believes that day. There is no principle in this and there are no facts in it at all. The Leader of the Opposition is on the record as supporting a carbon tax but now he is out there running a fear campaign.

There are so few facts in their argument that every day a Liberal Party spokesperson uses a different figure. They have no idea what the content of their fear campaign should be, so hollow are they. So the shadow minister for the environment in January was wandering around saying, 'Families will pay \$1,100 a year.' Then in February he was saying that it will be \$300. The shadow finance minister was out saying it will be \$1,000 and the New South Wales Leader of the Opposition was saying that it will be \$500.

What this should be reinforcing in people is that, day by day, they just go out there and make things up to try to create fear in the community. No facts, no principle, just a perspective about creating fear. Indeed, one of the things they try to do is create the impression that the tax burden on Australians is greater now than it has been in the past. That is 100 per cent untrue. Australia is less taxed now than it was when the Leader of the Opposition sat on the ministerial benches. If you want to pick the side of politics that has delivered lower taxation in this parliament, it

is this side of politics with me as Prime Minister.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney was heard in relative silence.

Ms GILLARD—The Leader of the Opposition's track record is of higher taxes. Of course, we know that he loves the levies if they are to pay for his election promises; he just hates them when they are to rebuild Queensland.

So there are no facts in this, and there is no future in this either—no future at all. Our nation is at an important crossroad about whether we have a clean energy economy for the future, with all of the jobs that that implies, or whether we get stuck in the past; whether we stump up to the challenge of this parliament to price carbon in the way that earlier parliaments stumped up to challenges like reducing tariffs, floating the dollar and creating the GST. We have to decide whether this parliament can stump up to this challenge.

Just like the challenges in the past, it is easy to raise fear. It is easy to go out into communities and say to people, 'You'll pay more.' It is easy to say to people, 'Your jobs are at risk.' Fear campaigns are easy. What is harder, but what is ultimately right, is doing the reform work that makes us a prosperous nation for the long term. I am glad we had the courage as a nation to step up to the economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, and we do not have less courage now than we had then. We are a creative, confident people. This is a big challenge but we can get it done. The Leader of the Opposition, as that challenge confronts, just says, 'Believe in fear.' I actually believe in the capacities of the Australian people: the capacity to innovate, the capacity to live in a way that is generating less carbon pollution and the capacity to create the clean energy jobs of the future. I

believe in the skills and abilities of Australians to do just that.

Today we have seen the most grossly irresponsible statement made by a national political leader in the last 15 years. I campaigned against the GST, but once it was implemented I understood how devastating it would be for businesses to try to take it away. What the Leader of the Opposition has said today is that, if this parliament successfully embraces the opportunities of the future and prices carbon, he will go to the next election sweeping that away, with all of the consequences that will have for business certainty and for the loss of jobs that that will create. People who have moved into the renewables sector, people who have got themselves the skills they will need for the future—their jobs and prospects are to be trashed by this Leader of the Opposition. He talks about cost of living pressures on Australian households, but he has guaranteed today that if he is elected at the next election he will smash carbon pricing and he will rip out of the hands of Australians the generous household assistance we have put into their hands. He will go to the next election promising to make Australians worse off and to take away from them household assistance that will come with carbon pricing.

No-one should believe the Leader of the Opposition's fear campaign. He believes in nothing. He stands for nothing. He has no facts to support his case and he has no ideas for the nation's future. On this side of the parliament we have the courage to act. We understand what needs to be done. We must price carbon. We have worked with people of goodwill to work out how in this parliament, the parliament that the Australian people voted for, we will price carbon. I have done that just as prime ministers in the past have done that, just as Prime Minister Howard sat down with Meg Lees to negotiate the GST—working with people of goodwill to get a

major economic reform through this parliament. We will bring in carbon pricing. It will create clean energy jobs. It will transform our economy. We will give households generous assistance. We will meet this challenge that our age requires us to stump up to. I will make this prediction: Australians are growing tired of the Leader of the Opposition's scare campaign. They know: day 1, you go out and you try to engender a bit of fear, and people get a bit scared; day 365, you go out and engender a bit of fear, then it is starting to wear off. To the Leader of the Opposition I say: what will you say to Australians when we price carbon, when Australian households have received the generous assistance we will give them, when the system is working? How will he look then? He will look then as he looks now: a hollow man, worried about his political interest, with no ideas for the nation's future.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Mackellar is warned!

Ms GILLARD—We will get on with the job. We will meet your fear campaign with facts, we will meet your fear campaign with courage and we will see this through. We will stare you down and we will get this done.

The SPEAKER—Order! The time allotted for the debate has expired.

Question put:

That the motion (**Mr Abbott's**) be agreed to.

The House divided. [3.17 pm]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes.....	69
Noes.....	<u>73</u>
Majority.....	<u>4</u>

AYES

Abbott, A.J.
Andrews, K.

Alexander, J.
Andrews, K.J.

CHAMBER

Baldwin, R.C.
 Bishop, B.K.
 Briggs, J.E.
 Buchholz, S.
 Christensen, G.
 Cobb, J.K.
 Dutton, P.C.
 Fletcher, P.
 Frydenberg, J.
 Gash, J.
 Haase, B.W.
 Hawke, A.
 Hunt, G.A.
 Jensen, D.
 Katter, R.C.
 Laming, A.
 Macfarlane, I.E.
 Markus, L.E.
 McCormack, M.
 Morrison, S.J.
 Neville, P.C.
 O'Dwyer, K.
 Ramsey, R.
 Robb, A.
 Roy, Wyatt
 Scott, B.C.
 Slipper, P.N.
 Somlyay, A.M.
 Stone, S.N.
 Truss, W.E.
 Turnbull, M.
 Vasta, R.
 Wyatt, K.

NOES

Adams, D.G.H.
 Bandt, A.
 Bowen, C.
 Brodtmann, G.
 Burke, A.S.
 Byrne, A.M.
 Cheeseman, D.L.
 Collins, J.M.
 Crean, S.F.
 Danby, M.
 Elliot, J.
 Emerson, C.A.
 Ferguson, M.J.
 Garrett, P.
 Gibbons, S.W.
 Gray, G.
 Griffin, A.P.

Billson, B.F.
 Bishop, J.I.
 Broadbent, R.
 Chester, D.
 Ciobo, S.M.
 Coulton, M. *
 Entsch, W.
 Forrest, J.A.
 Gambaro, T.
 Griggs, N.
 Hartsuyker, L.
 Hockey, J.B.
 Irons, S.J.
 Jones, E.
 Kelly, C.
 Ley, S.P.
 Marino, N.B.
 Matheson, R.
 Mirabella, S.
 Moylan, J.E.
 O'Dowd, K.
 Prentice, J.
 Randall, D.J.
 Robert, S.R.
 Ruddock, P.M.
 Secker, P.D. *
 Smith, A.D.H.
 Southcott, A.J.
 Tehan, D.
 Tudge, A.
 Van Manen, B.
 Washer, M.J.

Albanese, A.N.
 Bird, S.
 Bradbury, D.J.
 Burke, A.E.
 Butler, M.C.
 Champion, N.
 Clare, J.D.
 Combet, G.
 D'Ath, Y.M.
 Dreyfus, M.A.
 Ellis, K.
 Ferguson, L.D.T.
 Fitzgibbon, J.A.
 Georganas, S.
 Gillard, J.E.
 Grierson, S.J.
 Hall, J.G. *

Hayes, C.P. *
 Kelly, M.J.
 Leigh, A.
 Lyons, G.
 Marles, R.D.
 Melham, D.
 Murphy, J.
 O'Connor, B.P.
 Oakeshott, R.J.M.
 Parke, M.
 Plibersek, T.
 Rishworth, A.L.
 Roxon, N.L.
 Shorten, W.R.
 Smith, S.F.
 Snowdon, W.E.
 Symon, M.
 Thomson, K.J.
 Wilkie, A.
 Zappia, A.

Husic, E.
 King, C.F.
 Livermore, K.F.
 Macklin, J.L.
 McClelland, R.B.
 Mitchell, R.
 Neumann, S.K.
 O'Neill, D.
 Owens, J.
 Perrett, G.D.
 Ripoll, B.F.
 Rowland, M.
 Saffin, J.A.
 Sidebottom, S.
 Smyth, L.
 Swan, W.M.
 Thomson, C.
 Vamvakinou, M.
 Windsor, A.H.C.

PAIRS

Schultz, A. Rudd, K.M.
 Keenan, M. Jones, S.

* denotes teller

Question negatived.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Ms Gillard—Mr Speaker, as it is clear the opposition are out of ideas and out of questions, I ask that further questions be placed on the *Notice Paper*.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.20 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 document:

Commonwealth Grants Commission—GST revenue sharing relativities—2011 update.

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

CONDOLENCES**Larcombe, Sapper Jamie Ronald**

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (3.21 pm)—On indulgence, I rise to acknowledge the death of Sapper Jamie Larcombe, who was from my electorate, and to join the House in paying my respects. Sapper Jamie Ronald Larcombe, of the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment, F Troop, was born 14 September 1989 at Kingscote on Kangaroo Island. It is a place he loved and it is a place that grieves for him today. My heart goes out to his loving parents, Steve and Tricia; his sisters, Ann-Marie, Emily and April; and his girlfriend, Rhiannon. I am forever humbled by the bravery of young Australians who risk it all on our behalf; I am humbled by Jamie. Those of us who are elected to this place make decisions to send young Australians, like Jamie, into harm's way. We do not do so lightly; it is done with the full knowledge of the fate that may confront them. We do it because we believe that the cause we send them to is right and just. It is therefore our duty to honour this sacrifice with an increased resolve to the cause for which 23 young Australians have paid the ultimate price. It was Abraham Lincoln who best described this resolve when he said at Gettysburg:

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain ...

Sapper Jamie Larcombe, rest in peace.

**HEALTH INSURANCE AMENDMENT
(COMPLIANCE) BILL 2010****AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL
AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2) 2010****EDUCATION SERVICES FOR
OVERSEAS STUDENTS LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL 2010****Referred to Main Committee**

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (3.23 pm)—I move:

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

Question agreed to.

**TOBACCO ADVERTISING
PROHIBITION AMENDMENT
BILL 2010****Second Reading**

Debate resumed.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (3.25 pm)—When I was speaking on this bill just before question time I made the point that it is through the internet that the advertising of cigarettes is now going to have the most effect. The Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010 specifically deals with trying to restrict the advertising of tobacco products through the internet because that is the best way to target the young people who are most likely to be vulnerable to becoming addicted to tobacco smoking. I said also that I wanted to make a few other points that are relevant to this legislation.

One of the matters I want to touch on is that when I was speaking on the excise and customs tariff amendment bills in June last year I raised the importance of ensuring that nicotine patches were placed under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. It is a matter that I feel strongly about. When the tax on cigarettes increased I spoke to many people who suggested to me that, whilst they would dearly like to give up cigarette smoking, they found it very, very difficult and nicotine

patches were very costly and some of them could not afford to buy them. So, whilst they would like to give up smoking, they found it very difficult to do. Given that, as I and other speakers have made clear, cigarette smoking has direct health effects I believe it important that the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme does cover nicotine patches. I am pleased to see that the government has adopted and embraced that proposal and nicotine patches are now available under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. The anti-smoking drug varenicline, otherwise known as Champix, has also been made available through the PBS for an additional 12 weeks. I commend the Minister for Health and Ageing for supporting that move.

There are a number of other related matters which I will also touch on. One of them is the fact that, each year, millions of cigarette butts are thrown out into the environment generally. In fact, Australians discard some 32 billion cigarette butts each year and, if you put them all together, that equates to something like 40,000 cubic metres of waste. Sadly, much of that waste ends up in our waterways, in our drain systems, in our reserves, in public areas generally and in our seas and oceans. The risks to marine life as a result of both the butts being consumed by fish and the toxins that are in turn slowly discharged into the marine waters are very, very real. It has been suggested that cigarette butts take anywhere from one year to 12 or 13 years to break down and, whilst they are breaking down, they are constantly releasing the toxins and poisons that are in them in the first place. So, when you combine the effects of both the direct risks to the environment—to our oceans and fish in particular but also to other animals on land—and also the poisonous effects that occur due to the breakdown of cigarette butts, you can understand the serious implications and impacts of cigarette butts on our environment generally.

When you look at cigarette smoking rates across the country, smoking amongst Indigenous people is the highest, at around 50 per cent. We know that Indigenous people are generally worse off than other Australians. They have a higher unemployment rate and their life span is generally lower than that of other Australians. I suggest that the level of smoking amongst Indigenous people contributes not only to their shorter life span, because of the direct health impacts of smoking, but also to their lower standard of well-being. If they do not have employment in the first place and they are also spending money on cigarettes, that clearly leaves even less money for food and the other necessities of life. So, if we are going to do anything to curb smoking in Australia, we need to ensure that we have measures that specifically target the Indigenous population. I hope that is one of the strategies being adopted in responding to the health needs of Indigenous people through our Close the Gap program.

The last matter I will touch on is the impact of passive smoking. Again, it has been well-documented that passive smoking has a direct impact on other people. I am particularly concerned about the direct impact it has on children—including unborn children, when a mother smokes whilst carrying a child. Children have little say about the environment they live in and the habits of their household. They have little say about the conditions and places they find themselves in. Adults can choose not to frequent a venue where smoking occurs and can choose to distance themselves from smoking areas. Children generally cannot. We know full well that every health impact of smoking also applies to children who are in the company of people who are smoking. The impact is perhaps slightly lesser because they are not smoking themselves, but ultimately it is the same. Particularly when it comes to respiratory illnesses—children's immune systems

are not as strong as adults'—the evidence is very clear. In fact, sudden infant death syndrome has been linked to smoking. We as a society have an obligation to do whatever we can to protect those children.

For the reasons outlined by other speakers and by me in this debate, I support this bill and commend it to the House.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (3.32 pm)—I join my colleagues in support of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010 and the inclusion of internet tobacco advertising within the tobacco advertising framework. This bill makes the advertising of tobacco products on the internet and by other electronic means an offence unless it complies with state or territory legislation or Commonwealth regulation. The bill simply amends the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992 to extend existing restrictions on tobacco advertising.

The internet is being added to the list of media currently regulated: print media advertising; advertisements in films, videos, television and radio; advertising on tickets, handbills and other documents; advertising on anything sold or supplied; and outdoor advertising on billboards or public transport. It is entirely appropriate that all advertising content comply with the standards and laws of our land irrespective of the medium—whether it be print, television, radio, internet or even phone messaging, text. Uniformity is, in this case, a virtue.

Many people have argued over time that internet content should not be regulated, that a systematic intrusion and limitation of content by any means should not be applied to the World Wide Web. Arguments along this line were advanced in response to the concept of an internet filter, the purpose of which would be to disable web pages with proscribed content. The argument has been that people should be their own filters, being

free to choose what they watch, read, listen to et cetera. It is a purely social libertarian argument—that the common sense of the individual provides satisfactory safety for that individual and guides what is in their best interests and thereby that of the society of which they are a part. It is a nice idea. It would be lovely if people made rational choices or if their choices could be made without impact on others—their family, their community and their nation.

Smoking is one of the many choices that impacts substantially on others. The impact of passive smoking, for example, can be devastating. We have all seen the health reports that come out on passive smoking. The sickness and disease caused by smoking is incredibly costly to each and every one of us, as in this we are all connected in one way or another. We are the family and friends of smokers, the workplace colleagues of smokers or the employing companies of smokers, and, ultimately, taxpayers pick up the vast majority of the health costs incurred in caring for smokers. Smoking is one choice that a person cannot make in isolation. The consequences impact on each and every one of us, directly or indirectly.

A person's freedom of choice in this matter is further complicated by the fact that a person's decision at one time is not necessarily a decision that can be reviewed and amended at a later time. I say that because tobacco is one of the most addictive substances in our marketplace. A person's freedom to choose to buy and smoke a packet of cigarettes is not accompanied by an equally free choice, once the addiction has taken hold, to cease buying and smoking cigarettes. The likelihood of addiction and ultimately consequent disease and death sets this substance apart by far from the majority of consumables that we eat, drink and take.

I know about addiction to tobacco from direct experience. I remember how hard I found it to kick the habit. I will have been smoke-free for seven years this coming May. When I started smoking everyone around me was smoking and there was no education on it. We knew that perhaps it may cause some sort of harm, but it was something everyone did. We did not have the information at our hands that we have today. I am sure numerous members share this intimate knowledge of the education that we have about tobacco in this place. I appreciate the additional effort the medical professions made to help me seven years ago to rid myself of what I call a curse, because it was—I tried absolutely everything for years and struggled to give it up. But, being an addiction, one is never totally rid of the desire to smoke. That is what makes it such an evil—continually, constantly inspiring self-harm and indirect harm to others.

The theme of this bill is harm minimisation of our population through discouraging the consumption of tobacco products, especially—as we heard the member for Makin say earlier—in our younger population, our children; those who are the next customers of the big tobacco companies, because that is where they are aiming. They are losing people like me at a regular pace, either through death or through giving up, and their next market is the young—to try and get them as customers so they can have them for life.

It cannot do any harm to look at the facts again. The Australian Health Institute encapsulates the effects of smoking thus:

Tobacco smoking is the single most preventable cause of ill health and death. It is a major risk factor for coronary heart disease, stroke, peripheral vascular disease, cancer and a variety of other diseases and conditions.

Smoking is a key risk factor for the three diseases that cause most deaths in Australia: ischaemic heart disease, cerebrovascular dis-

ease and lung cancer. It is responsible for around 80 per cent of all lung cancer deaths and 20 per cent of all cancer deaths. Smoking has been linked to cancers of the mouth, bladder, kidney, stomach and cervix, among others. Smokers are also at increased risk of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and reduced lung function, and smoking in pregnancy increases the risk of health problems for both mother and child. Tobacco use has been linked to a variety of other conditions such as diabetes, peptic ulcers, some vision problems and back pain.

In 1998, over 10 years ago, smoking cost each and every one of us a combined total of almost \$13 billion in healthcare, lost productivity and other costs. Healthcare costs attributable to tobacco for the year 1998-99 were over \$1 billion, including medical, hospital, nursing home and pharmaceutical costs. The costs of the cigarettes are in addition to these figures, of course, putting additional strain on family budgets and decreasing family options for health and wellbeing.

When one looks at the irrational decision to smoke, the addiction to nicotine that keeps people smoking, the impact it has on the individuals concerned and the proportion of the public health dollar that goes to minimising the consequences of smoking related disease one can only be convinced of the merits of this bill. One can only be convinced that the degree to which liberty and personal freedoms within cyberspace are curtailed by the regulation of tobacco advertising is very minor in comparison to the cost of the consumption of tobacco products incurred by each and every one of us. I commend this bill to the House.

Ms O'NEILL (Robertson) (3.41 pm)—I am very pleased to be able to speak today on this important legislation that will, when passed, clarify the application of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992. As other

members have noted in the debate to date, the status of internet advertising of tobacco products is currently unclear. Through this Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010 the government's intention is to clarify that status. It will do so by making it a specific offence to advertise or promote tobacco products on the internet and all other electronic media and future technologies, unless—for a reason I cannot imagine—they are compliant with state and territory legislation and Commonwealth regulations. This is particularly important, given the way the internet really has engaged young people. Young people all around the world are very much engaged with modern technologies and social networking. We need to make sure that as they communicate with one another we create the safest possible medium for them to do that. It definitely needs to be a tobacco advertising-free zone.

This amendment will also enable the making of regulation in relation to internet tobacco advertising and will prescribe the size, the content, the format and location of tobacco advertisements; the inclusion of health warnings; warnings about age restrictions on the sale of tobacco products; and information about any fees, taxes and charges payable in relation to tobacco products. It is to make it absolutely clear to those people who are smoking—those people who do make a choice to smoke—how dangerous the activity they are about to engage in actually is.

The states and territories expressed their support for the Commonwealth to seek to regulate tobacco advertising on the internet at a Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy in 2007. Consultation with stakeholders on this legislation was conducted in 2007. The legislation was announced by the government on 29 April last year as part of a package of measures to tackle smoking. It certainly fits totally within the framework of preventative health that this government is committed to.

That package also included several other measures: increasing the tobacco excise by 25 per cent above normal CPI adjustments, legislation to require plain packaging for tobacco products, and a targeted social marketing campaign to curb smoking among high-risk and disadvantaged groups.

This legislation means internet advertising of tobacco products is on an equal footing with other advertising media at points of sale. From a regional perspective this will help ensure that people in rural and regional Australia cannot become the target of a social marketing campaign. The legislation will also provide better protection against sales to minors in rural and regional areas where purchase over the internet may be more prevalent.

I am very glad to hear from those opposite that, in this instance, they will be giving their bipartisan support to the bill. This is clearly an indication of constructive, wiser heads of the opposition having had their say. When speaking to the Australian National Preventative Health Agency legislation last year, I was rather shocked to find that some opposition senators had actually gone on the record as opposing the creation of that agency on the grounds that preventative health initiatives infringed on—in their words—'the way people choose, quite knowingly, to live their lives'. The member for Hindmarsh has just eloquently put the argument about why choices in a community involve not just an individual but also the lives of the people that they affect and the flow of costs in terms of health care that is required. That is very clearly the case with respect to people's use of tobacco.

I am glad we have got through this debate so far and managed to avoid those predictable nanny state arguments, because the facts about smoking are clear and compelling. You do not have to go far to find warnings by our

public health authorities that smoking is expected to kill one million Australians over the next decade. That is a really significant number in terms of the impact not only on our economy but also on the lives of all those people who work with, who are in a family with and who care for those one million Australians who simply will not be here because of the impacts of tobacco smoking on their life and health. The preventable death of one million Australians understandably needs to be our No. 1 focus.

The very first figure in the Preventative Health Taskforce's National Preventative Health Strategy says it all. The strategy shows tobacco as the No. 1 risk factor contributing to Australia's overall burden of disease. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has tobacco causing just under eight disability-adjusted life years. That is almost eight years off your life if you are a smoker. Consider as well that close to three million Australian adults smoke on a daily basis and you get a clear picture of the public health costs of smoking. Consider also that around half of these smokers who continue to smoke for a prolonged period die early. Half of them die in middle age.

Many of us here know people who have died of lung cancer, and this is the case for me. One woman I really wish was here today, somebody who knew me from the very day that I was born, is a great lady called Gay Wootton. I acknowledge in the gallery today my mother, who was a friend of Gay's when she first arrived in Australia in 1960. Gay Wootton was a young woman at that stage and obviously susceptible to the advertising pool that drew her into smoking and finally succumbing to lung cancer. I recall receiving a phone call from her one evening. This is how news of lung cancer comes to people. I was at home and received a call and at the other end of the phone was somebody telling me that their death was imminent—

and it was certainly attributable to the smoking of tobacco. Gay's words of advice were simple: 'I shouldn't have smoked.' She learnt too late to be able to stop herself from the habit, to be able to change her life outcome. That was two years ago—and, in terms of eight adjusted years of life, Gay should at least have another six. I am really sad that she is not here, and so many of her family and friends feel the same.

We are talking about millions and millions of Australians who have been impacted over the years by lung cancer. We can forgive the uptake rates that were happening at a time when smoking was so widely advertised and so widely accepted socially, but the facts have come out. We do know the truth these days. The clear and present danger of taking tobacco into your body and the risk of death that it brings to you from lung cancer can no longer be hidden.

I want to take this opportunity to put on the record the story of a former Labor Party member, a very loyal and long-serving member of the party—a gentleman by the name of Eddie Lawton, who resided at Green Point. I came to know Eddie through my years in the party on the Central Coast. I received a phone call from him about four or five months before he actually passed away from emphysema. Eddie rang and asked me to come to his home to speak with him because there was something important that he wanted to do. I was a little intrigued, I have to say, about what he might want to discuss. When I arrived I found that his sole purpose was to try to get a story in the local paper about the amazing care that he had received in the respiratory ward at Gosford Hospital. The lack of interest in the local newspaper at the time was very, very disappointing. Eddie did not get to tell his story, but I am glad to be able to tell it here and to acknowledge two things: firstly, that Eddie Lawton knew 100 per cent that his premature death was attrib-

utable to his smoking; and, secondly, the great care that is given in our public hospitals by those who work with people who are suffering all sorts of diseases, but particularly the ravaging loss of life that happens when somebody expires of lung cancer.

I want to also put on the record the reaction of my nieces and nephews and my own children to my youngest brother, Eamon, who continues to smoke. There is a plea from the entire family for him to cease. I do believe that, if he had lived in a context where smoking was less favoured and where tobacco advertising was less pervasive, there is a pretty good chance he might have got through his adolescence without being hooked on what is only going to cause his early death. This is the personal reality. This is the ultimate cost of smoking. On a macro level, the total quantifiable cost to the economy of smoking, including the costs associated with loss of life, is estimated at over \$31 billion. So, if you need a financial argument to add to the human cost argument, there it is.

As someone who spoke to the legislation that established the Australian National Preventative Health Agency, I am delighted to see the agency's badging on the 'Quit' television advertisements as part of the 2011 National Tobacco Campaign. The agency came into being last month, with Dr Rhonda Galbally as its transitional chief executive. The National Tobacco Campaign website, www.quitnow.info.au, lays out the importance of turning Australians away from smoking. Quitting at age 50 halves your risk of smoking related death, but quitting by age 30 avoids almost all of the excess risk. Stopping at age 60, 50, 40 or 30 can result in gains of, respectively, about three, six, nine or 10 years of life expectancy.

I am pleased to see the website with materials in different ethnic languages too. The

strong antismoking culture and messages we have developed here in Australia over the last 20 years need to filter into ethnic communities. I have been privileged in previous years to travel to South-East Asia with my family, and my children noted with some considerable alarm the amazing number of smokers they saw in Asia by comparison with Australia. It is very, very concerning. With so many people travelling between South-East Asia and Australia, there is a possibility for that message to be disturbed, so we should push even harder to make sure that the message is clearly delivered in a range of languages to make it possible for all Australians to access it.

As a Labor member I also have regard to the prevalence of smoking among blue-collar workers. I am aware of research that found all three measures of socioeconomic status—education, income and relative socioeconomic disadvantage—are significantly related to the likelihood of smoking by both sexes. Of these three measures, relative social disadvantage was most strongly related to smoking status.

I might add that I am proud to be in a party that has chosen as a matter of principle not to take donations from tobacco companies. I encourage all other parties to take up this principled position, if they have not already, because it does not mean much to talk about the importance of preventative health in this place if you yourself are addicted to tobacco dollars. And no-one should underestimate the insidious ability of big tobacco to get its message through. On the Central Coast right now, the Alliance of Australian Retailers against plain packaging for cigarettes are running their anti-regulation radio ads. I find this quite disgraceful. The alliance home page carries a disclaimer that, frankly, says it all:

We are supported by British American Tobacco Australia Limited ... Philip Morris Limited ... and Imperial Tobacco Australia Limited ...

Supported by? Owned by those companies to prosecute their self-interest would be much closer to the truth. I can only hope this preventative health campaign we are running is experiencing great success and that that of the opposition is experiencing its last gasp—to use a very appropriate expression.

A number of my male colleagues have spoken about the ubiquitous nature of tobacco advertising in sport in the 1970s and 1980s. We have certainly come a long way. The medical and health communities have been vocal in their support of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010. As you would expect, the Australian Council on Smoking and Health has welcomed the move. The AMA President, Dr Andrew Pesce, has also voiced his support. Dr Pesce has said:

The proposed new law will make it harder for tobacco companies to target teenagers and young Australians with attractive ads and promotions on the Internet.

It will help deter young people from taking up smoking and save the lives of thousands of Australians.

That is the AMA, Mr Deputy Speaker. I think on this issue those words are a resounding support for this bill. I support the bill.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Before I call the honourable member for Fowler, on behalf of all honourable members I would like to welcome to the gallery the mother of the honourable member for Robertson.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (3.56 pm)—I also acknowledge Mary O'Neill as a neighbour of mine, notwithstanding the fact that she is the mother of the member for Robertson. Mary, well done.

I also rise to lend my support to the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010. I am proud to follow a number of speakers, including the member for Robertson, who gave a very salient dissertation on the issues of smoking. In a modern society there can be no doubt that smoking remains one of the leading causes of preventable death and disease among Australians. It is responsible for killing over 15,000 Australians every year. Leaving aside the emotional costs of that toll, the social costs are estimated at \$31.5 billion. When we get carried away looking at budgetary requirements we should factor in real numbers like that, which actually show you the costs to the community as a consequence of smoking. I have looked at statistics such as these which show the harmful effects of smoking, the damage it does to people and to the wider community, what it does to families, and the importance of government doing as much as it can to reduce the appeal of smoking and discourage young Australians from taking up smoking.

While we have very strong laws on cigarette advertising, there are some loopholes, particularly with respect to internet advertising. I think the member for Robertson is right: with the preponderance of social networking sites, this is an area where those wishing to advance the cause of the tobacco industry have had the opportunity, almost a free rein, to advertise and encourage young people to take up cigarette smoking. I strongly support the intended effect of this bill to make it a specific offence to advertise and promote tobacco products on the internet or on other electronic media and using a range of technologies. In order to reduce the appeal of smoking the government needs the power to regulate internet tobacco advertising and therefore I support the intention of the bill to enable regulation in respect of the prescribed size, content, format and location of tobacco advertising, as well as any other

health warnings and information, regardless of fees that must accompany any such advertisement.

I got the Parliamentary Library to conduct some research for me on Australians aged 14 and older who had not previously smoked. I was astounded to find that they had their first cigarette at 15.1 years of age for males and at 16.1 years—one year later—for females. That is a pretty alarming statistic. It shows that the group targeted by cigarette companies is high-school kids.

The Cancer Council of Victoria's Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer led a nationally conducted study resulting in the report *Smoking behaviours in Australian secondary students in 2005*. They found that over 140,000 Australian schoolkids between 12 and 17 were smokers at that time. That equated to seven per cent of all 12- to 15-year-olds and 17 per cent of all 16- to 17-year-olds. For anyone who has raised children, that is of concern and it is something that, as I see my grandkids growing up, I certainly want to stay alert to. We know that the early uptake of smoking is also associated with heavier smoking and also greater difficulty in giving up smoking. We should be concerned about these statistics. We should be doing everything that we can to discourage smoking and to reduce the appeal, particularly to our younger people, of taking up cigarette smoking. That is why I support the bill and its intended effect: to clarify the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992 by prescribing, among other things, requirements as to age restricted access systems for access to tobacco advertisements.

I support the government's decision to legislate for mandatory plain paper packaging of tobacco products from July 2012. Again, this is something that goes with the general theme of making smoking less attractive to young people so they do not take

it up. Harking back to the late fifties and sixties, I can remember—and you are probably the same age as me, Mr Deputy Speaker, so you would too—black-and-white TV sets, with the Marlboro Man ads and all the other things that were put out there to encourage people, not kids, to relate to and think they would take on another persona simply by smoking that brand of cigarette. Any advertising that occurs now, as the research shows, is not so much targeted at adults; it is absolutely targeted at the growing market, and that market is kids.

A couple of weeks ago, I put out a press release in my electorate with a couple of doctors. I would particularly like to thank Dr Sang Giang Phan, a Vietnamese doctor in Cabramatta, for pointing out a number of things about cigarette advertising. What he was particularly concerned about was that we should be doing more and more to encourage and help people to kick the habit by using the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. That has now come to pass. Smokers can now take advantage of nicotine patches under the PBS to break the habit. I think that is a good thing. I know there are a lot of people, who still argue, 'That's everyone's personal choice,' but we are talking about an addiction, and kicking an addiction is difficult. I know and, certainly, people who are addicted to smoking know that it is not a matter of choice for them.

The University of Adelaide conducted various research studies into smoking. The important part to me was that they determined that, in the Fairfield LGA, 26.1 per cent of males are current smokers and, in Liverpool, at the other end of my electorate, it is 24.5 per cent. Those figures are still well above the national average of 22 per cent of the community being smokers. Further, from the university's figures, 26 per cent of females in the Fairfield LGA and 24½ per cent of females in Liverpool are smokers. Again,

these are alarming figures. They show that we have a challenge in front of us, one that means that we have to make a solid commitment—we have to commit not only our minds but also resources and, in this case, legislative support—to make smoking less attractive. We need to do something about combating these figures, clearly. These alarming figures show that smoking is an issue, certainly in my electorate of Fowler. It is further evidence of why I support the intention of the bill. The thing that underlines all this is that I know that, of all the deaths of smokers that occur—whether it is a car accident, a heart attack or any other tragedy—50 per cent are tobacco related. The hit rate of tobacco on not only the health but also the mortality of Australians is that high.

As I said, I understand that quitting smoking is often difficult and stressful, but I urge people who smoke to think about their families and their children. I know that the member for Robertson spoke of her younger brother, Eamon, whom I know from school days. I have the same situation with my son Jonathon. Jonathon is a builder. He was probably smoking for some time before I became aware of it—so from his early 20s on. He is a very lucky kid; he has a very precious daughter, Kyani. This is how I put it to him these days: ‘You know the health risks associated with smoking and you also know how central you are to your daughter’s life. You need to make decisions based around that.’ Hopefully, that gets through, because it is not just about the impact of smoking on the person who smokes—and I do understand the issue of addiction—but also about the impact it has on your dependants and the others you love in your life. Sometimes I think you have to put it in that way to encourage people to break the habit to do the right thing, in this case, for their families.

While I know the changes that are proposed in the bill may not be popular with

everybody—I know that some take the view that accessing the internet should not be subject to any restrictions at all—I believe that they are responsible insofar as they encourage smokers to quit and discourage young people in particular from taking up smoking in the first place. In our modern world, technology rapidly evolves and social networking plays an ever-increasingly influential role, so I am told. I am not a regular practitioner of these things, but I know from my own kids the role it does have. It is for everything from shopping online, accessing theatre tickets and a whole host of other things to working out what your family and your friends are up to. If that space were invaded by cigarette advertising, it would become patently clear who the target market is for cigarette companies: because cigarette smoking is probably starting to slow at the older end of society, they are aiming to increase the take-up rate at the younger end, from school age and beyond.

The amendments will apply to tobacco advertising on social networking sites and, therefore, I hope will have a distinct impact in making smoking less attractive, particularly for young people. As a father, it is one thing I discourage greatly. I know what the statistics are. It is not about going out there and lecturing family members about what they should and should not do. But when we carefully consider those that we love, I think we have a collective responsibility to do everything we can to discourage smoking. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms SMYTH (La Trobe) (4.08 pm)—I am very pleased to be able to speak on such an important issue in this place. Certainly, this issue has been foremost in the mind of the government in dealing with what is still, regrettably, a very significant health concern to so many Australians, particularly many Australians of fairly young ages. We know that, as a community, we need to think very seri-

ously indeed about the prevention of illness. Issues of communication culture, health culture and their influence on the health habits of our community are in many ways just as significant as considerations of the treatment and medications which are available to people who have become ill in our community.

This Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010 very clearly will have a significant effect on behaviour and on health culture in general. It will have an effect on the means of communication, particularly to young people. We have heard quite a lot during the debate today about the concerns of many members of this place about young people in their respective communities who succumb to the effects of smoking and ultimately suffer the health consequences later in their lives. We have seen the effectiveness of curbing tobacco advertising in our community over the last decade or so and it is appropriate to now extend these efforts to internet advertising, particularly given the prevalence of that advertising and the regularity with which many people in our community come into contact with such advertising.

We know that tobacco smoking remains the leading preventable cause of premature death and disease in Australia. We know that smoking leads to a very wide range of diseases, including many types of cancer, heart disease, stroke, chest and lung illnesses, and stomach ulcers. We have heard the Cancer Council's estimates that smoking claims the lives of 15,000 or more Australians every year and costs our economy around \$31.5 billion. I was thinking about this figure in terms of the number of people that I represent in my electorate of La Trobe and it would equate to over 16 per cent of the electors in my seat. When I think about the sheer numbers of people and of the families, dependants, friends and colleagues of all of those people, who are undoubtedly affected

by the loss of life that that occasions, it is disturbing indeed.

There are a great many statistics that can be discussed in this debate, which have been discussed and which will continue to be discussed. It is important that they be quoted regularly because they are so terribly alarming. It is really an unthinkable number of people. Our loss of those people from our community has very lasting and devastating impacts. We know that over 750,000 hospital bed days are attributable to tobacco related disease. In the context of our very recent and current discussions about how we are aiming to reform our national health system, it is a sobering reminder of the significance of such a preventable disease and such a prevalent cause of disease in our society.

This government knows the value of disease prevention. That is why we have made such a serious commitment to primary care through our national health reforms and it is why we are making such a concerted effort to curb cigarette smoking through a variety of measures. It is also why those of us on this side of the House will not accept political donations from the tobacco industry. That is a very significant point.

The Cancer Council estimates that 15 per cent of smokers do not smoke every day. That group of people includes new smokers who have not yet established regular smoking patterns and who might regard themselves as occasional or social smokers. In targeting smoking rates, this bill is very likely to benefit those in that category identified in the Cancer Council's research. If we have the means of limiting the attraction of smoking for people who are at risk of taking up smoking or ex-smokers who have recently quit and who might otherwise be influenced to start smoking again then we really must use it.

The report of the Cancer Council into the smoking behaviours of Australian secondary students in 2005 was particularly troubling. It found that experience with smoking becomes more common as adolescents progress through secondary school. In 2005 around 84 per cent of 12-year-olds had no experience with smoking. But this proportion, unfortunately, decreased with the age of those surveyed. The research determined that only 45 per cent of 17-year-olds had no experience with smoking. Of those surveyed, across all age groups, around 32 per cent of current smokers smoked daily. It is worth bearing that in mind when we are talking about secondary school students. The proportion of current smokers that smoked on a daily basis increased from 17 per cent among the 12-year-olds to a very troubling 37 per cent among 17-year-olds.

We know that young Australians who are aged 25 to 29 have by far the highest rate of smoking among Australians. In 2007, the Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer estimated that some 28 per cent of adults in that age group were smokers. It found that in my home state of Victoria, in 2007, some 19 per cent of the adult population were smokers. It found that more than 80 per cent of smokers became addicted to cigarettes as teenagers and that the average age when people took up smoking was, at that stage, 15.9 years. The consequences of that in health terms are obviously very significant, assuming that all of those remain heavily addicted to smoking throughout their adult lives.

The centre also found that 19 per cent of young adults in the 18 to 24 age category were smokers and that 23 per cent of those aged 30 to 39 were smokers. Obviously these are extremely troubling statistics and any measures that we can implement to try to address those statistics are fairly welcome.

This bill is an important step in reaching the targets set under the COAG National Healthcare Agreement for reducing smoking rates by 10 per cent by 2018 and halving the Indigenous smoking rate. It will be important in addressing the health culture associated with cigarettes, particularly for those young people who may otherwise take up smoking or progress to heavier use of cigarettes. We know that the AMA has given its support resoundingly to the measures proposed in this bill. Indeed, its president has remarked:

The proposed new law will make it harder for tobacco companies to target teenagers and young Australians with attractive ads and promotions on the Internet. It will help deter young people from taking up smoking and save the lives of thousands of Australians. Banning or limiting tobacco industry advertising is vital if we are going to help people to quit smoking or stop taking up the killer habit.

We know that inroads have been made into the number of people smoking daily in Australia during the last decade, and in many ways that is very directly linked to the harsher measures imposed on advertising. We have seen that more than half a million fewer people are smoking than were smoking a decade ago. Unfortunately, we know that there are around three million Australians who still smoke. We certainly know and have heard regularly throughout this debate that messages and images promoting the use of tobacco products can normalise tobacco use. They can increase the uptake of smoking by youth and act as a significant disincentive to quit.

Since 1992 most forms of advertising of tobacco products have been banned under the act. For consistency, and to reflect the changes in technology and the means of communication of many people, particularly young people, and to ensure that our act reflects Australian society in 2011, it is impor-

tant that this bill's measures be implemented swiftly.

The bill is part of the government's promised package of measures targeting smoking, and they are significant measures. They include record funding being committed to targeted antismoking campaigns aimed at cutting smoking in very high-risk and disadvantaged groups; the first increase in tobacco excise in over a decade; a requirement that cigarettes be sold in plain packaging; and now the restriction on internet advertising of tobacco products.

This bill will have a very significant focus on retailers who advertise their products without required health warnings and as being 'tax-free', therefore advertising 'cheap' cigarettes. It is intended to address the gap presently in place which does not cover internet advertising, and amends the act to specifically include advertising over both the internet and other electronic media.

Following, hopefully, this bill's implementation, regulations will also be developed under the act in order to prescribe specific requirements for the advertising of tobacco products. These will include the provision of health warnings, warnings about age restrictions on the sale of those products, information about fees and charges payable in relation to those products, and particularly age restricted access systems for access to tobacco ads. These measures are very consistent with the government's strong approach to curbing cigarette smoking and restricting tobacco advertising. We know that effects are very significant for those in the 24-29 age group in particular, who have continued to take up smoking and remain smokers at an alarmingly high rate, despite the good work that has been done in trying to limit tobacco advertising in recent decades. We certainly know that prevention, most of the time, is better than cure and that there need to be

very significant efforts put into changing the culture associated with tobacco use in this country. I am particularly pleased to be able to speak to a bill which will have a fairly large impact upon my own electorate and on the young people whom I represent in this place.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa—Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services) (4.20 pm)—When I saw this Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010 on the *Notice Paper*, I thought: 'There but for the grace of God.' When I was about 10 years of age, or perhaps even younger—eight—we used to play tennis on a Saturday morning, my brother, Martin, my then best friend, Roman Iwachiw, and me. On one weekend we went to the overhead bridge between the two platforms at Guildford station and he introduced us to cigarettes. Martin and I, being the sons of a person who smoked 60 a day until last decade of his life, never touched them again, and Roman went on to smoke 60 day until the last decade or so himself. So that is an example of their pervasive availability at that time and the fact that people can be introduced to them at a very young age.

As the previous speaker indicated, there probably is a need, despite the fact that it is known by many people, to reiterate the actual health realities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States estimate that 443,000 people a year die in the United States as a result of cigarette smoking. That is related to an estimate that eight million Americans will die by 2030 from this cause. They note:

More deaths are caused each year by tobacco use than by all deaths from human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), illegal drug use, alcohol use, motor vehicle injuries, suicides, and murders combined.

This is indeed a very serious area of public policy. Our nation has been at the forefront

in this area. As early as 1973 we had banned television advertising, had action on excise, had workplace and public space bans, had advertising initiatives et cetera. The member for La Trobe, who spoke previously, indicated that this side of the House has made the decision not to take money from this fairly perfidious industry. So there has been very long-term action by governments in this country. Ironically, for all that was wrong with apartheid in South Africa, I think Australia and South Africa were amongst the countries that were most draconian with some of these measures many decades ago.

The background to this is a COAG agreement to try to halve the Indigenous rate of smoking and reduce the overall smoking rate in Australia by 10 per cent by 2018. As I said, the health figures are very persuasive: smoking causes 80 per cent of all lung cancer deaths and 20 per cent of all cancer deaths in general, such as mouth, bladder, kidney and stomach cancers.

In recent years the internet has been used for promotion and sales. In the same way that the tobacco companies have decided it is easier to move towards the Third World markets of China and Asia in general, as tough regulations have restricted their ability to make money in the West—there has been a very serious campaign to exploit those populations where governments are less active in countering them—there has been a tendency to use the internet. There are a series of citations I make on this matter. Obviously, this is more pronounced in the United States. An article in the *Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics* as early as 2004 stated:

Purchasing tobacco over the Internet provides anonymity for the purchaser. Cyberspace tobacco purchasers are perceived as risk-free. Similar to vending machines, there is no face-to-face contact for Internet purchasers. Many Internet tobacco vendors purport to implement some form of customer age verification process, but they are nomi-

nal efforts. Approximately 65 percent of domestic tobacco sales websites have an age verification protocol that consists of either typing in a birth date or clicking a button that says, “Yes, I’m at least 18 years of age.” Roughly 9 percent of the websites ask the purchaser to fax in a picture ID, and only 6 percent check the purchaser’s identification when the tobacco is delivered.

... ..

In addition to allowing easy and anonymous tobacco sales to youth, Internet vendors also undermine tobacco restrictions by avoiding excise taxes. Numerous studies show that an increase in the excise tax on tobacco results in a decrease in tobacco consumption. Empirically, studies indicate that a 10 percent increase in tobacco prices results in a 5 percent decrease in adult usage rates and a 7 percent decrease in tobacco consumption among youth under the age of eighteen.

In the Substance Abuse Policy Research Program’s policy brief, Kurt Ribisl and others commented:

(1) Smokers in jurisdictions with higher cigarette excise taxes have easy access to cheap cigarettes online, which may undermine their resolve to quit or reduce their smoking. Left unchecked, rising Internet cigarette sales have the potential to undermine decades of progress in reducing youth and adult smoking rates achieved by raising cigarette prices.

... ..

These findings suggest that the Internet is being used as a vehicle to circumvent current tobacco control policies, allowing for tax evasion, youth access, and unrestricted marketing. The findings suggest a clear need for federal policies to prevent tax evasion, limit youth access, restrict marketing, and to effectively regulate a growing business that occurs across state and country lines.

The PR Newswire article titled ‘Congress approves bill curbing internet tobacco sales in victory for kids and taxpayers’ notes:

Voting 387 to 25, the U.S. House of Representatives today gave final congressional approval to the Prevent All Cigarette Trafficking (PACT) Act, legislation to curtail the growing sales of tax-

evading, low-cost cigarettes and other tobacco products over the Internet and through the mail.

It said the PACT Act will:

- Require Internet sellers to pay all federal, state ... taxes ...
- Mandate that the age and identification of purchasers be checked at purchase and at delivery;
- Require Internet vendors to comply with state and local laws ...
- Provide federal and state enforcement officials with new tools to block delivery of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products ...

There is indeed concern, and attempts have been made to overcome the campaigns that we have seen. Where anonymity is reduced, evidence shows that there is a significant drop-off in usage. As I said earlier, the government of this country, for quite a number of decades, has not been slow with regard to action to counter cigarette smoking. Of course, this government in particular organised the first increase in tobacco excise above inflation for more than a decade, an increase of 25 per cent. It has cracked down on one of the last frontiers of tobacco advertising. In a world first, cigarettes will have to be sold in plain packaging. Furthermore, there have been moves to restrict Australian internet advertising of tobacco products. The government is injecting an extra nearly \$28 million into hard-hitting antismoking campaigns.

It has been claimed that, if anything, this legislation is too moderate. By having only the same requirements as point of sale it is not going as far as it should in countering the very serious development where young people can purchase cigarettes without any evidence of their age whatsoever. There can be, through evasion of taxes, as I noted earlier, a very serious deterioration of the incentive to not smoke. According to market research studies commissioned on behalf of PM USA,

more than 800 million cigarettes were sold to US consumers by internet sellers in 2008. That gives you, in a far bigger market with a far bigger population, some indication of the degree to which the internet can undermine these health initiatives.

I certainly congratulate the government for going down this line. We all know about the health impacts. As noted by the previous speaker, the Australian Medical Association has not been backward in supporting the government very strongly on this initiative. Dr Andrew Pesce said:

The Government's strong action to restrict advertising of tobacco products must be backed by the Parliament.

Furthermore, he said:

It will help deter young people from taking up smoking and save the lives of thousands of Australians.

Those are important statements in this area. I commend the legislation.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (4.30 pm)—I welcome the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010, and its provisions which clarify and strengthen the application of tobacco advertising and promotion restrictions that will now apply to the internet and other new media communications technologies.

This reform institutes a sensible change that was contemplated within the parliament as far back as 2002. At that time a review of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act, under the guidance of the then parliamentary secretary for health, Trish Worth, seemed to conclude that no change was required. I say 'seemed' because no report was prepared as a result of the review and the inquiry submissions were not made public.

In any case, it is through this government's commitment to a substantially stronger and more effective preventative health program that we have before us a bill

that ensures that there is a specific offence to cover the advertisement or promotion of tobacco products through the internet or other electronic media, including future technologies, where the promotion is non-compliant, and ensures regulations can be made to restrict and control any such promotion, including the requirements that pertain to health warnings and age restrictions.

These changes add to the range of measures the government has implemented to further decrease the rate of smoking and to further reduce the attraction of smoking in Australia. This includes an increase of 25 per cent in tobacco excise—the first increase in more than a decade. This measure alone has a double purpose: it adds a significant price disincentive to the purchase of tobacco products, and it will generate an additional \$5 billion over four years to be directly invested in better health and hospitals through the National Health and Hospitals Network Fund.

This government is also responsible for the introduction of the world-first initiative requiring that cigarettes be sold in plain packaging, and for the rollout of a new \$27.8 million anti-smoking campaign. Together, these measures are part of the government's resolve when it comes to improving preventative health, and when it comes to making further headway in relation to reducing the severe public health impacts and costs of smoking.

Of course I acknowledge that the tobacco control position in Australia is a comparatively good one. The latest figures from the Australian Institute of Health show that daily smoking rates for people over 14 have fallen from 19.5 per cent in 2001 to 16.6 per cent in 2007. That rate is one of the lowest in the world, and has been a contributing factor in Australia achieving one of the highest average life expectancies.

But the changes that this bill introduces are important because they seek to head off the move by tobacco companies and some retailers to promote tobacco products through the internet and other electronic media. This is necessary because there has been a growth in promotion through such media. This was noted by the President of the Australian Council on Smoking and Health, Mike Daube, who said:

Cigarettes are now being heavily promoted on the internet, and there are serious concerns that both online advertising and social networking sites are being used to promote tobacco to young people.

It is in the nature of companies to explore the promotional opportunities represented by new media technologies, and of course it is particularly attractive in the case of a product like tobacco, whose advertising and promotion is strongly curtailed. Tobacco companies have a history of seeking new ways to promote their products in technical compliance with the letter of the law, even where that is clearly not in keeping within the law's spirit.

And as we make these further changes let us remember, that notwithstanding the special nature of tobacco—that is, a product that when used as intended, kills people—the companies that produce it have made it their business, over time, to deny both that their products are addictive and that they are injurious to health. Let us remember what was set down clearly in the *National Tobacco Strategy 2004-2009* which stated:

Tobacco is a unique consumer item. Tobacco products cause premature death and disability when used as intended by the manufacturer; and they are addictive. No company trying to introduce cigarettes into Australia today would succeed in getting them onto the market.

For these reasons, this bill is naturally supported by the National Preventative Health Taskforce and the Australian Medical Association.

I am very happy to say that since 2004 the Labor Party has not accepted donations from tobacco companies. The Liberal and National parties, however, continue to accept very substantial political donations from the two largest tobacco companies that operate in Australia: Philip Morris and British American Tobacco. Indeed, these companies are among the most generous donors to the coalition parties, and few companies donate more widely to their various branches and candidates.

The approach of the Leader of the Opposition, who of course was previously the health minister, has been to say that this is a legal product and there is no good reason for the Liberal Party to distinguish between tobacco companies and other legitimate corporate citizens. I think that is a fairly convenient position. The quote I gave earlier from the *National Tobacco Strategy 2004-2009* makes it clear that tobacco is a product that needs to be distinguished from other products and that big tobacco is a class of corporate citizen that need to be distinguished from other corporate citizens.

The fact is that cigarettes are a legal form of highly-addictive and highly-effective poison. Tobacco-related deaths account for approximately 15 per cent of all deaths and 80 per cent of all drug-related deaths in Australia. In the 2008 report titled *The costs of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug abuse to Australian society in 2004-05*, commissioned as part of the Commonwealth's national drug strategy, the total social cost of smoking in the financial year 2004-05 was estimated at \$31.5 billion. This represents 56 per cent of the total cost of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug use. In 2004-05, smoking caused 14,900 deaths; was responsible for 753,618 hospital bed days, and for \$669 million in hospital costs. For these reasons tobacco control is one of the most important areas of domestic policy.

Tobacco control needs to be exercised without the influence, or even the perception of influence, of big tobacco. The success we have had so far in controlling and regulating Australia's deadliest product, and our progress towards the steady decrease in tobacco consumption, has occurred despite the often implacable resistance of tobacco companies. In illustrating big tobacco's resistance to regulation, Konrad Jamrozik, an internationally recognised expert on tobacco control, made the following remarks about big tobacco, in his role as the Professor of Evidence-based Health Care, University of Queensland:

Its standard tactics are to debate almost endlessly the scientific evidence on the harm caused by its products, to cultivate (and regularly pay) spokespeople in other industries and in academia, and to purchase influence by making substantial donations to any political party that will accept them.

Sadly, Professor Jamrozik passed away last year after a professional life in which he had given so much to the antismoking cause. He was a life member and former Chairman of the Australian Council on Smoking and Health. He did work for the World Health Organisation in Geneva and in other countries. His contributions were recognised through his receipt of the inaugural President's Award from the National Heart Foundation of Australia and the Nigel Gray Award, which is given for Excellence in International Tobacco Control. The work undertaken by Professor Konrad Jamrozik throughout his career helped to save thousands of lives. It is only appropriate that in the passage of this bill we remember and honour him.

The Howard government ratified the World Health Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the FCTC, in February 2005. Article 5(3) of the convention states:

In setting and implementing their public health policies with respect to tobacco control, Parties shall act to protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law.

Article 13(2) states:

Each Party shall in accordance with its constitution or constitutional principles undertake a comprehensive ban of all tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

Is it unrealistic or unreasonable to think that on this basis the Liberal and National parties would themselves refuse sponsorship by big tobacco? Tobacco control is not a matter of moral nicety and nor is it about playing politics. Tobacco control in this country must be exercised without the slightest hint or perception of influence for the simple reason that cigarettes cost this country so much. Each year they cost us thousands of deaths; each year they cost us billions of dollars.

Some opposite may point out that, notwithstanding their reliance on money from tobacco companies, Australia's tobacco control record is a comparatively good one. No-one can dispute that, but the real question is: could it be better? Could there be fewer deaths and are there ways in which we could lower the social and economic costs of tobacco? Of course there are. And let us not assume that our progress when it comes to tobacco control, cigarette use and the death and disease and enormous expense that flow from this poisonous, addictive product is assured—because there are those who actually believe that we should retreat from the achievements we have made.

In 2006, the Victorian branch of the Young Liberal Movement took a proposal to their annual conference calling for an end to the prohibition on tobacco advertising. The explanatory text stated:

Prohibitions on tobacco advertising are an insult to the intelligence of the ordinary Australian.

One wonders not only about the intelligence of those conference participants but also about the guidance they had received from their political elders in a political party which relies so significantly on money from big tobacco.

Finally, I simply acknowledge that the Labor Party was wrong to accept money from big tobacco up until 2004. We confronted that error and we made the change: we quit big tobacco money. The Liberal and National parties are wrong to continue receiving a significant amount of their funding from tobacco companies. This bill is another step in the steady march towards a day when smoking tobacco will be looked back upon as an historical oddity and its terrible impact on the health of Australians and on the cost of health care will be a thing of the past.

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

NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK COMPANIES BILL 2010

Cognate bills:

TELECOMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK MEASURES—ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 2 February, on motion by **Mr Albanese**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (4.41 pm)—I rise to speak today in strong support of these two vital bills, the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010. These two bills are a key part of the legislative package required to deliver the federal Labor government's commitment to establish a national

broadband network in this great nation, an initiative that defines this government and its vision and that will define this country's future. Aside from delivering on this nation-building commitment, the NBN access bill will, in particular, provide certainty to business and the wider community about the competitiveness of the National Broadband Network. The NBN access bill will establish clear open-access equivalence and transparency requirements for the NBN Co. It will also extend supply and open-access obligations to owners of other superfast networks that are rolled out or upgraded after the passage of this bill through parliament.

The National Broadband Network Companies Bill will obligate NBN Co. to limit and focus its operations on wholesale-only telecommunications. It will also establish arrangements in reference to parliament for the eventual sale of the NBN Co. once the network rollout is complete. These two bills will deliver on federal Labor's commitment to establish a wholesale-only National Broadband Network offering access on open and equivalent terms. They are clear evidence of Labor's commitment to deliver an effective, transparent and competitive network, something it is worth noting that the market has failed to do thus far. I, for one, seriously doubt that they would ever have done so to the extent that included the technical and financial challenge posed by last-mile connection.

During this debate, some on the other side of the chamber, and some commentators too, have suggested that, like President Obama in the US, we should not be putting all our technology eggs in the fibre broadband basket and instead should be concentrating on 4G wireless and satellite delivery. I cannot agree and it seems that neither does the Chairman of Google or the CEO of the NBN Co., Mike Quigley, who said in evidence:

Far from proof that fibre will be redundant, the 4G announcement is very good news for the NBN rollout. While people like the convenience of their wireless devices, fixed networks are and will continue to be the workhorse of data download.

And young people know so much about data download. Today in a briefing I saw an application that is being used by government. Apps are becoming so frequent, so helpful and so instant. It is important to say that the growing popularity of iPads and other mobile devices leads to greater data demands and to meet those demands requires the serious grunt of fibre. That is indisputable. The Chairman of Google, Eric Schmidt, said a week ago that Australia was 'leading the world in understanding the importance of fibre'.

I think that was very clearly illustrated on Saturday in an article in *Australian Financial Review* by Julian Bajkowski. He said:

Lurking in the background is the big sleeper issue that wireless speeds and capacity are, as a function of nature, a strictly limited resource. The more people who pile onto a frequency to make calls, send emails or update their Facebook status, the less signal there is for the next punter connecting to the network.

Imagine a battery hooked up to 100 40-watt light bulbs burning brightly. Multiply that to 1000 bulbs and increase their strength to 100 watts connected to the same battery and the picture dims very quickly without a boost from the mains.

Apply that to mobile phones and you get one or two bars of signal strength in congested metro areas when you should have five.

I think that is a very apt way of describing it so that all people can understand that the more people who use wireless, of whatever status, the more demand on it and therefore the slower it becomes.

I am a member for a regional seat, and we know that in regional Australia there will never be enough towers to meet that demand.

It will be fibre that gives certainty, and it will be wire-line services like in the NBN which will take the load off mobile networks and certainly all of the other applications that are going to happen.

I note there is one key issue that the opposition keep raising—the issue that they have danced around—and that is mobile base stations, the same ones that give coverage, are usually connected to the same kind of optical fibre that will power the NBN. Without the NBN we certainly would not be able to deliver on the needs for 4G, 3G et cetera. Fibre is the nationwide spine that we need for the future. While this does have serious limitations, it is contested that the more people on it, the slower it goes. It is prone to interference from noise in a real-world environment and wireless will initially roll out to capitals and prime regional areas, leaving the rest behind. So I find the comments of the opposition quite deceiving and certainly not linked to reality.

The reality is that the homes of every Australian will increasingly become communication central. In the not-too-distant future our homes will be an e-health extension to our doctors' surgeries and to our clinics and hospitals. Our homes will be an e-learning extension to our children's schools, to our TAFEs and universities. Our homes will be our e-entertainment centres from where we will access every cultural and recreation experience possible. So many personal and care services will have elements that can be delivered via our home internet service. A stable and reliable real time link—link to fibre—will have countless possibilities.

Although we would all agree that virtual encounters will never be equivalent to a direct personal service, high-speed broadband based on the NBN fibre rollout will be the closest thing to virtual robots in our homes—freeing up more and more people for critical

service delivery and helping to overcome workforce shortages and to increase participation. I remain so excited about the profound and far-reaching changes ahead and the impact they will have on workforce shortages and participation in critical areas.

I am very proud that the NBN is a Labor legacy issue and that in decades to come it will be ranked alongside the social democratic reforms of the Whitlam government and the transformation of the Australian economy by the Hawke-Keating governments. The NBN stands as further proof that Labor are the true reformers of this nation and that they are the people who believe in social engagement and participation in every service that we can offer them. Conversely, the opposition to the NBN from the coalition stands as further proof that they are the luddites, the dinosaurs struggling to imagine or create the future.

It is no exaggeration to say that the National Broadband Network represents one of the biggest nation-building projects in Australia's history. It will deliver affordable, high-speed broadband services to all Australians, irrespective of where they work or where they live. It will extend optical fibre to 93 per cent of premises, with speeds of 100 megabits per second—100 times faster than many Australians have access to today. Other communities will be serviced by next generation wireless and satellite technologies, with average data rates more than 20 times higher than what is currently available to most users. That is the undertaking we have given to the Australian people and that is what we are determined to deliver.

The establishment of the NBN will represent a major step forward for telecommunications infrastructure across Australia. It will be a game-changer for this nation's future economic competitiveness. As the OECD noted in May 2009:

Broadband is needed as a complementary investment to other infrastructure such as buildings, roads, transportation systems, health and electricity grids, allowing them to be “smart” and save energy, assist the aging, improve safety and adapt to new ideas.

It will affect how we conduct every aspect of our lives, how we communicate, how we express our creativity and our talents and intellect, how we store, share, document, exchange and access all forms of human activity and human knowledge. It will lead to better outcomes, more competition, more choice and more innovation for consumers and business. It will lay the foundations for social, cultural and economic benefit for future generations. Needless to say, its effects on regional and rural Australia in particular will be far-reaching.

By eroding the tyranny of distance, the network will significantly reduce the costs of doing business outside metropolitan areas. The NBN has the potential to deliver very real dividends for the health of regional Australians. By significantly expanding the opportunities for e-health services, it will improve tremendously the ability of regional hospitals—such as Newcastle’s John Hunter Hospital—to contribute to the wellbeing of regional communities. For example, the Hunter New England Area Health Service, supported by the federal Labor government’s Digital Regions Initiative, is currently undertaking a three-year program to deliver telehealth services to more than 200 patients in rural and regional communities and the NBN is supporting that initiative. Prior to this initiative by the NBN, we have seen hospitals linked to each other and professionals and experts linked to each other, but we have not seen them able to link to users, to patients. The program targets chronic disease sufferers and links them in their own homes to monitoring, education and support services. It is a wonderful, tangible and real-life ex-

ample of how telecommunications technology can improve the health of communities otherwise disadvantaged by limited access to health services.

Federal Labor investments in telecommunications are directly benefiting the health of the people of Newcastle and the Hunter Region. On 17 August 2010 the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, announced that Newcastle would be one of the first places in Australia to benefit from the use of electronic medical records. Through Hunter GP Access, patients in my electorate will be able to manage their own records and control access to their own records and control access to the information. GP Access and the Federal Labor government are taking Newcastle’s local healthcare system into the 21st century by building an electronic health records system that improves patient care and the safety and efficiency of the health system. We would love to see that rolled out all around the country via the NBN.

In addition to e-health records, GP Access will use healthcare identifiers for patients, providers and hospitals and will be the first to electronically send discharge summaries and referrals using national specifications. They will help lead the way in developing and informing future planning of the system, improving technology and identifying what works well and what could work better. When used via the NBN across this country, there will be improved interactions and patient information transfers will be fast and reliable. Health is one of the many areas in which the NBN will improve equality of access and opportunity for Australians outside the major capital cities.

I know from firsthand experience the serious limitations to broadband access many in regional Australia suffer. For too long now, residents of the Hunter have suffered from inadequate internet connections, due in large

part to the distance limitations of ADSL technology. That is to say that ADSL can only be offered effectively if the residence is within a certain distance of a telephone exchange. As a result of this, places like Thornton and Shortland in my electorate continue to have serious difficulties accessing ADSL coverage due to distance and topographical factors. By offering fibre-optical access to the door of every premise, the NBN offers to fill this serious gap in the economic potential of regional Australia.

Major regional centres such as Newcastle stand ready to benefit from high-speed broadband. Like all my colleagues here in the House, I would of course love to see Newcastle and the wider Hunter Region be among the earliest areas to benefit from the NBN rollout. That is something my local Labor colleagues—the members for Shortland, Charlton, Hunter, Dobell and Robertson—are all particularly supportive of. I pay credit to Regional Development Australia and the Hunter and Central Coast, who are working with local industry to advance our position and ensure the right conditions are in place to maximise the opportunity for Newcastle, the Central Coast and the Hunter region to be among the early beneficiaries of the NBN.

Newcastle's success in the Smart Grid, Smart City initiative puts our region in the box seat to fully experience the full magnitude of the benefits of high-speed broadband. I would welcome collaboration between the Smart Grid, Smart City consortium, led by Energy Australia, and the NBN Co. Smart technology and innovation are central to the future of Newcastle. The people of Newcastle already know from hard experience how to innovate in order to pursue knowledge and excellence and sustain a diverse economy, and that is what we have been doing across all sectors. We have built a knowledge based economy, and the NBN offers the potential to

consolidate that success and make us truly an intelligent community.

The opportunities that the National Broadband network offers to regional Australia in particular may well be endless but they are certainly essential. To paraphrase the member for New England, another member of this House who understands the importance of broadband for regional Australia, the future is fibre, will be fibre, should be fibre and regional Australians should, in the main, be allowed to share in that technology.

This important piece of nation-building infrastructure is deserving of bipartisan support, but the Leader of the Opposition's proposal to scrap the NBN represents a slap in the face for the people of regional Australia. Sadly, the Leader of the Opposition chooses to put his wrecking-ball politics before the interests of the people of Newcastle and other regional electorates and indeed the interests of this nation. Clearly, the member for Warringah is well out of step with community sentiment on this issue. As the mother of two young adult daughters I sometimes look at him and think: I can't believe it! My daughters would be so ashamed if I did not understand the importance of this technology to their generation and to their future.

The people of my electorate understand why the NBN will play a crucial role in their economic future. They understand the importance of the federal government stepping in to allow for high-speed broadband access to their homes and workplaces every minute of every day. And they understand that Mr Abbott's proposal to tear down the National Broadband Network would represent a serious step backwards for their future economic prosperity and the people of regional Australia.

The federal Labor government's broadband policy will move Australia to the international forefront of connectivity, helping us

to compete with countries like Korea, Japan, Singapore and much of Europe, which already benefit from high-speed broadband. The choice for the future of our digital economy is clear. I am pleased to support these bills.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (4.57 pm)—The National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010 form a further part of the legislative scheme dealing with the National Broadband Network, building on the bill that went through the House last year. The key purposes of these bills are to establish NBN Co. and regulate how it operates and how it may be sold; and to regulate the terms on which retailers can get access to NBN Co.—by making further amendments to Parts XIB and XIC of what was the Trade Practices Act but is now known as the Competition and Consumer Act.

In commenting about the legislation that is before the House today, I want to make three fundamental points: firstly, the legislative scheme is a fundamentally bad one; secondly, the provisions incorporated in this bill that make NBN Co. hard to sell are bad policy and essentially intellectually dishonest; and, thirdly, the provisions contained in this legislative scheme to impose, by statute, barriers to entry on players wishing to enter the market to compete with NBN Co. are an atrociously bad idea and should be removed.

Let me turn to the first point. This legislative scheme, of which the two bills before the House today form a part, is a fundamentally bad one. Let there be no doubt that it is well accepted by those on this side of the House that the telecommunications sector in Australia faces two serious problems: firstly, fixed line competition is weak because of Telstra's vertical integration; and, secondly,

Australia's broadband infrastructure needs to be upgraded. These two propositions are not contentious, but the solution which the Labor Party is putting forward to these problems is contentious in the extreme. We say it is a bad solution; in fact, it is no solution.

Let us remind ourselves of the elements of this solution. Labor is proposing to spend \$41 billion of taxpayers' money, including \$27 billion on providing 100 per cent equity funding to a completely government owned company. Secondly, Labor will use that money to effectively renationalise a large part of the telecommunications sector, reversing a policy direction that has been followed in Australian telecommunications for at least 15 years—a policy direction consistent with that followed in many countries around the world.

Thirdly, Labor's policy exposes government to the very conflict between its interest as regulator and its interest as taxpayer which was faced for many years, and which was a powerful rationale for privatising Telstra in the first place. Fourthly, this scheme will have the government owned NBN Co. enter into a deal with Telstra for Telstra to effectively stop competing and to exit the market. Telstra will no longer operate an access network but will instead use the new access network to be built by NBN Co. Fifthly; Labor's scheme will see \$11 billion of taxpayers' money spent to secure Telstra's agreement to this outcome.

Next, once that money is spent, this government is going to take the existing Telstra network and trash it. It is going to completely destroy it, even though that network is more than capable of continuing for many years to deliver both voice and broadband services to millions of Australian homes and businesses. Further, as part of this vandalism, this government will completely destroy the existing hybrid fibre co-ax network operated

by Telstra, which passes 2.5 million homes in five cities and is already able to deliver 100 megabits per second. That is the speed which we are told is one of the great selling points of Labor's NBN. We have a network which can already deliver this speed in Melbourne and could readily deliver it in other cities with some upgrading, and that network is to be trashed.

Further, Labor's scheme involves putting taxpayers' money at risk in a business venture which is fundamentally challenged, a business venture which relies on wholly unrealistic assumptions such as a dramatic tapering off in the growth of wireless penetration. Wireless penetration, as NBN Co.'s own corporate plan makes clear, has risen from four per cent to 13 per cent in the last six years. Yet NBN Co.'s operating plan now assumes it will not exceed 16.3 per cent in the 14 years to 2025—a fundamentally unrealistic assumption which you could only arrive at if you were desperate to indicate that your plan was worth pursuing. Even with this fundamentally unrealistic assumption, this plan in which \$41 billion of taxpayers' money is risked will still only be able to produce a pathetic seven per cent rate of return. No investor with free will would touch this proposition with a barge pole. Sadly, every Australian taxpayer is a forced participant thanks to the policy of this government, in one of the worst business propositions ever promoted in the history of trade and commerce in this country.

The worst aspect of this scheme is that Labor is so desperate to shore up the very dim commercial prospects of NBN Co. that it is legislating to deliberately suppress competition in telecommunications networks by imposing additional burdens on companies which are contemplating entering the market to build networks in competition with NBN Co. My first proposition to this House is that this legislative scheme is a fundamentally

bad one. My second proposition is that the provisions contained in this bill which are designed to make NBN Co. particularly hard to sell are exceptionally poor policy and are fundamentally intellectually dishonest.

Those provisions require the following steps to be carried out before NBN Co. can be sold: firstly, a declaration by the communications minister via a disallowable instrument that the NBN is 'complete' and 'fully operational'; secondly, a Productivity Commission inquiry and report on the competitive and financial implications of NBN Co, the privatisation and appropriate post-sale ownership limitations and regulatory arrangements; thirdly, a joint parliamentary committee inquiry and response to the PC report; and, fourthly, a declaration by the finance minister via a disallowable instrument that market conditions are suitable for a sale. Until all of this happens, 100 per cent of NBN Co. will stay in public hands.

This is part of the deeply disingenuous approach of the Labor Party to broadband policy. I remind the House that the original policy, which the Labor Party took to the 2007 election, was that only \$4.7 billion of public money would be allocated and it would be allocated in a joint venture with a private sector company. By April 2009, that plan was dead. It was on its back, gasping for breath. It was deceased. By April 2009, we had a \$43 billion project. But then Prime Minister Rudd assured us:

The Government will be the majority shareholder of this company, but significant private sector investment in the company is anticipated.

The government proposes that it would welcome private sector participation of up to 49 per cent—that's all right then! Where is it? Nowhere to be seen. Yet again that aspect of Labor's policy has been junked.

When the implementation study appeared in May 2010, we learned that 100 per cent of

the cost of this venture would be borne by taxpayers. Further, in this legislation, despite the government's stated commitment to sell NBN Co back into private hands, the government deliberately introduces all kinds of detailed restrictions to make this as difficult as possible. It is no secret why this has happened—this is all about accommodating the Greens, who are opposed to NBN Co. returning to private hands. While Labor may be in government, the Greens are in power.

This bill is also about leaving a 'poison pill' designed to tie the hands of a future government when Labor loses power. As we have seen with the grubby conduct of New South Wales Labor, when it comes to the dreadful deal they have done on power this is standard Labor behaviour—you burn the villages as you retreat! That is exactly what has happened in this bill. This is the same Labor which in a fit of hypocrisy steadfastly opposed the privatisation of Telstra for 11 years from 1996 to 2007, even though the previous Labor government had enthusiastically privatised Qantas, the Commonwealth Bank and CSL. Those were good policy decisions. But when it came to telecommunications, unfortunately, we have seen a sad history of bad policy and rank political posturing.

The third objectionable element of this package of bills is the provisions which would impose by statute barriers to any player wishing to enter to build networks in competition with NBN Co.. These are the so-called 'anti-cherry-picking' provisions. That rang alarm bells for me when I saw those words, because there is no code word used by a monopolist more frequently than 'cherry picking'. We have heard those words regularly from Telstra for two decades: 'This must not be allowed to occur because it is cherry picking.' I will tell you what it is, Deputy Speaker D'Ath: it is a red flashing light warning signal 'monopolist behaviour

occurring'. That is exactly what we are seeing.

We are seeing a National Broadband Network Company being established and protected by a series of exceptionally objectionable provisions deliberately designed to put lead in the saddle bags of anybody wishing to come in and compete with NBN Co. and build a competing network. They will be required to give automatic access to their network under this legislation. Extraordinarily, they will be required to do so under 'access rules based on those applying to services supplied by NBN Co.'. In other words, NBN Co.'s competitors will largely be in the hands of NBN Co.; whatever NBN Co. decides to do in terms of pricing or other terms and conditions of supply will bind competitors.

This is an exceptionally radical policy departure for two reasons: firstly, it has always been the case under the telecommunications access regime in Australia that you are only required to give access to your network if it delivers a service which had been determined by the ACCC to be a 'declared service', and in turn a threshold condition for this was that, in essence, you had to have market power. It has never previously been the case that a small player, a new entrant, has been required to grant access to its network. But that is what this bill now proposes. The first time you come in and build even a few kilometres of network in competition with NBN Co., you will be obliged to provide access. That is a radical policy departure designed to make it as hard as possible for new entrants, designed to nobble competition, designed to be part of this grubby stitch-up in which competition is sacrificed so that Labor's ailing, hopeless NBN business plan can be given even the smallest chance of gasping into life.

Secondly, it has never previously been the case that the access terms and conditions committed to by one company in the telecommunications industry automatically binds other companies in the industry. Indeed, it gets worse, because if you are building a so-called 'fixed-line superfast access network' you are required to conform with technical standards specified by NBN Co. This is a throwback to the days when Telecom Australia set technical standards and you could be fined for plugging a phone into a jack which did not meet Telecom's standards. The reality is that for many years the use of so-called technical standards was a standard weapon of anticompetitive conduct by Telecom. It is, frankly, Orwellian that the explanatory memorandum on page 13 calls these the 'Level playing field arrangements' and disapprovingly says that competing providers might 'ignore technical specifications employed by NBN Co.'. Why on earth should competitors be required to comply with NBN Co.'s technical specifications? We do not require Virgin Blue to comply with Qantas's technical specifications, we do not require Optus to comply with Telstra's technical specifications and we do not require Woolworths to comply with Coles' technical specifications. This is a complete perversion of the way that competition should work.

These bills before the House today form part of an overall legislative scheme which is a bad scheme. These are bad bills. Nobody disputes that broadband infrastructure needs to improve. This is a very bad way to do it.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (5.12 pm)—I am very pleased today to rise and speak in favour of the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010. It was interesting to hear the member for Bradfield provide a bit of a smoke and mirrors per-

formance there, hiding the fact that the opposition has absolutely no plan when it comes to providing access to broadband around this country. We heard a lot from the member for Bradfield about competition. Listening to the member for Bradfield you would think that he thought the current arrangements under Telstra provided a very competitive marketplace. Perhaps he needs to come and speak to the many people in my electorate about the problems with pared gains in Hallett Cove, Reynella and Aldinga or the problems with extending past RIMs in Woodcroft. All these issues have prevented many, many people from being able to access broadband. Why? The vertical integration of Telstra, providing a very uncompetitive market place. This has stopped many people in my electorate from being able to access any broadband at all and has held back many small businesses. In fact, the Southern Economic Development Board puts lack of broadband as one of the No. 1 impediments to being able to grow economically in the south. If the member for Bradfield is trying to convince us that it is a very competitive playing field out there now, he is absolutely wrong.

I welcome the opportunity to address this parliament in relation to these critical pieces of legislation. They will deliver on this government's commitment to establish a wholesale-only company to build and operate a superfast broadband network on an open and equivalent access basis. This is a key, competitive part of our proposal—that companies will be able to compete competitively to provide retail services. They will not be in a situation where they want to provide services but are locked out of the market and unable to use infrastructure. It will be an open network where companies will be able to compete on an equivalent basis.

The NBN has been developed in response to an industry failure to invest in superfast broadband and to provide a platform for ef-

fective competition in the retail market. The passage of this legislation will ensure for the first time that we have a competitive telecommunications market to provide affordable and modern internet facilities to families and businesses around the country. The National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 establishes governance, ownership and operating arrangements related to NBN Co. It acknowledges that NBN Co. is subject to the same regulatory framework as other licensed carriers and goes further by legislating that this company must remain true to its wholesale only mandate and provide access to the NBN to all telecommunication retail service providers on open and equivalent terms. By focusing on and limiting NBN Co. to wholesale only telecommunications this bill prohibits this company from involvement in the retail market, thereby protecting against the kind of market monopolisation that we have seen in the past. Ultimately, this will mean more choice and more affordable prices for better quality services.

Until now Telstra's dominance in both the retail and wholesale markets has stifled technological progress. The ACCC, in 2003, said:

... Telstra is in a position to largely dictate the type of services that consumers will be able to access and the time at which these services become available.

I cannot count the number of times that constituents in my electorate of Kingston have come to me with concerns about the price and quality of products provided to them. Often these customers do feel helpless because of the monopolised network. These bills will ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. While the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer Safeguards) Bill 2010 will ensure that the wholesale and retail arms of Telstra are separated, the bills before this House today will ensure that the new NBN

Co. will operate as an open wholesale only network encouraging competition and delivering good value services to consumers.

The NBN Companies Bill also provides for the Commonwealth to retain full ownership of the NBN Co. until such time as the NBN is built and declared fully operational by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. This will ensure that the best interests of all Australians, including those in rural and regional areas, are considered at length before any sales occur. This will not allow NBN Co. to go down the same track that Telstra did, leaving significant parts of rural and regional Australia lagging behind the rest of the country. These requirements will enable this government to deliver on its promise to connect 93 per cent of homes, schools and workplaces to fibre-to-the-premise infrastructure and to connect the remaining premises to next generation wireless and satellite technologies.

These bills are about ensuring that all Australians have access to fast and affordable modern internet facilities. The NBN access bill, which is also before the House today, ensures that NBN Co. must provide access to the NBN to all telecommunications retail service providers on an open and equivalent basis. Customers will reap the benefits of this increased market competition. Importantly, this legislation renders all services provided by NBN Co. declared, meaning that all services will be subject to more rigorous and robust standard access obligations than is usually required. All services provided by NBN Co. will therefore be subject to supply and equivalency requirements as well as ACCC oversight.

The NBN access bill is about ensuring that services are provided to carriers in a non-discriminatory manner and with a high level of transparency so that we can create a more level playing field for all retail service

providers. NBN Co. must offer equal terms and conditions to all access seekers. NBN Co. will only be able to discriminate on limited grounds, such as credit worthiness, and if that discrimination aids efficiency. Any such discriminations will be subject to further scrutiny and only permissible if all access seekers are presented with the opportunity to accept similar variations in terms and conditions. Should NBN Co. be found to be in breach of its equivalence obligations, retail service providers can seek compensation through the Federal Court. Together these bills will promote competition in the telecommunications retail market, thereby ensuring that this government delivers on its promise to provide better and more equitable broadband facilities to families and businesses around the nation.

I want to talk about the importance of the NBN generally. We regularly hear the opposition say, 'No, we're going to stop the NBN; we don't like the NBN,' but they provide absolutely no alternative. This government understands that access to affordable high-speed broadband is essential to the way Australians communicate and do business. We have heard a lot about wireless versus fixed line broadband. This is a dichotomy that the opposition regularly put up. They say, 'Why have fixed line broadband when we can have wireless?' But these two technologies are completely complementary.

When you look at some of the wireless technologies around the place you see wireless towers. What do you think actually transmits the data to those towers? It is fibre optics. That is what actually does the large amount of data transmission across this country. You cannot say, 'Don't invest in a fibre network; we'll have wireless.' There is no way to encourage wireless if there is no fibre to get it to the towers. These are two complementary options. Many people who are experts in the telecommunications indus-

try have made it clear that wireless will not substitute for fixed broadband.

The majority of the things that we want to do in the future, whether they are high-speed health consultations over the internet or high-definition videoconferencing or things like that, cannot be done over a wireless network. These things will be very important, and the majority of the data that is transmitted around Australia will need to be done by fibre optics. The government are not opposed to wireless. We think investment in wireless technology is really important, but it is complementary to our National Broadband Network and should not be instead of it. The opposition are grasping at straws when it comes to accessing fast internet services, because they seem to be looking at any excuse not to support the National Broadband Network but have no alternative to get fast broadband for businesses, for education and for health services in the community.

The NBN will help drive Australia's productivity, improve education and health service delivery and connect our cities and regional centres. The NBN Co. will invest up to \$43 billion over eight years to fund the rollout and operation of this historic piece of nation-building infrastructure. This is about more than just fast interconnection and fast emails. It is about increasing our productivity and the benefits that will continue to flow for decades to come. The NBN will increase our economic growth as a nation, but it will also revolutionise the way individuals and businesses all around Australia use the internet.

From speaking to small businesses in my electorate of Kingston, I know that the community is extremely excited about the possibilities that going live will present. Willunga is a town located 50 kilometres south of the Adelaide CBD and home to world renowned wineries and food producers. This town is one of the first release sites and we have seen

90 per cent of residents opt to take up the connection of fibre to their homes. We have seen businesses getting excited, having meetings and looking at the potential this will have. One particularly exciting option, which I have spoken about in this House before, will be the opportunity for cutting-edge videoconferencing. One of the winemakers I have spoken to has seen the very exciting opportunity that it will present. High-definition videoconferencing will allow the winemaker to sit in his winery in McLaren Vale and taste the wine with his buyers in New York. He will not have to leave the winery; he can sit there and drink each wine with his buyers in New York on videoconferencing. He says he will be able to expand significantly his client base in places all around the world, and this is critical for the McLaren Vale region. Many other businesses are talking about how they will use this to increase the number and variety of orders they can take and increase their efficiency. This is very exciting for local small businesses in my electorate. The opposition call themselves the party of small business. If they really are they would get on board and support the NBN. Small business in my electorate is certainly excited, as are many others.

These two pieces of legislation before the House are very important for the regulatory framework and scrutiny of the NBN Co. They complement the legislation for the structural separation of Telstra that occurred in the last sitting week last year. Together they will take this government's plan for high-speed broadband one step further. I hope that the opposition at some point will see sense when it comes to the National Broadband Network. I was surprised that in my electorate they campaigned against the Broadband Network. I thought that was quite an odd thing to do, considering just how popular the National Broadband Network

is—and, more than popular, it is in the national interest. It is critical infrastructure that will have a huge impact on my region, on Kingston, but also around the country. If the opposition cannot get a policy on the National Broadband Network—well, they have got a policy: they are going to oppose it, but if they cannot find an alternative policy—then perhaps they should just get on board, stop their opposition and support this very important piece of national infrastructure.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (5.26 pm)—I rise today to speak in support of the amendments to be proposed by my colleague the member for Wentworth, the shadow minister for communications and broadband, to the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and cognate bill. The amendments are necessary to ensure transparency, create competition and bring scrutiny on value for money principles to Labor's white elephant, the \$50 billion national broadband plan. Labor's latest white elephant is an unnecessary waste of taxpayers' money at this time in our nation.

We face challenges of natural disaster recovery and reconstruction across five states, especially in Queensland; a rising cost of living, due in no small measure to Labor's reckless spending and massive debt; and increasing pressure on small business, a traditional source of jobs. Now is not the time to commit to a \$50 billion spend on a technology that is no better than other technologies being used across the world today—wireless, DSL, HFC cable and other systems that deliver fast broadband. Now is not the time to commit to the largest public works project in Australia's history with a technology that will be largely superseded and out of date by 2020, at the project's end. That level of investment, resources and infrastructure would be far better diverted to assisting the rebuilding of Queensland and addressing Australia's water supply issues.

Ploughing \$50 billion into the NBN—most of which will be spent digging trenches and laying pipes—at a time when reconstruction after natural disasters and a once-in-a-century mining boom compete for resources is a guaranteed way to ensure taxpayers do not receive value for money. Any sensible and fiscally responsible government would have the ticker to cancel the NBN plans in the nation's best interest. The Gillard Labor government apparently has no ticker, nor has it anything but contempt for the Australian taxpayer. This is made clear by the refusal to submit any aspect of the NBN to parliamentary and public scrutiny, and I will return to that point a little later.

What we do know now, after intense pressure from the opposition, is the reluctant admission by the Labor government that households will have to foot the bill to connect the cable from the road to the home. But they cannot tell us how much. What we do know now, after the spotlight of public scrutiny was shone harshly by the coalition on the Labor Party, is the plan to dig up our roads and freeways, city and suburban streets, footpaths and utilities trenches to lay the cable. Again, they cannot tell us how long it will take.

People in the Blue Mountains, in the electorate of Macquarie, know all about roads being dug up. The Great Western Highway has had upgrade works for years which have had an impact on residents, local business and the environment. The electorate of Macquarie is a snapshot of a semi-rural community that already faces challenges of resources, services, telecommunication black spots and the tyranny of distance. From the outer limits of Mount Victoria across to Mount Tomah; in places like Ebenezer, St Albans, and Colo in the Hawkesbury; in the Megalong Valley, in Hawkesbury Heights, Linden, Woodford and many, many more suburbs across the electorate of Macquarie,

there are properties large in size and long in terms of distance to the road.

An example is Bilpin, known as the 'land of the mountain apple'. This village of large acreages has a population of just over 500 people, where the distance from the front door to the front gate would be a week's exercise for many Sydneysiders. A resident of Bilpin, Kylie Docker, contacted me, seeking an answer to the question: who will pay the cost of connection from the road to the front door? Kylie lives on acreage and the family home is a long distance from the road. Kylie also wanted to know if the cables would be laid underground. I wrote to the Minister for Communications, Broadband and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, on 10 December. It is now 28 February, and I have still not received a response.

Residents in Wilberforce have raised concerns over changes to the telecommunications landscape and the costs associated with setting up the NBN. Residents in Kurmond are questioning the technology and whether or not it will be outdated before it is operational. Why are we moving to fixed-line fibre optics when countries such as the United States are going wireless? Residents living in Wentworth Falls want details of the broadband policy and the future for small rural villages.

It is not only unacceptable that the Gillard Labor government are determined to waste taxpayers' money, as they did with the Home Insulation Program and the BER; it is also unacceptable that they are refusing to allow proper scrutiny of the NBN. Many residents in my electorate of Macquarie, already under enormous pressure due to the increases to the cost of living—in gas, electricity, food, fuel, utilities and transport—are quite rightly asking questions about the cost to them of the National Broadband Network. The December quarter inflation figures show big in-

creases in essential food items such as fruit, up a staggering 15.5 per cent; vegetables, up a massive 11.4 per cent; water and sewerage, up 12.8 per cent; electricity, up 12.5 per cent; gas, up 7.1 per cent; and education, up 5.7 per cent. These are goods and services that families cannot do without. At a time when every Australian is facing a constant battle to balance the weekly budget, it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand this extravagant spending of taxpayer funds on the NBN by the Gillard Labor government.

I now turn to the double standards being applied by Labor, which are a matter of significant concern to the coalition and the nation, including the residents of the electorate of Macquarie. The Labor government have chosen to be selective in their 'management' of Australian taxpayers' money. The decision to have the NBN exempted from the Public Works Committee Act and the parliament's Public Works Committee is all about avoiding scrutiny. What is hidden in the yet to be publicly released 240 pages of the NBN Co. business plan? Why won't Labor allow the NBN to be subject to a cost-benefit analysis by Infrastructure Australia, a review by the Productivity Commission and an inquiry through a joint standing committee of parliament? A cost-benefit analysis would make it clear whether or not the NBN is the most cost-effective method of delivering modern technologies to the family home, businesses, schools, hospitals, industry, government and corporations. The choice of fixed-line fibre optic technologies is questionable, given the range of equally high-performing alternatives. We need to know if the NBN will deliver value for money.

The government estimates the NBN will require around \$27 billion in equity funding and will need to borrow a further \$10 billion to roll out the network. In addition, they need to do a deal with Telstra, estimated to be worth \$11 billion, for use of its conduits and

migration of its customers. The \$50 billion price tag adds equity, debt and payments to Telstra. Will we as taxpayers get value for money? It appears we will never know. What makes the whole project bizarre is that, in the normal course of events, every contract over \$15 million is scrutinised to ensure that the Australian taxpayer is getting value for money. The government has moved quickly to set up a reconstruction inspectorate to oversee public spending on the reconstruction in Queensland but does not see any need to do the same for the \$50 billion NBN spend. It does not give taxpayers much confidence in the financial management of the NBN.

There are many questions that remain unanswered. The NBN will be a government built and owned monopoly wholesale provider, with a long-term plan for privatisation. How will that affect long-term infrastructure investment? If the government is the owner and the government is broke, as it always is under Labor, and the NBN is not reaching its performance targets, where will the money come from to upgrade infrastructure? The NBN will initially be a stand-alone wholesale provider that provides layer-2 bitstream services to retail service providers who in turn provide services to end customers. It is not allowed or set up to do retail. How then is the NBN allowed to supply network services to gas, water and electricity utilities, transport operators and road authorities—even though the provision of such services to these entities is an existing and valuable business opportunity for Telstra, Optus and other carriers? Is this selective retail creep? These are just some of the concerns unanswered by Labor.

The coalition remains committed to a policy of providing all Australians with high-quality affordable broadband, regardless of where they live. It is vital that every aspect of the NBN be transparent. The coalition is

determined to get value for money for every taxpayer dollar spent, contrary to the Gillard Labor government. I challenge members opposite to support the amendments to be submitted by the coalition.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (5.36 pm)—What I would like to do in this debate on the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010 is to remind those opposite of exactly why the NBN is being introduced, why it is being rolled out and why it is accepted by the Australian people. The Australian people are looking forward to seeing it rolled out throughout the nation. We are and were 17th out of 31 developed countries on broadband penetration, the fifth most expensive amongst 30 developed countries on broadband prices, 50th in terms of broadband speeds, equal last on deployment of optic fibre broadband and 29th out of 50 countries on an average connection speed at 2.6 megabits per second.

It is very sobering to restate those facts no-one on the other side can deny. They had 13 years to do something about it and 19 or 20 plans to do something about it as well. One cannot say they did not put up some plans. The trouble is that they could not put up anything else with them. I reckon the great testimony to that is that the second last or third last—I cannot remember now there were that many—spokesperson to put forward their plan in the last election, only last year, is now languishing somewhere on the back bench, having been thanked for the effort he put into putting forward a broadband plan for the opposition, and every now and again we hear him gnashing his teeth and screaming his head off about Bill Shorten and other people. No doubt they will drag him out for another plan, plan 25, later on.

We now have the current spokesperson on ‘Let’s not produce another plan for broadband’—the member for Wentworth. What are his riding instructions? Destroy the NBN. I am not surprised at all because everything you hear from the other side is no, negative, not now, never. Anything else associated with negativism is from that side. The member for Wentworth, the member for no, has been sent out to try and destroy broadband.

I can tell you the Australian people want the NBN. It has fantastic prospects. Did you know that a recent Akamai internet report showed that no Australian city was in the top 100 cities for average internet connection speed? How’s that for a legacy? Fantastic! Australia was last in the OECD for fibre penetration for broadband—not second last, not third last but last, zero, zilch, bottom of the class. Australia was ranked 50th in the world for internet speeds, on a par with Russia, and lagging almost every single advanced industrial economy, including our friends across the Tasman. Australia ranks 31 out of 50 countries on the percentage of connections of more than two megabits per second. Only 45 per cent get two megabits per second in Australia. But it is rising ever so slowly for those persons who are on the NBN. Some of those people are in my electorate; so that is absolutely fantastic. The NBN is actually rolling out and this mob on the other side wants to stop it. They will use any excuse, any old negativity, to stop it.

To finish off the unfortunate statistics that are the legacy of the last coalition government before we came into power, Australia ranks 29th out of 50 countries on average connection speed. That is not a good record and we are trying to do something about it, at least on this side. I remind those opposite, because it is very relevant to this legislation, that a week prior to the 2010 federal election the opposition released a plan—I think it was No. 19 or 20—which was a \$6.25 billion

alternative policy. We eagerly waited for what it meant. It was relying on a combination of public and private funding to build a primarily wireless network delivering a peak speed of 12 megabits per second to 97 per cent of the Australian population, it said. The plan included \$3.5 billion to be spent developing an open access, optical fibre backhaul network. It did not take long for the general telecommunications industry to assess it, and it was described as 'harking back to an earlier era', 'lacked vision'—that is strange, is it not?—and 'muddy and unclear'.

Indeed, I think Rupert Murdoch himself best sums up the need for NBN. In assessing the state of broadband in Australia prior to NBN, he actually said it was an absolute disgrace. That is the legacy we inherited, and now with some vision, some boldness and with some certainty we wish to continue to roll out the NBN. All those on the other side want to do is either delay or destroy it. I have got news for you: the Australian people have made up their minds about the NBN. They want it and the quicker we get on with it the better. That is what this legislation is designed to do. The two bills, the National Broadband Network Companies Bill and the NBN access bill, deliver on our commitment to establish a wholesale-only NBN offering access on open and equivalent terms.

Mr Deputy Speaker, for your interest in this topic, what are some of the more specific aspects of the companies bill? That is at the heart of what we are discussing here. I would like to range through a few aspects to reinforce our case for this legislation. Importantly, it defines NBN Co. to include—heavens above!—NBN Tasmania and any company the NBN Co. controls. I mentioned earlier that the NBN began in Tassie. It began its history, began its journey and began its story in Tassie.

Mr Lyons—In my electorate of Bass!

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—My colleague the member for Bass is here, and it commenced at Scottsdale, I believe. It also commenced in my electorate, in the beautiful township of Smithton, where they are doing some extraordinary telecommunications work on wireless technologies as well. It is going to benefit the rest of regional Australia when all of this fantastic stuff comes out. It also commenced at Midway Point, Sorell, in the electorate of Franklin in Tassie. So the NBN is on a roll. I have had the privilege of seeing the NBN in operation. It is awesome, not only just for speed but for the clarity of the images. It was just wonderful stuff, and I really look forward to its application to a whole raft of things and for people and organisations.

The bill limits the NBN Co. to wholesale only telecommunications activities, as we promised, including in relation to the supply of services and goods and also investments. It establishes powers to enable functional separation and the transfer or divestment of assets. It enables the minister to make licence conditions, including prohibiting NBN Co. from providing specified services. It requires the Commonwealth to retain full ownership until the NBN is built and fully operational. So there will be no dilution of it. We will see it through to the end. It requires a Productivity Commission and parliamentary committee review prior to any sales process—so no little deals being made; it will be open, transparent and accountable.

The legislation establishes the framework for the eventual sale of NBN Co. It enables regulations to be made to set limits on the private control of NBN Co. post privatisation and establishes reporting obligations on NBN Co. once no longer wholly Commonwealth owned. It exempts, finally, the NBN Co. from the Public Works Committee Act 1969.

It is important to note that there is no longer a requirement that the NBN Co. must be sold within five years of its being declared built and fully operational. Rather, this will be left to the judgment of the government and parliament of the day, enabling both to have due regard to the role the NBN is then playing, market conditions, and any other relevant factors.

As regards the NBN access bill, firstly, it makes all services provided by NBN Co. declared and thereby subject to supply and equivalence requirements and ACCC oversight, so there is accountability and transparency. It establishes the mechanisms to ensure that the terms and conditions relating to the supply of services by NBN Co. are transparent. It requires NBN Co. to offer services on an equivalent basis, with discrimination only allowed where it aids efficiency and other limited circumstances, which, again, are subject to ACCC scrutiny.

It requires the publication of access agreements with different terms from the standard ones already published to provide a high level of transparency. It provides a more level regulatory playing field for all new, extended and upgraded superfast broadband networks by extending obligations that apply to NBN Co. to owners of superfast networks upgraded, altered or deployed after the introduction of these bills to parliament.

I again would like to put on the record my support for this government and particularly the relevant minister, Minister Conroy, for developing the NBN from what was essentially a vision and then beginning to see it roll out. I look forward to the future with Telstra coming on board so that we can extend the network efficiently and effectively and of course get it to as many premises as possible—businesses, households and persons—as we can throughout Australia.

So I recommend the legislation and I suggest to those opposite that they try for once to be positive. If they are not, let me remind them that the Australian people are and, contrary to all the template answers that they pop out on that side, the NBN is being embraced by the Australian population. It is supported by the Australian population. So I ask those opposite to get on board and support this legislation, because we can have the NBN rolling out. It is as important as extending the highway system throughout Australia into the next century. That is how important it is as a piece of infrastructure in this country. And to have the other mob saying that the NBN should be postponed or deferred in the wake of the floods in Queensland and those other unfortunate natural disasters is really throwing in a red herring. It is as important that we get on with the NBN Co. now as it ever was, particularly to those areas that have been affected by the unfortunate natural disasters. So come on, the other side, get on board. I really look forward to hearing the other members talking about the legislation before them and the provisions of the bill. Let's hear you go through the provisions of the bill one by one so that we know specifically what you are talking about. If you need to, then you be negative on each provision and explain to me exactly why you are negative. But you cannot; you have got your little template answers up there ready to rip, so don't let me stop Hansard from recording you.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (5.51 pm)—As we know, Australians do need fast, reliable, affordable and secure broadband services, and my electorate has many broadband black spots and backhaul issues. It is a seriously underserved area, one of the underserved areas around Australia. It should be a priority under any broadband plan to deliver to areas where not only the technology has not been available previously but also where govern-

ment services have not been available previously, and I will keep working for better broadband sooner for the Forrest electorate. But, unfortunately, Labor's National Broadband Network is not the best way to meet the needs of Forrest or the rest of Australia. If it were so, given that this is the Labor government's fourth year in office, in my electorate the underserved areas would have already had delivery. But now we have another never-never plan for the south-west.

Given that the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010 relate to access, I have a number of questions about the management, engineering design and security, as well as the commercial terms. Specifically on the commercial terms: given that there will be no parliamentary oversight, how will we know whether ISPs have equitable access? How many will actually have access? This government is notorious for picking winners and losers. The lack of scrutiny and oversight will enshrine this opportunity for the government, unfortunately.

I also want to know who is responsible for the national security issues in the construction and maintenance of the NBN. The government now has this responsibility because of the total government control of the NBN. This will give the government far greater control over broadband than even the government in communist China had. But with this total government control and ownership comes total government responsibility for the national security issues of the NBN and total taxpayer liability for security breaches and commercial costs where fibre network breaches occur. The NBN places Australia in a situation where acute oversight of the NBN is a matter of national security as well as government agency and individual customer security.

Who at this moment is responsible for the security and integrity of the fibre technology and components during the construction phase? Who is doing that? Who was responsible for the engineering of this security? Who has oversight of this engineering and design? Who is making sure there are no inherent design flaws and faults that could lead to not only national security problems but also commercial or personal security breaches? Who has oversight of the physical components being used in the construction? Who is responsible for the ongoing maintenance and efficient end-to-end security of the fibre-optic cable, given the scale of the NBN? What entity will provide a report on the ongoing integrity of not only the fibre-optic cable where the fibre is installed at the premises but also the sites where the NBN connects to the wider internet? What agency will provide oversight for NBN customers as well as taxpayers that NBN Co. ensures that there is no tampering with the fibres—for instance, that there are no added illicit links? Who is responsible for the physical hardware and software security?

I understand that in the United States, the National Security Council is overseeing their form of the NBN. Do we have that same level of security here? What is the taxpayer liability for any legal action arising from evidence that breaches or tapping of the NBN fibre cable is responsible for commercial costs and losses? Who will provide the independent security audits for NBN Co.? Who will be liable if there is a serious breach in the security of the system? Who will pay?

Who is protecting our national security: will it be the entity defined in this bill—the NBN Co.—that restricts NBN Co. to business and financing activities directly related to its core function of supplying wholesale communication services? Maintaining the integrity and security of the NBN will be part of NBN Co.'s core functions, whether

the government admits this or not. Cyberterrorism is a serious and growing transnational security issue. When the NBN is finally complete in 2030 or so—I think that is the latest estimate—93 per cent of all premises in Australia will be linked to the NBN single fibre loop. When the data of government departments and agencies, of hospitals, of key city and regional infrastructure, of water delivery systems, of electricity systems, of emergency services—core critical services—is concentrated, what a prime target for cyberterrorists and transnational crime it will be.

The NBN will facilitate instantaneous crime at a speed and frequency we have never experienced in this country. I was a member of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications when it inquired into cybercrime. Our report stated very clearly that cybercrime is now a sophisticated transnational threat that operates on an industrial scale and has become an increasingly important issue for the global community. A report by the Kokoda Foundation, entitled *Optimising Australia's response to the cyber challenge*, released on 4 February this year at the National Press Club, said:

... cyber security has become the fundamental weakness in Australia's national security, and that the threat is poorly understood by politicians, business people and the general public.

This report was co-authored by former Deputy Chief of Air Force John Blackburn. The report identifies that Australia has reached the point where our ability to respond to internet attack is being rapidly outpaced by advances in cyberattack and cyberterrorism. The foundation also states:

A case in point is the mooted National Broadband Network (NBN) ... once the network is built, taking high-speed broadband services through fibre-optic cable to an estimated 93 per cent of households, responsibility for maintaining cyber

security will rest with retail service providers rather than NBN Co.

It is inconceivable that the government would try to absolve itself of any level of responsibility for internet and cybersecurity in designing, building and maintaining the fibre system. This is a national security issue. NBN Co. and the government cannot walk away from that. As I said, it will be end-to-end cyberinfrastructure on a scale never seen here or anywhere else in the world. The job of securing that system will also be of a scale that we have never experienced and it will facilitate cybercrime and cyberterrorism opportunities on a scale we have not experienced.

I strongly suggest that a former Deputy Chief of Air Force knows what he is talking about in relation to national security. Essentially, from Air Vice Marshal Blackburn's comments, by the very nature of the interface between NBN Co. and internet service providers, our national security will by default become the responsibility of internet service providers. I am told that it is not at all difficult or expensive to tap into a fibre. In fact, a transparent tap can be applied at the point of access to the premises in about three minutes flat.

I also want to know where the 14 points of interconnect will be physically located. Who will be responsible for the impact of cyclones, flood or fire on the National Broadband Network itself, as well as the 14 or so points of interconnect? I want the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, to answer this question: was the connection point for Queensland located on the flood plain and is it still located on the flood plain? Are the rest of the proposed POIs located out of high-risk areas? We have seen what has happened with floods and cyclones. This is particularly relevant, given that the majority of the fibre in Tasmania is overhead cabling. Will this be

NBN Co.'s cost and risk or the taxpayers' cost and risk? What is plan B for any major damage to the NBN's single backhaul loop? I have discussed some of these issues with Dr Walter Green, a WA telecommunications engineer. He said it is vital for the government to build security transfer into the NBN to accommodate the transport of data.

NBN Co. only allows for 14 points of interconnection, or POIs, to be located in the major cities across Australia. I note that the ACCC recommended that 195 POIs be built. It is an unfortunate reality that just 14 POIs, or even 30 POIs, would be easy targets for terrorist groups wanting to disable or damage the country's entire internet system. In practical terms, at least one million people, businesses and government agencies or departments will be connected to each one of these 14 POIs. They would be excellent targets for sabotage or could be exposed to national disaster. Imagine what damage could be caused and what threats to our security there would be even if you took out two or three of those. That is all it would take.

That is just one example of a serious engineering flaw; it is a national security risk. I also question whether the NBN design will handle 13 million customers, each with 100 megabits per second. That is a cumulative 1,300 terabits of data. I understand that there are only six or so one-terabit fibre links in the world right now. Does the NBN have the capacity to handle this?

The NBN will have a massive amount of traffic from customers at each POI. I ask: can it handle that volume? I note that Alcatel-Lucent, a supplier of electronic equipment to the NBN, recently prepared a security perspective of the NBN, which explained what other organisations need to do to ensure security—most of which I understand is common knowledge. But there are two main concerns with two security components that

are under the control of the NBN. Firstly, the claim that it is difficult to tap into a fibre cable is false. I am informed that fibre to the premises used to be expensive until a simple low-cost method of tapping into a fibre was developed. That is the very technology that reduced the cost of fibre. The claim that it is easier to tap into copper is no longer true as these fibre-tapping devices are now widely available and it is the capacity to tap into fibre that underpins the NBN fibre rollout.

Secondly, there are two points that can be accessed at the NTU: the fibre connection and the copper ethernet connection to the devices in the home or premises. I am told that the encryption process used by a gigabit passive optical network creates another management overhead cost for carriers. Given this, will the encryption for the GPON be turned on for all network connections or will it be an extra feature that customers will have to pay for? This encryption will not necessarily provide security. I understand that the GPON encryption can be bypassed when a hacker taps into the copper ethernet connection of the network terminal unit located in protective casing, which I understand will be located at the front of the premises. That is why the building owner should have the choice of placing the NTU inside the house to prevent illegal tapping—although I note that in the current plan, customers have to pay for their NTU to be installed inside their properties.

I want to know who will maintain security at 'the pit in the road' point? What is to stop someone unscrewing the cap, plugging in monitoring equipment and a small wireless service, monitoring traffic for 24 hours or whatever time they want, then coming back and retrieving the information? NBN Co. claims it will encrypt the data between the premises and the POI. I wonder how the NBN will manage 13 million passwords?

The minister must confirm that each customer will have their own key.

I have also been unable to secure from the minister any confident information about when the NBN will be rolled out in the south west; which towns in my electorate will be connected to the NBN via fibre cable, which will have wireless service and which would have to use satellite? Given that the NBN will only provide universal wholesale prices to retailers, will the regional and rural consumers in my electorate be paying the same amounts as metropolitan consumers, whether it is for connection to the NBN, satellite or wireless? And what proportion of the network will be installed as overhead cables? These are vital questions that deserve to be answered and I encourage the minister to respond to my constituents in a timely manner.

I see that the NBN will cost at least \$50 billion. I suspect that that will be quite a conservative estimate by the time it is finally built. As we know, any prudent, responsible government would have committed to a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis. There really has been no external appraisal of the viability of the NBN. It is really incumbent on a responsible government to deal with these particular issues. We know about the growth in wireless and other technologies. The minister must answer the key questions that I have raised in relation to the management, engineering design and security as well as the commercial terms, given that there is no parliamentary oversight on whether ISPs have equitable access.

I think that these issues of security certainly need to be dealt with. The Standing Committee on Communications in its inquiry into cybercrime tabled a report called *Hackers, fraudsters and botnets*. A number of witnesses who gave evidence to the committee mentioned that the NBN was a future cyber-

security issue that had to be dealt with. I really want the minister to address the specific questions that I have raised in this speech today.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (6.05 pm)—It is clear that there is no issue that escapes an opposition scare campaign. Even the NBN is now subject to a scare campaign. It is an interesting and different tack that we are hearing from the member for Forrest. She is actually complaining that there are risks with this that do not exist with wireless. She is also complaining that too many people are going to use the NBN—there are going to be 13 million—and therefore there will be all these additional security risks. Some of her colleagues have said that the NBN is not going to be used by many people. One thing is very consistent with those on the other side, and that is the absolute inconsistencies in the way in which they approach the NBN. But that should not be a surprise to anyone here. In their 11 years in government they were very good at coming up with plans—they came up with 19 plans in 11 years—but unfortunately they were not able to implement, roll out or start any of them.

It appears that what those opposite are trying to do in relation to the NBN is what they do with every issue—that is, just oppose. The thing that they must talk about in their party room meetings is, ‘We don’t have a position so let’s just oppose anything that the government is looking at doing.’ The NBN is a classic example of that.

I would like to talk a little bit about my electorate and why it is so essential that we have the NBN. We are a community that has identified that we really do need the NBN and fast broadband. Thirty-five per cent of the people who work in my electorate commute to Sydney every day. We have communications difficulties even in our technology parks. Businesses are looking at moving out

of the metropolitan area to the beautiful Central Coast because of the cheaper land and to employ people, but the technology base is not there to enable that to happen properly. So, if you are looking at areas that are going to benefit from the NBN, it is those outer metropolitan areas in the big cities which do not have the infrastructure, that have a large commuting community who spend hours commuting that need it most. It is a round trip to Sydney for commuters in my electorate of about four hours every day, and they do that because we do not have the technology that will create the jobs on the Central Coast. So we need the NBN more than most.

It is little wonder that the NBN is universally supported on the Central Coast. There is no political divide in relation to this. Liberal Party members, businesses, community groups, welfare groups, education groups, health groups—they all say the same thing: ‘We need the NBN and we want it fast. We want it as quickly as we can get it.’ When I was talking to the minister about this, he said it was not that he was having people say, ‘Don’t bring the NBN to my area’; He has a huge queue outside his door with communities right around Australia, communities like mine on the Central Coast, knocking down the door saying, ‘We want the NBN now. We can see the benefits. We need it now.’

One of the groups on the Central Coast that has been formed to campaign around this issue is a business group led by Dave Abrahams and Edgar Adams. Edgar Adams is the editor of the *Central Coast Business Review*. Edgar Adams has been very direct in his criticism of those opposite in his magazine for, in his words ‘simply not understanding the difference between fibre and wireless’. He has made the point in his magazine on numerous occasions that in his view this was the single issue that cost them the election last time. I do not agree with Edgar on many things, but I do agree with

him on the need to have the NBN rolled out, especially to areas like mine on the Central Coast.

This business group has identified a number of issues. They have said that the National Broadband Network will drastically boost regional productivity, that it will boost participation and new market activities, employment and innovation opportunities and that it is the only serious broadband plan that can be supported by the business community. They are unequivocal in their support for the NBN. Mr Abrahams and his group say the NBN will drastically improve productivity that has been stagnant or negative for over a decade. Current copper and wireless broadband networks cannot cope with Australia’s 34 per cent annual bandwidth growth, and these legacy networks do not provide upload speeds that can effectively increase productivity. It is in no-one’s interest to have a mum and/or dad commute for two to five hours a day to sit in an office in northern Sydney to utilise the CBD-grade broadband infrastructure required to do their work simply because the National Broadband Network has not been available or is going to be opposed by those opposite.

This expert group also points out that the NBN will boost participation in new market activities, as well as boosting opportunities in employment and innovation, particularly for youth. In fact, one of the groups involved in this committee is Youth Connections. Youth Connections is a fine group, which aims to reduce youth unemployment on the Central Coast, so it is only natural that they would gravitate to and support this initiative which is providing technology that is clearly going to make it easier for young people to get jobs locally.

The expert groups have said that the dot-com mark II boom is taking off now, led by the likes of Google, Facebook, Twitter and

YouTube—each stimulating massive changes in business and culture. They have said:

There are very real opportunities in the new frontiers of business and cultural development that the NBN will provide premium world-class access to.

Youth unemployment in regional Australia is stubbornly high, including on the Central Coast, where youth unemployment has hovered between 30 and 40 per cent for over a decade and is only now slowly coming down. Our expert communications and information technology group also believes that the NBN is the only serious broadband plan on the table. There are simply no costed alternatives to the NBN. There has been much talk about options but no-one has produced an engineering plan, a business case or any real options ready to go. The telecommunications industry knows this and realises a collective investment in infrastructure like the NBN will grow everybody's market significantly and stimulate employment and service developments in health, education and business. The industry estimates that the investment on the Central Coast alone from the NBN will be in the vicinity of \$400 million. The direct investment and spin-off economic benefits to the region, including employment, will be significant.

Not only will the communication and information technology infrastructure be vastly upgraded and improved, but businesses which depend on technology will have opportunities to start up. On the Central Coast, most of the businesses are small businesses. This is not unusual for Australia, but on the Central Coast in particular most businesses are small businesses and a lot of them are mum-and-dad businesses. The NBN provides that opportunity for them to compete on a much larger scale in a much broader market. If every one of those businesses were to employ just one person, then the sorts of youth unemployment levels that we have seen for a

long time on the Central Coast will disappear almost overnight.

It is important to address the argument in relation to wireless versus fixed line. The Competitive Carriers' Coalition has recently said that current discussions about the upgrade of wireless networks and the implications for the National Broadband Network reflect a lack of understanding about the role of wireless and fixed line networks in the future. According to the CCC, wireless and fixed line networks and services are complementary, not substitute, services. Anyone who knows anything about this type of technology would not argue with that point. They said that wireless technology has evolved to deliver fast speeds from the towers to the users but is not likely to ever evolve to a point where wireless mobile networks can replace fixed line networks. Likewise, fixed line networks will never provide the mobility that wireless networks provide, even though the connection within people's homes may be via wireless modems. These inside-the-home mobile networks—which many people confuse it with—are not the same as mobile wireless networks operated in Australia.

It is also worth noting—it has been much quoted here, but I am going to quote it as well—the endorsement by Eric Schmidt, the former CEO and now executive chairman of Google, who recently said to the Mobile World Congress:

Let me start by saying that Australia is leading the world in understanding the importance of fibre. Your new Prime Minister, as part of her campaign and now as part of her prime ministership, has announced ... 93 per cent of Australians ... will have gigabit or equivalent service using fibre and the other seven per cent will be handled through wireless services of the nature of LTE. This is leadership, and again from Australia, which I think is wonderful.

Right around the world people know and acknowledge that fibre is the way to go, that

fibre is future proof in relation to what it does. No matter what arguments are put up by the opposition they cannot argue with the laws of physics in relation to the way in which the speed will operate with fibre. There is nothing faster than fibre, nor can there be because of the laws of physics.

Instead, what we have from the opposition are arguments for the sake of arguments. They have no position themselves, other than a position of opposition. They had 11 years in which to come up with a plan, and they did a great job in coming up with plans—more than 1½ every year—but that was all they would do. Each year they would change the plan a couple of times, come up with another plan and then say, ‘That’s all we need to do’. Now that there is a real government here that is about changing and improving Australia’s infrastructure, the opposition’s only position is, ‘We’re going to oppose it no matter what they say.’ Not for any rational reason, but just for the sake of opposing the NBN. This is what we have seen from this opposition in relation to every piece of important legislation that this government has put through or has attempted to put through. It is the same response that we had in relation to the global financial crisis. They are now trying to reinvent the history of that, but their position then was, ‘Let’s do nothing; let’s just let the market look after itself.’ We all know where we would be if that had been the case. Australia has come out of that as the envy of all Western countries around the world as we are with our proposed investment in the NBN.

What we ask of the opposition is that if they do not support our legislation, just get out of the way. Let us get on with delivering vitally needed infrastructure to communities like mine that have been crying out for this sort of investment for years and years. It takes a Labor government to build proper infrastructure in Australia. We need the op-

position to get out of the way to make sure that we can get on and do the job. I commend the bills to the House.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (6.17 pm)—I rise today to address the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010. The National Broadband Network Companies Bill is designed to limit the operations of NBN Co., which is the Commonwealth-owned builder and operator of the fibre internet network. It also seeks to establish the framework through which the NBN Co. will eventually be privatised. Similarly, the telecommunications legislation amendment bill proposes changes to current legislation to ensure that NBN Co. gives equal access to all retail carriers. Collectively, these bills are designed to push ahead with the rollout of the Gillard Labor government’s white elephant, the National Broadband Network. What we know about the NBN is that it will take at least eight years to roll out—more like 15 to 20 years—it will cost the taxpayer at least \$50 billion dollars and it will reach 93 per cent of Australian premises.

To translate those figures, what we have here is the single largest taxpayer-funded infrastructure project in our nation’s history. Yet despite the massive commitment of our money made by the Gillard Labor government, seven per cent of those taxpayers who fork out will not even get access to it. Worse still, we have not been supplied with a cost-benefit analysis, and there are serious doubts about whether the internet services promised will actually be cheaper than what is currently available.

The problems do not stop there. As I mentioned, the NBN will take eight years to roll out, and that is if it is done on time and on budget. But can we really expect that to hap-

pen? Of course not. Remember, the Rudd-Gillard Labor government is the same one that wasted billions of dollars on a failed and tragic home insulation scheme. This is the government that wasted billions of dollars building dodgy school halls that were not as good as the buildings knocked down to make way for them. This is the government that is so incompetent at controlling our borders we now have a record number of people risking their lives on unsafe boats run by illegal people smugglers. But let us be generous and give Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, the benefit of the doubt.

Eight years is a long time in technology. Allow me to provide some examples. Eight years ago Windows released its new operating system XP 2003. Since then we have since had Windows Vista and Windows 7. Eight years ago Apple launched its first iTunes store. Today, the iTunes store accounts for more than 70 per cent of all worldwide online digital music sales. Eight years ago Apple's premium product was the iBook laptop. It has since created the iMac G5, Mac mini, iPod nano, iPod touch, iPhone, iPhone 3G, iPhone 4, and most recently the iPad. Eight years ago your average USB thumb drive was eight megabytes. Today you can pick up a one terabyte portable memory device for around the same price. That is about 131,000 times more capacity. Are we seriously supposed to believe that the NBN will be up-to-date if it is finally delivered in almost a decade from now?

Journalists have also raised issues with the Gillard Labor government's NBN plan, including concerns over cost, relevance, access and competition. I refer to an article by Mitchell Bingemann published in the *Australian* on 8 February in which he compares the Australian approach to that in the United States. He writes:

THE Labor government is betting its \$36 billion National Broadband Network can only be built by

government and must rely almost universally on a fibre optic network.

But last month US President Barack Obama in his State of the Union address went in the reverse direction, promising the American people a nationwide wireless network among other technological solutions built by the private sector. The question is does Obama know something Communications Minister and NBN champion Stephen Conroy does not?

... ..

The project is bold, ambitious and expensive, but it is also one that was devised in haste, bereft of industry or public consultation, or considered against the demand for other broadband technologies such as wireless internet access. The US plan in contrast was forged through extensive public workshops which drew more than 10,000 online and in-person attendees and generated some 23,000 comments totaling about 74,000 pages from more than 700 parties.

The article goes on to reference President Barack Obama, who says that it is America's free enterprise system which drives innovation. He said:

That's what planted the seeds for the internet. That's what helped make possible things like computer chips and GPS. Just think of all the good jobs—from manufacturing to retail—that have come from these breakthroughs.

Finally, Bingemann quotes Peter Cox, a respected media and telecommunications analyst, who says:

We want a clever and educated Australia and we know broadband helps this. We can encourage Australia down this path by providing fibre to all major and small businesses but this doesn't mean we need fibre to every home. We can achieve the outcomes that are required at a much lower cost by changing the mix of technologies the government is prescribing.

The bottom line is that you don't need to spend anywhere near what we are spending to achieve the NBN goals. The issue is not about us building fibre or wireless networks, it's about getting that mix right at the right cost.

The issues raised by Bingemann are wide reaching, and it is extremely important that we get a proper explanation before any further money is spent on the NBN rollout. The Gillard Labor government needs to provide detailed, costed and relevant answers to the questions raised. Why is this project best delivered by government and not through private enterprise? Why do we need fibre to every home? Will enough people take up the service to actually make it affordable and viable?

A telecommunications analyst at the Royal Bank of Scotland, Ian Martin, raised another important point in an article entitled 'Tied to cable yet future is wireless' which was published in the *Australian* on 8 February. He wrote:

The US wireless broadband initiative has left some supporters of the NBN nonplussed. Why couldn't Obama see, as Kevin Rudd did, with Julia Gillard's endorsement, that a government-owned, wholesale-only, fibre to the home network was the better vision to "underpin future productivity growth and our international competitiveness"?

For one thing, Obama couldn't afford it. Even a fibre access network to 80 per cent of US households would cost \$US80 billion to \$US100 billion. It's unthinkable that congress would have supported that kind of budget spending. Nor would it have supported a similar role for government in owning and operating a fibre access network. And structural separation of access networks was tried and failed in the US in the 1980s.

More important, President Obama chose to support wireless broadband over fibre access because it has more to offer. Bearing in mind that the backbone of wireless networks is typically a fibre core, it's wireless broadband, not fixed broadband, that is growing with advances in wireless network capability, wireless devices and applications. Obama's firefighter is downloading the design of a burning building on to a handheld device, not knocking on a neighbour's door to plug a laptop into the local fibre network. In fact,

they would probably download it in the fire truck on the way to the building.

The point Martin is making is that wireless technology is more accessible than fibre infrastructure, and I agree with him. As the member for Paterson I am often travelling throughout my electorate. Further, when I am away on shadow portfolio business I rely on the internet to stay in touch with constituents via email. Using my Blackberry or my iPad, both utilising wireless technology, allows me the freedom to do what I do. There are no cables and no compatibility issues; you just turn on your device and you are connected to the digital world. That is of extreme value to consumers, and that is why the best internet plan for Australia should be a mix of technologies, not a restrictive fibre network which will cost billions of dollars to deliver to 93 per cent of premises regardless of their needs.

Today's consumers do not want to have to plug in. They want to connect wirelessly with the push of a button from wherever they are, regardless of whether they are sitting at a table, standing in line waiting for a coffee or on the street watching for their bus. That is why new products on the market, such as the iPad, do not even have a standard cable socket through which to connect to cable internet. How does the government explain the increase in the number of households that have mobile phones only? The fixed line is a restrictive and dying trend, and the figures back this up. According to a Telstra report on 29 September 2010, its wireless broadband business grew 109 per cent per year over three years. In just one financial year, between 2009 and 2010, the number of wireless broadband subscribers in Australia rose from two million to 3.5 million, and that does not even include smart phones.

Do we really want to be building a cable network when the rest of the world is going wireless? One answer we have been given by

the Gillard Labor government concerns the physical delivery of the NBN. We know that some cables will go underground, while others will need to be placed overhead. This raises serious concerns for my constituents, who deserve to know how their properties and those nearby will be affected. If Labor is determined to push ahead with its NBN, the legislation package needs to be tightened to ensure full public accountability.

When governments deliver infrastructure it is crucial that the right balance is struck between the delivery of services and the physical location of any structures. Failure to do so creates anxiety for the local community. Public consultation must therefore take place. One need only look at the current situation in Corlette, in my electorate of Paterson, to see what I am talking about. In Corlette, Telstra has proposed to build a new mobile phone tower on Port Stephens Council land. Many nearby residents of the planned tower only found out about the development application through a letter sent by council little more than a week before comments were due. Further, council's submission period was over the Christmas holidays, when the majority of residents were either dealing with family matters or away on holidays. As a result, dozens of people have contacted my office furious, frustrated and upset. After a phone call to council, the submission period was extended by one week. However, more needs to be done to ensure the public has its full and rightful say in public infrastructure projects such as this.

The Labor government must heed the lessons of the past. 2011 appears to be the year of big new taxes. If the Gillard Labor government gets its way, we will have a flood tax, a carbon tax and a mining tax—and it is only February. Prime Minister Gillard and Mr Swan have to resort to these taxes because they cannot manage the money they already have. They took a \$20 billion sur-

plus, which we the coalition worked hard to save for a rainy day, and wasted it. Then they worked us into a massive national debt which will peak at \$94.4 billion according to the latest Mid Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook.

Simply put, taxpayers cannot afford to fund a \$50 billion broadband network—not when they are crying out for basic improvements in health, roads and other areas, and especially not when a wireless OPEL network that would have required less than \$1 billion from the government would have been completed by mid-2009. In my electorate of Paterson a tiny fraction of that \$50 billion would pay for the road upgrades that are desperately needed to protect lives on the Bucketts Way and the Lakes Way and on the roads between Paterson, Vacy and Gresford, between Nelson Bay and Fingal Bay and on main road 301.

A tiny fraction of that money would deliver the life-saving medical equipment needed by patients in my electorate, such as dialysis machines and a chemotherapy unit at Forster-Tuncurry and more public hospital beds on the Tomaree Peninsula. A tiny fraction of that money would deliver the digital television upgrades we so desperately need to guarantee the delivery of local news, advertising, entertainment and community announcements. Labor has delivered none of these things because, as we are told, there is no federal funding available. That is why Labor needs to re-examine its NBN and offer us a more cost-effective solution to our broadband needs that combines the use of wireless and fibre.

A paper released on 9 February this year by the Economist Intelligence Unit, one of the world's most respected research organisations, shows that the NBN will cost Australian taxpayers 24 times as much as the scheme in South Korea. Despite the exces-

sive cost, it will deliver only one-10th of the speed. The *Australian* newspaper explained the report in further detail in its 9 February article:

The report assesses the plans of 40 countries to enable high speed broadband development, assessing the target speeds, rollout time frame, cost and regulatory provisions to deliver a final ranking.

The research body marks Australia down in its government broadband index because of “the huge cost to the public sector” of the NBN.

It also loses points due to limited private-sector involvement, high government intervention and the exclusion of state and municipal authorities from the plan.

The report highlights the disparity between the cost of the network - estimated at 7.6 per cent of annual government revenue - and the cost of the South Korean network, which is estimated at less than one per cent.

The report does score the NBN highly for having a target speed of 100 megabits per second, but it says Sweden, Finland, Estonia and France have all set similar targets with much lower costs.

Clearly even international commentators are aware of the Gillard Labor government’s waste.

There are many questions that remain regarding the NBN, as I have detailed today. Until those answers are provided to the people of Paterson and the Australian public in general, the NBN should be put on hold. That is why the public works and public authority exemptions within this legislation need to be erased. We cannot afford any reduction in the ability of parliament to publicly scrutinise NBN Co. When the Labor government was elected last year, Prime Minister Gillard promised that it would be an open, honest and accountable government. I call on her to deliver on that promise. The task should be simple if she has nothing to hide.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (6.32 pm)—In making my contribution to this debate on the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the cognate bill, the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010, my mind turns to an email from a Chifley constituent and Woodcroft resident, Christopher Jadhav, who writes:

I am writing to bring to your attention the plight of the residents of Woodcroft regarding bad internet connections. Telstra has not bothered to invest in infrastructure and therefore we are unable to get cable or ADSL2 connections. Also for some unknown reason we cannot connect to other providers and we are the mercy of whatever Telstra will provide us at an exorbitant and uncompetitive price. Woodcroft is the only suburb which is disadvantaged as far as internet connectivity is concerned ... could you please look into this at the earliest and raise this issue in Parliament and get it sorted.

This is not the first time that I have raised in this place the plight of Woodcroft residents, who are trying to get something that is becoming an increasingly important feature of modern living: reliable, high-speed communication and information access via the net. Only a few weeks later, last month, I received the details of a petition that residents were sufficiently moved to go around their neighbourhood and prepare. It states:

We are living in Woodcroft for a long time but we are disadvantaged by a slow internet connection at a higher price, normally \$40 to \$50 for ADSL2+ landline, but here, up to \$90 to \$100 for ADSL1. Telstra is having a monopoly in this area and we don’t have any other provider with cables in Woodcroft, where only secondary loops are available, no primary loops. We pay double the amount paid by customers in other areas and we don’t get access for ADSL2. We would like to have your kind attention about this issue. Some of our friends working in software jobs left this area due to slow speed of internet and some of our

friends are thinking to leave. Please take action to stop years of rip-off.

That is signed by 17 neighbours who got together because they were frustrated by the lack of access. I want those residents to know not just that their concerns are heard but that I will do what I can in this place and elsewhere to stand up for them and ensure they get some sort of help, having been failed in the past by a former government who had no ability to solve this problem. This week I, along with the member for Greenway, will be meeting with NBN Co. to press the case for Woodcroft residents along with residents of Greenway.

I am pleased to say that residents in Chifley have the potential to benefit from being amongst the first wave of Australians able to access the NBN, after the government announced last year that Riverstone would form the centre of a second release site in New South Wales, specifically within Western Sydney. Potentially 3,000 homes will be connected. This rollout cannot come quickly enough, with residents across generations united in their desire to get access to super-fast internet. At this point I would like to recognise the work of two special groups in Chifley who are helping older Australians connect with the net: Blacktown Computer Pals and the Rooty Hill and Districts Seniors Computing Club. Those groups have said to me they would love to see the benefits promised by the NBN.

These bills build on the historic reforms that the House agreed upon at the conclusion of the 2010 sittings. The companies bill sets up a framework for the operation and legal status of the NBN. It also puts in place mechanisms for potential private ownership. The access arrangements bill makes the necessary adjustments to competition laws to ensure the NBN can be the platform for open and non-discriminatory access to retail carriers using its wholesale services. This legisla-

tion provides something that we have been lacking for years—the ability for competition to grow from the basis of a uniform, wholesale network. We really have to stand and congratulate the government on this legislation.

While the rest of the country relishes the prospect of gaining the superfast internet access enjoyed by many other countries, there is one group determined to do whatever they can to block the community's access to this infrastructure—not for the national interest but for their own political interest. That group is the coalition. I can understand the Liberal Party doing their best to stop the NBN. It proves yet again that they have no interest in meeting the infrastructure needs of Western Sydney residents. But I am surprised at hearing the Nationals' lemming-like support of the coalition approach to 'demolish the NBN', as the Leader of the Opposition has stated. It is, frankly, astounding. Regional Australia knows superfast internet access is critical to ensure that the regions enjoy tapping into an infrastructure that their city cousins have enjoyed for years.

My friend the member for Throsby highlighted some of the views of the media from a vibrant region of New South Wales, the Illawarra. The *Illawarra Mercury*, a great newspaper—despite its misplaced and frenzied support for the Illawarra Hawks NBL team—told it like it is on the coalition's position:

Malcolm Turnbull is off the pace if he thinks the Australian people will accept a tiered system of broadband connection in which regional and suburban residents are treated as second class citizens.

I continue to quote from this devastating editorial:

... in his (the Member for Wentworth) view town centres should get a super-fast internet connection at 100 megabits per second, while those logging

on in the 'burbs are forced to settle for a slower rate.

There it is in a nutshell: the coalition defending haves at the expense of have nots. So what is the coalition's preferred position? They do not want to rely on fibre, which hands down is the fastest way to deliver the internet. They recommend a method of internet delivery that would relegate residents in suburban and regional areas to being, as described earlier, second-class citizens. The coalition want residents in suburban and regional areas to rely upon wireless and HFC. People react vigorously to this. These are just some of the comments from people on Twitter and Facebook who have written on my page:

I have heard them say that fibre to the home is too costly and we'd be better off with wireless, because it is cheaper and faster. How the hell—

and these are quotes direct from the public—
can wireless ever be quicker than a hardwired connection?

Wireless is awful.

Bring on the NBN.

Wireless can only do so much.

Wireless is so damn slow.

The NBN—

I hasten to add that these comments from the general public, expressing their frustration—

can't come soon enough. I just moved to the Central Coast and I was nearly bullied by Telstra into going wireless because of a lack of ports on the exchange. I ended up having my way with them. Wireless is not answer. I cannot stress this enough.

There are other people who live in city areas who say:

I live in Sydney's CBD and wireless does not work at my house at all. The only way I can access internet is by ADSL. Why don't they realise that the majority of us want it. Just because they did bugger-all for so long.

These are the comments straight from the public. They know wireless is a second-class

option. Consumers cannot stand it. It clogs up when many users in one area are trying to get onto it. HFC faces the same hurdles if multiple connections exist in the one household, which is likely, given that it is used to deliver Foxtel.

Notably, not even the coalition believe in the viability of wireless to deliver superfast internet connections:

No wireless broadband technology is able to handle the data rates of the best wireline technologies but there are many situations where the latter cannot yet be used or is simply unavailable (such as remote and regional areas and even in some suburban metro areas).

That is from the report *Connecting Australia! Wireless broadband* delivered in 2002 by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. Its chair was the member for Sturt, now the Manager of Opposition Business. Wireless has its place where fixed line is difficult to roll out. It is great when you are on the go and away from home. People using iPads with 3G capacity, just like the one I am using here today, will testify to that. But would one ever seriously believe that it would be the main technology platform on which we would deliver reliable access for residents, particularly those I have the honour of representing in this place? The general community knows the limitations of wireless technology. Even the coalition in government recognised the limitations. So why have they taken the position they have? Because, to paraphrase *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist Peter Hartcher's reflections on why the coalition opposed the flood levy, even when they have a history of using levies themselves, he nailed it when he said it reflected opportunism—bare, naked, unashamed opportunism. And who loses out? Western Sydney residents and the regional residents mentioned by the *Illawarra Mercury*.

The coalition has used a variety of sham arguments to undermine the case, need and process for building the NBN. Some of them, frankly, are elitist. Other arguments they use here do not even stack up against their own performance in their own electorates. For example, in the electorate that the member for Wentworth represents, you do not hear too many complaints about lack of internet access. In fact it has some of the best access in the country.

You have heard me highlight the poor position of the constituents of Chifley. So we have an inequity—that digital divide—that we are trying to address in this government. The member for Wentworth says it costs too much money, we need cost-benefit analysis and we need Productivity Commission reports—all this to find some way to relegate us to an option that makes us ‘second-class citizens’ in the western suburbs. Sometimes, government infrastructure is going to cost money. We have to make choices. We are doing this for the good of those jammed in the digital divide. There has been significant market failure, so much so that the other side tried to address that failure 19 times and came up short 19 times. We are fixing this once and for all.

I want to see if word matches deed when it comes to the member for Wentworth. People know I used to have the honour of representing postal workers in this country through a previous role. I often fought tooth and nail to protect jobs and conditions. I was happy recently to see support from unlikely quarters: from the members for Bradfield and Wentworth. I almost wanted to bestow on them honorary membership of my old union, the CEPU! I turn the House’s attention to a terrific article featuring the member for Wentworth. It is a great photo. He has no tie and his sleeves are rolled up. I like the fact that he has no tie on. It is a good touch, knowing my distaste of quite an old style of

fashion. He is out there mixing it up in the crowd. The title of this article is ‘Don’t close it down’. It basically goes on about the member for Wentworth standing up, and rightly so as the local member, for his local post office. He took delivery of a petition. This is from the *Wentworth Courier* 12 January 2011:

“Woollahra also has a larger than average percentage of older people who rely on its services,” he said.

The article states his saying:

Australia Post must balance making a profit against its public service obligations. Since the post office is part of a network and not an individual business this makes it possible.

I do not have a problem, obviously, with government’s investing in public infrastructure and services, but I am consistent. Based on what the member for Wentworth said on the NBN, I think he would want to be the same. After being projected to lose \$160,000 this year, Australia Post wanted to close the Woollahra Post Office in the seat of Wentworth. That post office had lost nearly \$400,000—nearly half a million—over three years. What was the member for Wentworth’s reaction? Again, off with the tie, roll up the sleeves and out in the public domain demanding it remain open. He never asked for a cost-benefit analysis for that, could not find demand for a Productivity Commission report and there was no cheap advice of accepting a second-class option. There he is demanding the government wear the half a million dollar loss.

Why do we have to bear that hypocrisy of telling Western Sydney residents that they have unrealistic expectations for wanting the internet in their neighbourhood while the member for Wentworth rails against the shutdown of a service in eastern Sydney. Be consistent. If it is good enough for your constituents, why isn’t it good enough for the residents of Chifley, Greenway, Lindsay,

Prospect and Werriwa? Do not stand in the way of technology that can aid and enhance the lives of residents in Western Sydney because you are putting the opportunism and self-interest of the coalition ahead of the nation's interests and the next generation of Australians, no matter where they live.

Some of the other quotes that have gone into this debate have been pearls. The member for Bradfield asked, 'Why did the government walk away from its initial proposal on fibre to the node?' We know why: because, when the bids went out, Telstra put out a deficient five-page bid that signalled, for all intents and purposes, that the main company in this country was not serious about broadband, and we had to examine another way to deliver a wholesale platform that would deliver results for residents. We had the member for Paterson advocating support for wireless technology on the one hand but then arguing about mobile phone towers in his electorate. How does he expect wireless to be delivered? This is what constitutes the great thinking of those opposite.

What about 'the US is going wireless'? The reason it went wireless is that the ideological brethren of the opposition, the Republican Party, opposed the plan to provide fibre to homes. And we heard, 'Not enough examination or reports'. How many reports do they want? We have had implementation studies and we have had reports released last year. At the end of the day, it is not about reports; it is the fact that they do not have a report that they like. The other thing about this claim of national security that was brought up by the member for Forrest is that that was the one that was peddled around by Telstra when they were trying to spook everyone about the government trying to get into the space of actually providing a wholesale network that could not be provided by Telstra and that was the subject of 19 failed plans.

The opposition, as has been remarked by this side, do not have a plan. They are trying to stop people from getting access to a technology that the rest of the world enjoys. They need to recognise the huge demand for these services. They need to get out of the way and let us get on with the job that they were simply unable to do themselves.

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (6.47 pm)—I rise to speak tonight on the debate on the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and a related bill. It is fair to say that this is an example of what this government has not done well. I thought it was highlighted very nicely today by the member for Fraser's motion, which I was able to speak on—that is, that this policy is not about an evidence based policy approach to politics. For those who do not remember, this policy was born out of an attempt in 2007 to paint the then Leader of the Opposition, the member for Griffith, as modern, new and someone who understood the challenges of the future more than the then Prime Minister did. So they came up with this great broadband promise, in about April 2007, which was for 12 megabits per second for 98 per cent of Australia, using fibre-to-the node technology. At the time, many said that was not possible to implement. But, given the electoral circumstances of that year, it was a policy that was quite popular. It was no doubt part of the reason that the government changed in November 2007—much to the worse, unfortunately, for our country.

In government, the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and the Prime Minister looked to see whether they could put together this politically based promise that was part of an election advertising campaign that was very well crafted, and they could not possibly put the policy together. So it had to be changed—it had to be reformed; it had to work; it had to be put into something that

could possibly be implemented. The only face-time the minister could possibly get with the former Prime Minister was on a VIP flight to Perth, which was a 3½- or four-hour trip on the VIP. So we saw the minister rushing with his bags to climb up the stairs of the VIP to get up there with the then Prime Minister. This is an experience that many on the other side commented on, off the record, prior to the events of June last year. On that VIP plane they decided that, instead of spending \$6 billion, they would pluck a figure out of the air, so they said, 'Let's spend \$40 billion. Let's build fibre to the premise. Let's grab the beer coaster on the VIP and we'll put a business case together on how this will work and then we'll make an announcement about it.' That was the next stage of the political promise to ensure that they looked like they were all for the future.

What you hear from those on the other side in this debate—and you just heard it from the member for Chifley and I am sure you will hear it from the warrior himself over there, the member for Wakefield, who is out at the doors every morning banging on the party lines these days, and it is good for his career that he is doing that—is that the only way that you can have broadband in this country is to support the NBN and the only way that you believe in fast broadband is by supporting the government's plan to have 100 megabits per second to 93 per cent of the country delivered to the home. Of course, that is simply not true. The fact is that, even on the government's own assumptions, the demand for those sorts of speeds will just not be there. The NBN Co. business plan forecasts that two-thirds of users will be paying for speeds no higher than today's top ADSL2+ 25 megabits per second.

That makes complete sense, because people want to access broadband for different purposes. There are some in the community who want to have fixed-line broadband with

very fast speeds, because they download and upload at such a pace that they need that extra capability. But the vast bulk of people in the community do not need or want that sort of speed. They do not want to be driving a Ferrari in a 50 zone. They do not want to spend the \$40 billion or \$50 billion that is required to deliver this network that the government says will get to 93 per cent of the country—which I do not think it ever will. The government simply thought it seemed like a good promise to make people believe that they are for the future to contrast with us on the other side.

On the other hand, what Australia needs is a mixture of technology. In certain places we need fast speed and access to fast speed. There is a place for fibre in this mix but, undoubtedly, people want the ability to be portable. You see it with the devices that are driving the market today. You see it with nearly everyone in this chamber in question time who taps away on an iPad or an iPhone or uses some sort of portable tablet or laptop as they move around the country. What is driving the uptake is mobile technology. Spending \$40 billion on a fixed network is picking winners at the cost of the Australian taxpayer. It is not that this technology will be outdated. I do not think fibre technology will be outdated. Fibre technology will be part of the picture but it is just not required for every home in this country—not that it will get to every home.

That brings me to the next point: delivery. My electorate of Mayo, as I am sure you are aware, Madam Deputy Speaker Livermore, takes in the Adelaide Hills, the Fleurieu Peninsula and Kangaroo Island in South Australia. Some in this House have very close connections to parts of my electorate. It is an outer metro area that is affected badly in some parts by lack of access to broadband. There has been underinvestment in electorates like mine and that of Parliamentary Sec-

retary Marles at the table, where there has not been the demand for the services or the uptake of the services in the past. So there needs to be investment in these areas. However, the likelihood that the Adelaide Hills Council is going to allow overhead cables to deliver fibre to the home in the Adelaide Hills or, indeed, the Fleurieu Peninsula is less than zero. If you do not accept that will not happen, the case is then about digging the trenches to install the fibre in parts of the country like mine, and that becomes even more outrageously expensive than what is on the table today. So the likelihood that my electorate and areas in the country which have problems with broadband will benefit from the scheme is ridiculously low.

In other words, you need a mixture of approaches to fix the issue. You certainly need government intervention in some parts of our country to fix the problems, and there is no doubt that in parts of my electorate you need government intervention to ensure that problems are fixed. There are problems in Scott Creek, for instance; there are problems in Norton Summit; there are problems in Basket Range. There are problems in areas which have challenges with topography and distance from the exchange. Those are the areas which need investment in either improving the exchanges or upgrading the capability for wireless technology. But it is beyond the realm of belief that a town like Birdwood in my electorate will have this system built to it. It just does not make economic sense and it will never happen. It sounds like a wonderful promise and it sounds exactly like what people would want—‘We want 100 megs per second. That sounds brilliant. This will be great’—but the fact of the matter is that most people do not want that. They want access to reliable, decent-speed broadband so they can do what they want to do. That is what the parliament should be focusing on. We should not be try-

ing to build everyone a Ferrari to drive in 50-kilometre zones. We should be investing in areas which require the investment and having the right settings so that the market looks after those areas which do not need the government investment. Those on the other side would say, ‘That didn’t work previously,’ and to some degree they are right. There was a problem with the structure of the system and I believe very strongly that that should have been addressed by previous governments, including the former government. However, that does not mean that you waste \$40 billion or \$50 billion by building an asset that is not required throughout the country.

The additional problems we have—and I think the member for Wentworth has focused on some very well thought through amendments—is the lack of transparency and the inability of the parliament to look at the spend. If you hold it up against what the government have done you will see the double standard in relation to the transparency they are applying to the Queensland flood reconstruction, which will cost about \$5 billion. They have appointed a former Liberal to oversee the spend. We are talking about an investment of about \$50 billion and yet there will not be any parliamentary oversight. They have excluded any oversight by this place of that spend.

It beggars belief that a government with a record of wasting money, as it does, whether it be through the BER debacles that we see on the front pages of the national papers day after day, the Green Loans program, the Jobs Fund or, the *creme de la creme*, the pink batts debacle—we have seen so many stories about waste and mismanagement by this government—would not have much more detailed consideration of the spend. Therefore, it is appropriate that the member for Wentworth’s amendment deals with issues to make it much more open to scrutiny so that

we can see how the money is being spent and can try and ensure that it is not being wasted along the way. It is a very important amendment and I am sure that the government, if it were open, honest and serious with the Australian people, would adopt it.

I will finish where I started, and that is on the issue about evidence based policy. The initial and continued promise in relation to fast broadband is a political ploy. It is not about giving access to people who do not currently have access to broadband. That can be fixed and it should be fixed. This is about making the Labor Party seem like they are the party of the future and are au fait with technology. They will use language like: it is necessary for our economic development; that this is the only way forward; and that we have to have this investment or we will be left behind. The truth of the matter is that most small businesses do not need 100 megabits per second, do not want 100 megabits per second; they want access to reliable broadband with decent speeds. That is where we should be focusing our attention, not on this massive overspend that this government are proposing.

This is a very dangerous piece of legislation. It is a very dangerous path for the government to be proceeding down, given their record in relation to spending of Commonwealth money. At the very least, the proposed amendments that the member for Wentworth has tabled, particularly in relation to the scrutiny of that money, should be considered.

There is no doubt as we go forward that investment in technology in this country is hugely important for the future of our economy. Both sides of parliament must be and are focused on that. The debate is not about whether we believe we should have decent broadband access and speeds. We believe that. We are committed to that. We have a

plan to do that. We have a plan to fix the problem areas that should be addressed that are not being addressed, and there are many. They sit in electorates like mine.

We do not accept this argument from the government that you need to spend \$50 billion of taxpayers' money building a network that the vast majority of people will never want or need. It is overspending on something that does not need that much money spent on it to make it a good, reliable, fast network which can be used and accessed by all Australians. We need a mixture of technologies to go into the future; we do not need this massive investment in just one of those technologies at the expense of other choices.

This is a political plan by a government that is desperate to run politics rather than policy. This is not an evidence based policy decision, as the member for Fraser talked about earlier today. This is not a government committed to that evidence based policy; it is a government committed to its politics. It is a government committed to having lines at the next election campaign and, in that sense, we oppose the approach on this issue.

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (7.02 pm)—I listened carefully to the contribution from the member for Mayo, the rebellious member for Mayo. We know that he is persona non grata these days in the Liberal Party for his outspoken advocacy on industrial relations and Work Choices. He must be commended for his candour on that front, his policy vigour. If only John Howard had put him in charge of broadband instead of Work Choices, who knows what the result could have been? We might not have had the failures of the previous government. He was frank about the failures: 18 broadband plans over 12 years and, at the end of it, people in my electorate—not just people out in the country, not just people out in towns like Riverton, Clare or Kapunda but also people

in suburbs like Craigmore and Hillbank, vast suburban communities of 8,000 people—stuck on dial-up in suburban Adelaide.

We are not talking about the back of Bourke; we are talking about suburbs in our capital cities. It beggars belief to hear the member for Mayo get up and say his constituents will not want these services. I do not know where he gets it from. It is an extraordinary statement to say that people in Birdwood or Mount Torrens, where my mother lives, will not want these services. I find it extraordinary for him to say that about his constituents. Wherever I go in my electorate, people are clamouring for broadband services, and they do not ask for the bare minimum; they want broadband services that are going to back this country into the future just like the member for Mayo said.

The National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010 are about shrinking the tyranny of distance in this country. There is no doubt about it: that tyranny has been with us a long time. I remember my days in high school where we had to study half a year of legal studies and half a year of geography because there were not enough kids in the class to justify having both classes run. That would not happen under e-education opportunities. We know that the tyranny of distance strikes the country areas hardest of all. We know that this bill is about shrinking that through superfast broadband infrastructure.

These bills are about establishing the Commonwealth's ownership and eventual sale of NBN Co. and providing a level regulatory playing field for our infrastructure and superfast broadband. It is an important bit of legislation because it brings before this House the infrastructure that is going to pave

the way to do all that. As I said before, I know how important this is because of places like Craigmore and Hillbank, places where they could not get broadband. I vividly remember going and talking to telecommunications providers about why a place like Craigmore, with 8,000 people, could not get anything but dial-up or wireless. It was explained to me that upgrading the exchange was not economical; that Telstra would not get enough customers out of it; and that no-one else was prepared or in a position to upgrade that infrastructure. We had industry failure. We had market failure and we had Howard government failure.

Obviously, we do not want that failure to continue. Part of our commitment, part of what this legislation establishes, is for NBN Co. to provide 93 per cent of Australian premises with fibre based services and seven per cent or so with next generation wireless and satellite technology, subject to the final design. That means that areas like Riverton, which lies on the Barrier Highway in my electorate, will be able to get fibre-to-the-home. It is an important opportunity for those towns because we will not be able to foresee the demands in those towns necessarily. I think business cases always tend to be a little conservative on this front. I suspect we will find that over time demand will grow rather than diminish.

We know currently our country lags well behind in the broadband stakes. We know currently we are ranked some 29th out of 50 countries for an average connection speed of 2.6 megabits. We know that no Australian city is in the top 100 for average internet connection speed. That poor comparison does not bode well for Australia's reputation as an advanced Western economy. It does not bode well for our future when we know that productivity will be based more and more on information technology, creative industries and harnessing people's imagination.

Some commentators and some on the Liberal side say this is all about playing computer games a bit faster, but in fact computer games are now a massive industry—bigger than the motion picture industry and that gives you some idea of human creativity. We only have to look at e-books and the like to know that more and more information will be online and more and more of our creative endeavours will be online. We also know that there will be more and more demand on the systems, not just in relation to downloads but also in relation to uploads. Uploading will be increasingly important as people, through business and other creative endeavours, put more and more information and content on the internet.

I recently read in the *Economist* about phone services in Africa. Some of these countries now have vast mobile networks and no fixed networks because eventually a technology came along that allowed them to get around not building a fixed network. They had 60 or 70 years without any telephone services and, of course, that retarded their economic and social growth. Not having phones was a pretty big deal in Africa until mobile technology came along. That is really at the heart of the opposition's position. They say, 'Let's wait and eventually a new technology will come along.' We know that might be a long way over the horizon, a long time indeed. Having told us to wait for the 12 years they were in government, they now want to put it off into the distance—so we will be like Nigeria, Kenya or somewhere like that for broadband services down the track. You can see that happening as the Liberal Party desperately wait for some new technology to emerge. I do not think that we should do that; I think we should act on the best available information that we have—that is, that fibre to the household is the best way to go.

Mr Ciobo—Why is that better than 4G?

Mr CHAMPION—The member for Moncrieff keeps putting forward the tired old arguments of the opposition, 'Wait, there is this new technology'—and it has suddenly emerged in the last three years; it did not happen in the 12 years they were in government. All we had was market failure, regulatory failure and government failure. That is what we had for the 12 years they were in power and that is what the Liberal Party will promise for the future.

Only Labor has a plan that will accommodate this nation's demands into the future. The Liberal Party will deny, obstruct and delay, endlessly pushing it off into the future and claiming the 4G network would be better—or maybe it will be 5G, 6G or 7G. Maybe somewhere down the track there will be a wonderful wireless network or some other technology that will resolve the Liberal Party's problem, which is that they do not want to put in place a decent broadband service for this country. We saw this time and time again in my electorate. I remember talking to a journalist who was commuting to Sydney from Adelaide every week because she could not get broadband in her house in Hillbank.

Mr Ciobo—Couldn't get broadband? What is her name?

Mr CHAMPION—It is true: that is what she was doing, as she could only get dial-up in her house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore)—Order! Members will stop interjecting.

Mr CHAMPION—It is an interesting story. She met her husband in Iraq. He was a member of the South Australian police. They got married, moved to Adelaide and lived in his house in Hillbank. They could not get broadband so she was commuting every week to do her job. These are things that my constituents tell me; they are no laughing

matter. For 12 years, the member for Moncrieff and others laughed, joked, denied, obfuscated, delayed and never came up with a solution. They had 18 plans over the years. There was a denial of services and they never got around to fixing the problem. Time and time again they said, 'There's a solution, but just wait.' We know who suffers when this happens. It is people in the suburbs and people in country towns.

I am stunned that members of the National Party would come into this place and say, 'Just rely on the market to fix the problem. Just rely on some new wonderful technology which the private sector will bring to you.' We know that that will not happen. We know that delaying, wishing this problem into the never-never and hoping for some future nirvana, is an approach that did not work in the past. It did not work during the Howard years and it is unlikely to work in the future, and that is why those opposite keep losing on this issue. They keep banging on and raising all these objections to the system because they do not have anything positive to say about it, they do not have a record to run on and they do not have a plan for the future. Personally, I think it does not win them one vote and, more importantly, it does not serve their constituents very well.

We had the situation where the National Party were all for this, right up until Barnaby Joyce became their Senate leader. Then he did a complete 180-degree turn and said he was against it. All of sudden there is some spurious reason for not backing it; that is the truth. Why? It is because he is appealing to the short-term conservative thinking of asking, 'Why would we do this?' If we listened to those opposite, roads would have been too expensive—the original phone would have been too expensive. They would have been here saying, 'Why do farmers need phones?' That is basically the tenor of their argument. And if they were back in Roman times, they

would have been saying, 'Why does the empire need aqueducts; we don't need aqueducts. Who needs water? Who needs sewerage?'

For every great bit of infrastructure, you could count on the opposition to find some reason to oppose it, to find some reason not to do it, to find some reason to delay it and to find some reason to say, 'We don't need it.' Of course, once it is in put in place, then we will not hear about those issues anymore. They will be the greatest supporters of it ever known, and they will hope that the speeches that they gave in this place with this short-termism, this ostrich-like behaviour, will be ignored. They will hope that they were not seen to be standing in the way of the future.

This government will press on with our legislation. It is important legislation for the future and it is well-balanced legislation for the future. It is legislation that provides the backbone for our important National Broadband Network, a network that will serve all of my constituents well, whether they are in the suburbs or if they are in country towns to the north of Gawler. It is an incredibly important program for this country and I commend it to the House.

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (7.16 pm)—While sitting in here during the last contribution from the member for—

Mr Champion—Wakefield!

Mr CIOBO—Wakefield, thank you—I realised something. It was a moment that crystallised in my mind what this NBN is about for the Australian Labor Party and the government. It is the chance for all of the Labor members to stand up and channel their inner Fidel Castro. You can see them come into the chamber and metaphorically put their little soap box underneath their feet, stand up, stroke their goatee and start dispensing wisdom about what a great nation-building project this will be. That is what we

are getting from the Labor members opposite: the chance to channel Fidel Castro.

I hope that the member for Wakefield's children—I am not sure if he is a father yet, but if he is not, I hope that God blesses him with children—read his contribution because in the decades to come my child—and, as I said, the children I hope the member for Wakefield is blessed with—will be able to understand the contribution that the member opposite made to a \$50 billion spending commitment by the Australian government. And they should understand how facile a contribution it was, like so many others from that side are, because they will be paying the debt off for decades. For decades it will be future generations of Australians that are paying off the grand vision of Australia.

The former Prime Minister, the member for Griffith, was a great one when it came to big, bold plans. He was not very good at following through and he was not very good at making sure that what was being proposed actually made a hell of a lot of sense, but he was great on the sell. They say in marketing, 'Sell the sizzle, not the sausage', and that is what we had from the Australian Labor Party at the last election and prior to that, when this grand scheme which, according to folklore, was developed between the former Prime Minister, the member for Griffith, and the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, on the back of an envelope aboard a VIP. It seems very appropriate that a \$50 billion exercise that is going to commit generations of Australians to debt and deficit should have been devised on the back of an envelope inside a VIP, because this entire project completely reeks of the fiscal incompetence that has become the hallmark of this federal Labor government.

We have a number of fascinating aspects to the bill before the House today, the Na-

tional Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010, and they underscore the approach of this government when it comes to NBN Co. What we know is that this is, for all intents and purposes, going to be the single largest building project of its kind that the world has ever seen. Only a matter of a month or two ago, the President of the United States rose in the United States Congress for his State of the Nation address, and he outlined a bold vision and a plan. There are a lot of similarities between a lot of the rhetoric we hear from members opposite—from government members pathetically trying to justify this massive expenditure—and what the President of the United States said. However, there was a key difference between his approach and the approach of Labor members opposite—and this was coming from a president who has presided over a massive blow-out in their debt-to-GDP ratio in the United States. That was that in the United States, in relative terms, their investment in providing high-speed broadband to their people is about 165th, according to most media comments, of what this government is doing in this country. He outlined his plan, which was built on 4G wireless technology.

Members opposite get up and wax lyrical about how nothing happened for 12 years under the coalition and all of this absolute rot—and it is absolute rubbish, because 12 years ago, although the internet did exist, it was nothing on what it is today. Let me inform members opposite, if they do not know already, that there is a reason why they talk about Web 2.0—it has been the evolution of the internet. Indeed, it has evolved from what originally started out as effectively what they called internet relay chat, or IRC, and some very limited components of the internet in terms of multimedia in the early 1990s to what it is today in 2011. And we have no idea where it is going to go. In another 10 or

20 years it will be even more profound than it has been over the last 10 or 20 years.

To hear members opposite start to rave on about how nothing happened for 12 years deserves the contempt of the Australian people. I sit here on this side of the chamber and I listen with contempt as I hear members opposite speak in these glib terms about 'investing'—so-called—\$50 billion of taxpayers' money 'after nothing happened for 12 years'. What absolute rubbish! Members opposite have an obligation to future generations of Australians to put a more compelling case—rather than to simply throw up these kinds of stupid lines, frankly—because what the government is looking at doing through this legislation is entrenching a monopoly in this country. It will hand to NBN Co. effectively the single greatest telecommunications monopoly this country has ever seen. It is a massive regressive step, and it comes at a huge cost to Australians as they will be paying off for decades the debt associated with this so-called vision from those opposite.

The coalition are not exactly being unreasonable with our proposal. Fundamentally, there is one aspect of the proposal we are driving forward that we are asking the government to listen to. We are saying: subject this to a cost-benefit analysis. What is so outrageous from a public policy perspective about asking for this \$50 billion, or thereabouts, of expenditure to be subjected to a cost-benefit analysis? The answer—from any right-thinking, straight down the line, ordinary Australian—would be, 'Nothing,' because there is nothing outrageous about subjecting this to a cost-benefit analysis.

There is nothing outrageous about saying to this out-of-control government that a \$50 billion spending initiative should perhaps go before the Productivity Commission and that we should ask the Productivity Commission to make a decision about whether or not this

expenditure, which our children will be paying off for decades, is the right expenditure. Members opposite should hang their heads in shame, because it is one thing to have people lock in behind a government policy but an entirely different thing when that policy involves such an exorbitant waste of money.

I am sure I am not letting the cat out of the bag when I say that, if the Productivity Commission and the cost-benefit analysis said, 'Yes; this is definitely the way to go and this taxpayer subsidy should be rolled out,' the coalition would probably support it. I am sure it is not that radical to say that. But you know what? We all know that that is not going to happen, and the reason it is not going to happen is that it is economic madness, sheer economic lunacy, for the government to pursue this agenda—and that is the reason they are avoiding scrutiny at all costs.

The Labor Party do not want scrutiny on NBN Co. before the Productivity Commission. The Labor Party do not want scrutiny of NBN Co. when it comes to freedom of information laws, which is why NBN Co. is structured the way it is in the legislation. The Labor Party do not want scrutiny of NBN Co. by the parliament's Public Works Committee, and that is the reason that they have also made attempts to try to avoid any scrutiny by that committee. In essence, the Labor Party do not want scrutiny of this bill or of the whole proposal, because they know that it was a legacy promise from the former Prime Minister, now being implemented by this government, that is bereft of any notion of economic responsibility—completely devoid of any real semblance of making sure that young Australians will not have to meet this debt in the future.

Let us use a basic analogy. If you go out to dinner with a group of people it is very easy to whip out the credit card at the end of the night and say, 'It's all right; it's on me.' It

is really easy if you are not the one who actually has to pay that bill. And that is precisely what we have got going on here now. We have a government that is happy to throw the card around at the end of the day and say, 'It's all right—I'll pick up the tab; not a problem; don't you worry,' because the people who will pay the bill for this economic recklessness are the Australians of tomorrow.

We have already had a government that has racked up, in a relatively short time—three years or thereabouts—around \$80 billion of net debt, and that excludes the \$50 billion that NBN Co. is putting forward. The most galling aspect of this exercise is that, in a world that is rapidly evolving, a world that is shifting from fixed-line technology to wireless communications, a world where the United States President has indicated—in what is one of the most, if not the most digitally-enabled economy globally—that they are putting their resources into wireless 4G technology, we have got this government spending \$50 billion and saying: 'Trust us! It's okay. We're the ones with vision,' and just blithely throwing out all manner of rhetoric about anyone who dares to question them about what they are up to.

But we know that the stakeholders who have come out in support of NBN Co. are those with the most vested in this area. The wise stakeholders have remained tight-lipped, unwilling to indicate whether they believe fixed-line communications are superior to wireless technology. But there are others, of course, who have come out and said, 'This is brilliant; we should support it.' And why wouldn't they? Why wouldn't Google, for example, support this rollout of technology? After all, they are going to be the beneficiaries of this technology. So why wouldn't Google come out and say, 'Yes, we support it; fantastic idea'? After all, it is not going to cost Google a cent, and it is all blue sky when it comes to that company. So I am

not surprised that those are some of the groups that we hear from.

But the more compelling argument to me is that if you were to pin down any of the members opposite and ask them: 'Why is it that this form of technology is superior to a wireless form of technology?' they would be unable to answer. I would invite any members of the government following to explain why this technology is superior to 4G wireless technology. I think we will find that they will fall short and that all we will hear is glib rhetoric about how something should have happened 12 years ago because back in the year 1999-2000 you should have seen all this coming. Well, that is just rubbish.

This bill will remain an absolute testament to the manner in which this government has completely lost control when it comes to fiscal responsibility. This is not going to be Kevin Rudd's legacy as some kind of a visionary. This is not going to be the current Prime Minister, Julia Gillard's, testimony of her great vision. What it will be is a sign of the times as technology continues to evolve and as the world moves increasingly to wireless technology, which has been the trend for the last decade. People will look back and say, 'We can't believe that this is what they spent the money on that we are still paying off.'

It is almost not too much to say that this is effectively one evolution away from the fixed copper wire network. It is just a different form of technology. Fixed copper wire was visionary at the time too. This is going to be fixed fibre. No doubt Labor members have all been saying what a great vision it is. It is not, because it is just \$50 billion that has to be repaid in the future when the market could have provided a solution and that is what the coalition took forward.

The far better option is to accept that there are changes that need to be made to this leg-

isolation and for Labor members opposite to concede that it should be subjected to a cost-benefit analysis. If they do not want to take my word for it, they should listen to the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Glenn Stevens, who made it clear that any proposal like this should be subjected to a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis. They should listen to their own rhetoric. Labor Party policy says, 'We will subject any initiatives in terms of public infrastructure to a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis.' Of course, none of us saw the asterisk that says 'excluding the NBN'.

The Labor Party need to start living up to actually making sure that their actions match their words. They need to explain why fixed wire technology that is going to cost \$50 billion should be an expense that our children should have to pay for for decades to meet some kind of bizarre vision that the Prime Minister had.

Ms O'NEILL (Robertson) (7.31 pm)—In listening to the member for Moncrieff I can tell that he is taking his lessons from the Leader of the Opposition. I am reminded these days of the big, bad wolf when I see the Leader of the Opposition get up—lots of huff and puff, all threat, all menace, but absolutely no plan or vision for the future.

What the member for Moncrieff was attempting to sell here today was fear on steroids—fear of technology, fear of investment and fear of the future. I say shame on him as the member for Moncrieff, shame on him for the selling short the future of those people in this country that he is supposed to be representing and shame on him for the future of the children that he certainly has a right to be proud of. What sort of opportunities do those on the opposite side offer in terms of a future that connects us into a world economy in a high-quality way using digital technology?

We understand, on this side, that we have an obligation to future generations. We want our young people to be able to participate on an equal footing with other world citizens whose governments have already positioned their people and their economies to take advantage of this technology. The member for Moncrieff asks why we cannot go ahead with wireless technology. He has not been listening. The member for Greenway made some very powerful points. It is very simple. We need a National Broadband Network to provide a backbone, a stable, speed of light backbone on which Next G and satellite can be added. It is very simple. What this technology offers is very clear to those who pay attention. Instead of the negativity of the other side, I am absolutely delighted to offer my support to this legislation which is going to enable our future.

To cast a new metaphor—this legislation is another junction box in the rollout of the NBN, which, as we all know, is the government's most important long-term infrastructure project. It has been explained many times that the NBN will connect up to 93 per cent of all Australian homes, schools and workplaces with fibre based broadband services. The remaining premises will be served by next generation wireless and satellite broadband services. As many Labor members have consistently and persuasively argued in this chamber, the NBN will better position us to prosper in an increasingly digital world by enabling Australian businesses to compete on a global scale. I want to back Australian businesses every time, not the rhetoric of fear, misery and denial of opportunity which those opposite are offering. We have to invest in our people. We need to invest in this world-changing technology and give our people a chance.

In April 2009 the government indicated that it would legislate to establish operating, ownership and governance arrangements for

NBN Co. Ltd and the regime to facilitate access to the NBN for those access seekers. The legislation achieves that. The government has consulted extensively on the legislative arrangements for NBN Co. Ltd and released exposure drafts of the bills in February 2010, and it has consulted, through the implementation study on the NBN.

As other government speakers in this debate have noted, the primary bill—the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010—limits and focuses NBN Co. on wholesale only telecommunications activities, and that is consistent with its mandate. The bill sets out clearly the Commonwealth ownership arrangements and provides for the eventual sale of the Commonwealth's stake in NBN Co. subject to parliament's approval. The accompanying bill, the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010, establishes new access, non-discrimination and transparency obligations for NBN Co. and provides a level regulatory playing field for superfast broadband infrastructure.

Members on this side of the chamber have extolled long and in detail the benefits of the NBN. Last week the member for Greenway—a person of considerable experience in the telecommunications sector, unlike many of those opposite who continue to perpetrate myths and mistruths about the opportunities that the NBN offers us—eloquently gave us some more useful context in her contribution on a matter of public importance to inform the overall debate. I noted particularly the member for Greenway's reference to comments last year by the Broadband Commission for Digital Development. The commission has called for broadband inclusion not for some but for all. Among other things, the commission states that broadband will be:

... a “game-changer” in addressing rising health-care costs, delivering digital education for all, and mitigating the effects of climate change.

That is a pretty good rap. And let us just get a few facts on the table here, instead of this huffing and puffing and fear of the future. The reality, also referred to by the member for Greenway, is quite simple:

A high-capacity fibre optic packet transport backbone is the fundamental backbone infrastructure that countries need to deploy to support the growth in broadband services.

We need a stable backbone. We are talking about information moving at a speed of light. We are talking about stability. We cannot deliver that with the instability that is offered by 4G. Unless it has a backbone it is not going to meet our needs. I thank the member for Greenway for her informed contribution to this debate. It is much appreciated.

All of us come to this place from different backgrounds, but with a united purpose: to take the Australian people forward. As a teacher over three decades—and, just as an aside, I do not believe anyone can ever be a former teacher; you continue to hold that role—I am thrilled at the educational prospects that the NBN will offer future generations. As with most government infrastructure initiatives, however, those opposite love them in their electorate but loathe them when it comes to this place. I wish I had a dollar—it would be a great fundraising venture, actually—for every Liberal that has been seen at a BER school event. At the last one I went to, the Liberal member for the state seat of Terrigal, Chris Hartcher, was there celebrating a brand new library at Central Coast Grammar School. What a fantastic project that is. It is linking kids into a future. It is an investment in capacity and possibilities. It is not miserly, it is not negative and it is not fear—all of the rhetoric that we keep seeing from the other side of the chamber. It is a funny thing that those who do the least want

to criticise the most when it comes to delivering infrastructure for our country.

Clearly, from his comments in this debate, the member for Wentworth does not feel a burning need for reliable, superfast broadband in regional areas like the one I come from on the Central Coast. There is no matter of urgency for fast and reliable broadband in Point Piper. 'Let them eat copper,' I think is what the member for Wentworth is saying to the people of the Central Coast. Well, I can tell you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that the people of the Central Coast are itching for fast, reliable broadband. They are ready and they are waiting. Speeds of up to one gigabyte a second will transform the way the people on the Central Coast can do business and allow our businesses to compete on a national and international stage.

I was at a great fundraiser recently, speaking with a local architect who wants to enlarge his business and do work that will be in an international context. He simply cannot advance his business in the way he wants to, which would lead to more employment in our area, because, with the current restrictions in technology, the current speeds of broadband are not sufficient for him to be able to do that sort of work. He represents a body of architects, and there are many architects who are expressing the same need for high-quality digital broadband and the capacity to transfer large pieces of information. It is the upload capacity that keeps getting left out by those opposite in their comments on the possibilities that broadband offers. The NBN will also open up a host of new applications in the fields of health and education. We have e-health consultations and virtual classrooms that will remove the tyranny of distance that affects Central Coast residents. Those opposite try to gloss over the market failure that was the legacy of the Howard government's broadband policies. I doubt very much whether the member for Wen-

tworth has constituents like I do who contact his office looking for solutions to their broadband access problems—although I was intrigued to hear, via the member for Chifley, about his own home-grown protectionism for snail mail in his electorate.

As the member for Greenway has pointed out, we have been overtaken by Estonia and Latvia in the broadband stakes. I was recently at a citizenship ceremony where I met a young family who had migrated to Australia from Ireland. They were delighted to become Australian citizens. The gentleman, who runs a small business of his own in property development, had spent two years in Romania. When he compared the broadband experiences he had had in Australia and in Romania he described our conditions as 'Third World', with the speed of the internet in Romania outstripping ours by far. That is just one testimony among many from people coming here from various countries in Europe who are used to being able to click quickly and move through. We could have productivity gains that are absolutely immeasurable in terms of the speed of opportunity for people to download, and that is without even going to the possibilities of uploading and all of the applications that it might offer creative, brave and courageous Australians who do see the future is a place we want to go to, unlike those opposite who see it as a place we should be fearful of. The member for Wentworth must know that speeds and access in other parts of the world outstrip our by many, many times. But still, for purely political reasons, he proffers solutions that would consign Australia to a Third World broadband future. That is not good enough.

The opposition failed dismally at the last election to convince the Australian public of the merits of their broadband policy, but they keep on trying to rewrite history. They keep on trying to make out that Australian people

do not need reliable, superfast broadband. Regional Australians where I live—businesses, educators, health professionals—are crying out for it. Regional Australians can see the transformational capacity of broadband. They want a game-changer to make their lives better. That is why I could hardly believe my ears when the member for Cowper got up to complain about the NBN. This is the same member for Cowper who has Coffs Harbour in his electorate—the same Coffs Harbour that was announced as the hub for that region’s National Broadband Network in July last year as one of the NBN Co.’s early release sites.

The member for Cowper clearly has not been talking to Southern Cross University or the 14 councils and the local businesses who all worked hard to be one of the early release sites. They are keen as mustard on the idea. I was a little surprised at the member for Cowper’s approach. I did a quick Google search and found an intriguing article from the *Coffs Coast Advocate*. The article, dated 9 July last year, is titled ‘Superfast broadband to hit Coffs’, by journalist Matthew Deans. The article reads:

IN a huge boost for Coffs Harbour’s future, the city got the jump on the rest of regional NSW with the news superfast broadband is coming here next.

Communications Minister Stephen Conroy announced yesterday Coffs Harbour has been selected for the next roll-out of the National Broadband Network.

This stunning coup will transform the region’s economic future if we capitalise on the early-adopter window of opportunity.

“This is a fantastic result for all the partners involved in the submission urging NBN Co to establish the broadband network as quickly as possible on the North Coast,” said Coffs Harbour mayor Councillor Keith Rhoades.

“The partnership of Southern Cross University, Coffs Harbour City Council, the local businesses

involved and our neighbouring councils has been key to persuading the company of the enormous economic and educational benefits that a high-speed broadband network would bring to the region.”

Clearly the member for Cowper is not on the same wavelength as many of the key players in his community. I know we often allege in our political debate that certain members on the other side are out of touch. But the member for Cowper is not just out of touch—he is off the planet!

I think it is pretty cheeky for him to stand up in this House and be so ungrateful for the investment that NBN Co. is putting into his electorate. That ungrateful demeanour comes in the absence, I might add, of any achievement on his part as a member of the former Liberal government for his electorate—lest we forget: the 19 failed broadband plans. I know those opposite have made some points about transparency, but what is abundantly transparent in this debate is that the opposition is trying to mitigate defeat with delay.

Again in this House we as a government find ourselves faced with a pointless, churlish attempt at opposition for opposition’s sake. As far as I am concerned, we had a referendum on the NBN last August in regional Australia. So I ask the member for Wentworth and his colleagues: please spare us and the Australian public all the strutting and fretting and the procession of irrelevant, straw-man debating points. The sooner we get on with it the better. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (7.47 pm)—I too rise to address the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the cognate Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010. However, I must take the member for Robertson to task about the trap that this government continually falls into where it paints any opposition

to a particular method of policy implementation as opposition to the whole premise. In this particular case, the fact that the opposition are opposed to the National Broadband Network in its current form does not mean we are against high broadband speeds. The member for Robertson said that we must build the backbone; well, we agree with that. We must build the arteries and veins that will allow for high-speed backhaul. But that does not mean we need the capillaries. Of course, we will never quite know whether we in the opposition or the government are right in this case, because the government refuse to have a cost-benefit analysis to discover just what the right answer is.

I recognise the need for all Australians to enjoy access to a world-class internet. It is critical to our nation's growth and competitiveness in the world market—although at times we can forget just how much telecommunications in Australia have changed in a relatively short time. You could be forgiven for thinking the government believe that, prior to their coming to power, we had been stuck in a time warp, using Marconi radios and carrier pigeons to communicate with each other, when in fact the changes in the telecommunications industry have been quite enormous over the last 20 years or so. Twenty years ago, we barely had mobile phones. Ten years before that, we did not have fax machines. Advances are both inevitable and inexorable.

I also deplore the government speakers who insinuate that those who do not support their version of broadband do not understand the technology or seek to deny Australians access to the technology. However, it is becoming increasingly obvious that there are a large group of industry experts who do not believe that a fixed line NBN delivered to the premise is the right answer for Australia and that the tertiary part of the network—that is, the fibre from the local exchange to the

house—is likely to be superseded before it is completed. The great unknown is whether the projections for NBN take-up will ever be reached, considering Australia's love affair with wireless technology. The NBN business plan predicts that, in 2025, 16.3 per cent of homes will be wireless only. I would be surprised if those figures did not prove to be very conservative. I am sure, Mr Deputy Speaker, that like me you are well aware of many households that do not have fixed line services now. In fact, it has been one of the main contributing factors to Telstra's declining profits in fixed line services. The advent of superfast wireless broadband services, which will come in the next few years with the rollout of 4G services, will accelerate this abandonment of fixed line services, no matter how good they are. Indeed, we are informed that in the US 26.6 per cent of homes are already wireless only. I have not heard a cogent argument which would suggest we are not likely to follow this trend.

If that rate of leakage to wireless is repeated in Australia, the foundations of the NBN business plan will be under serious threat. Already considered an unbankable financial risk for private enterprise, the biggest financial commitment in Australia's history would become the biggest white elephant in Australia's history. I will return later to a few of these issues, but I will deal now with the proposed legislation and touch on the amendments to be moved by the member for Wentworth.

Certainly, if we are to have a monopoly, government owned NBN, then some of the legislative proposals are necessary and desirable. There is of course an alternative point of view which questions whether we as a nation want to return to a monopolised telecommunications network and whether it will be or even can be responsive to new challenges and technologies—or will it, as we have seen in the past, be a monopoly com-

mitted to the past because they control all the current networks? After all, why would an entity drive change when they have 100 per cent of the business and there is no scope for gain in market share? This legislation addresses some of the concerns of the industry and attempts to confine the NBN to a wholesale operation only. Unfortunately, it is this part of the legislation that also snuffs out the ability of any other organisation to build any part of its own network. This, of course, is the basis of a legislated monopoly.

It will be illegal for anyone to try and compete against this network. It will be illegal to offer a superior service and it will be illegal to offer a cheaper service. It hardly seems like a free country, and I predict a government somewhere in the future will attempt to break open this monopoly, although it is unlikely to be in the near future. It is likely to happen if and when the monopoly is seen to be dragging its heels on delivering new technology.

So, while there is good reason to make sure the NBN does not get involved in retail and uses what will be enormous market strength against competitors, it is harder to maintain an argument that no-one should be able to try and pick up a slice of the transmission market if they wish, which is the intent of these bills, insofar as any network built after 25 November last year capable of carrying more than 25 megabits per second will have to allow access to other parties. There is little chance under this legislation that anyone would ever be prepared to build a competing network.

Perhaps the most objectionable part of these bills is the only too obvious effort to completely remove the greatest single expenditure in Australia's history, more than \$50 billion, from public scrutiny. The move to neither list the NBN as public works nor make the company a public authority does

just this. This move should be roundly condemned. What right does a government have to seek to avoid public scrutiny of the biggest single program in Australia's history?

The very fact that the government understate the total expenditure on this project by refusing to include the \$11 billion which they will have to pay to Telstra for access to their conduits and pipes and for transferring their customers across from the copper network they own to a network they do not own is one of the things that highlights the government's intention to hide this from public scrutiny. It is in fact a dishonest representation of the facts by the government and I am concerned that the \$37 billion figure used by the government has gained traction in the media. At the very least, the government should be honest about the true cost of this monument to their stubbornness.

To compound this lack of honesty, we know also that this enormous expenditure is off-budget, and while technically that is defensible it is yet another method the government are using to hide from the public the impact of the reckless spend, spend, spend policy they have employed since they came to office. Despite repeated assurances that they were fiscal conservatives—remember that one—that they were committed to surpluses and that they would protect the savings of the Future Fund, the government continue to spend and are driving Australia inexorably towards \$90 billion of debt. And remember that figure does not include the NBN. The government continue to borrow \$100 million a day to stimulate an economy which suffered a setback two years ago and is beginning to face labour shortages. So attempts to hide from the public the operations of the NBN should be resisted at every opportunity. I will be supporting the member for Wentworth's amendments, which are aimed at addressing this travesty.

This brings me to some specific issues surrounding the NBN and its rollout. I return to the justification for building a network of such epic proportions in a global sense. I said earlier that industry experts are coming out and questioning the wisdom of this \$50 billion extravagance. We should remember the words of telecommunications king and the world's richest man, Carlos Slim Helu, in September last year, when he visited Australia to address the Forbes Global CEO Conference in Sydney. He said:

It's too much money. It is not necessary to invest so much money, because technology is changing all the time.

He also criticised the reliance of the project on fibre, emphasising the need for a wireless service and stating that \$7,000 a home to connect about six million homes was too expensive. Mr Helu went on to say:

You need to have a multi platform of everything; mobile, landline, fibre, cable and copper.

Recently, President Obama laid out plans to supply 98 per cent of US households with high-speed broadband within five years. As a stark comparison, the US will be using a multiplatform approach with a high reliance on wireless broadband. Already more than 110 million people are receiving fast broadband services courtesy of 4G wireless and using either Wi-Max or LTE technologies. Speeds of up to 100 megabytes per second are being achieved, which is as fast as the initial speeds promised by the NBN. Even more importantly, speeds up to one gigabyte have been achieved in trials; the same speeds the NBN hopes to achieve.

The great question remains: will Australians sign on? Certainly the experience from Tasmania at this stage is less than encouraging. I and every other member in this place will know of many, particularly in the younger generations, who no longer have fixed line services to their houses, preferring

instead to do all via the wireless network. We have ample evidence that this network will improve, and it stretches credibility to think a fixed line NBN will reverse this trend or even reduce it. Of course, the government is hell-bent on making sure that we will not find out until it is too late to adjust the project.

I would like to take the opportunity today as well to look at some of the finer details of the NBN rollout. The government maintains 98 per cent of Australians will receive fibre-to-the-premises services. For those who will not be able to access fibre, the government has promised they will be supplied high-speed broadband of at least 12 megabytes either by wireless or satellite. This does lay a prima facie case. If 12 megabytes qualifies in the government's eyes as high speed, what then of their argument that the coalition's wireless proposals are inadequate? However, I shall put that debate to one side for the moment.

The government originally committed to 93 per cent of Australians having fibre-to-the-premises, including all towns with over 1,000 residents. Subsequent announcements commit to servicing 98 per cent and even more towns, with the remaining portion getting the far cheaper wireless and satellite services. I would like, therefore, to list some of the towns in my electorate, and their populations, which will miss out on the fibre-to-the-premises network: Orroroo, 500 people; Streaky Bay, 1,000 people—I thought people in towns of more than 1,000 people were to be serviced, but not Streaky Bay; Brinkworth, 400 people; Wudinna, 600 people; Wilmington, 600 people; and Leigh Creek, 630 people. There are many more but time does not permit me to mention them. However, it must be said these towns may miss out on the fibre-to-the-premises network and will have the much cheaper wireless or satellite service connected. But they

will get the full bill; they will not miss out when it comes to paying for this monumental extravagance. For \$7,251 per head, or \$26,375 per family, they will certainly get their fair share and equality when it comes to the bill.

So, in closing, if we are to have this version of a broadband network then some of this legislation is required. But there are some areas, largely surrounding the opportunity for any other company to compete for any of the workload and put some type of competitive pressure on the NBN to perform, where I fully support the amendments foreshadowed by the member for Wentworth.

Debate interrupted.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Multiculturalism

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa—Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services) (8.00 pm)—I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes the Federal Government's formal response to the recommendations provided by the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council; and
- (2) calls on the House of Representatives to:
 - (a) endorse 'The People of Australia' policy which recognises the importance of the economic and social benefits of Australia's diversity;
 - (b) recognise the success of multiculturalism in Australia and policies that reinforce the benefits our diverse communities bring;
 - (c) reaffirm support for multiculturalism in Australia and condemn political strategies or tactics that incite division and seek to vilify communities; and
 - (d) continue the tradition of bipartisan support for multiculturalism and multicultural policy in Australia sustained by successive Governments over the years.

The genesis of this resolution, of course, is the recent announcement by the government of a new multicultural policy for this country. I would think that there is very little that the overwhelming majority of members of this parliament could quibble about in that policy. It talks about celebrating the values and benefits of cultural diversity in Australia. It says that our country is committed to a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society and that the government welcomes the economic trade and investment that we gain from multiculturalism. The other principle is that we will act to promote understanding and acceptance while responding to expressions of intolerance and discrimination regardless of where they come from.

I would also like to put on record my appreciation of the committee that worked over a long period of time to bring this policy forward. As I have said on previous occasions, it was not a committee of academics, theorists or ideologues. It was a committee of people with practical experience that ranged from a Polish woman involved in aged care in Victoria to, at the other extreme from aged care, a young woman of Filipino extraction from Adelaide who is involved with youth affairs. There was a Tasmanian policeman who had worked for many years with African refugee children in Hobart and there was a lawyer from Sydney, from an Indian background, a long-term public servant. These are the people who have come together to formulate this policy.

In its initiatives it stresses the establishment of a Multicultural Council to be an independent champion of multiculturalism in Australia. It aims to promote a national anti-racism strategy and a strengthening of access and equity for people so that services are available to everyone and you are not denied services or your rights because you lack language. It talks about funding multicultural arts and festivals and it finally talks about a

multicultural youth program to make sure that new arrivals, recent settlement communities, young people, are brought into Australian society very strongly by participation in sport.

Going back to that festival proposal, I am very pleased to see that. Unfortunately, I think that the opponents of multiculturalism in some past years have had the advantage of construing multiculturalism as being for Muslims or Africans or new arrivals. Multiculturalism is for all communities, whether it is for the Welsh speakers who, back in 1948, had eisteddfods in Sydney Town Hall, or whether it includes German Oktoberfests or the Greek festivals that we see around the country. These are the kinds of things that the government should be looking at financing to make sure that the message gets out there that it is for all Australians.

Our nation has had, bar Liechtenstein and Israel, the highest proportion of its people born overseas. It has accepted seven million people since the Second World War and on two occasions nearly one million a year in the early postwar years. Our nation has been built around a labour force that is prepared to work on major national infrastructure projects. It has been built on the contribution of peoples with very real skills, a process that continues to this day.

Our alternative to multiculturalism has been seen in the past. There was the dictation test which, for instance, in the period 1902 to 1909 passed only 52 applicants, on racial grounds, out of the 1,357 people who sat for it. There was the infamous case of Egon Kisch, who came to this country to warn Australia about the growth of Nazism in Europe. Eventually they had to test him in Gaelic because he could speak virtually every other language in Europe. That was an example of the way in which that test was utilised.

We have the choice. Go to the oral history of this country. Sir Henry Bolte said that he feared throughout his political career that the Australian people would find out that he was of German extraction, because, if they had, he never would have got anywhere politically. Ours was a nation—in the words of Tim Fischer in a conversation I had with him—which in the past, in the Riverina in New South Wales, discriminated against Germans during the Second World War. We jailed Lutheran ministers, one of them a Jewish convert, because we thought he might be pro-Nazi. In the First World War there were other infamous cases when every Greek family in this country was investigated, through their neighbours, because it was feared that King Constantine I was pro-German and would change the allegiance of Greece in the First World War. These are examples where racism, denigration and marginalisation caused great anguish and drove people to extremes.

Last week the former minister for immigration, the member for Berowra, made what I thought was a plausible case for the shadow minister for immigration and for another member of the opposition. Quite frankly, he failed at any point to defend Senator Bernardi. There has been a large area of bipartisan support over a long period of time. I go to many events with the member for Berowra—we have been to hundreds of them together in Sydney and other places—and he puts up a very strong case that the Liberal Party has got a proud record with regard to the development of multiculturalism in this country.

However, it was very noticeable last week that he did not rise in defence of Senator Bernardi's conduct. The Liberal Party has to take a strong stand about the significant number of outbursts by this gentleman—not just one but a significant number. We have heard him say that he feels very troubled that

in some small sections of this country where there is a significant Islamic population McDonald's and other companies might sell halal meat. He says that he does not want to eat meat that has been blessed in a particular way because it, supposedly, means that he is going against his religious beliefs. What a lot of twaddle! Quite frankly, these companies are acting like other commercial enterprises. They are reacting to demand in the marketplace in those areas.

In recent weeks he has also talked about sharia law being introduced into this country by a consideration of Islamic compliant finance. We can sit around and we can dream that there is no Arabic world. We can dream that a minority of people in this country have particular beliefs about interest and interest being charged. In the real world we have to deal with that reality. This country has an opportunity to get into markets and be involved in an area of finance that is expanding around the world. To say that because the government might give tax equality to this form of finance it is in some way condoning sharia law is preposterous.

Senator Bernardi also made the very speculative and unquestioning comment that the current government has financed Islamic groups that 'try to prevent Muslims from integrating or talking to infidels'. He has not cited any organisation financed by this government or the previous government in the immigration sector that does these things. I would be the first to agree with him if we were to find that we were reinforcing Islamic obscurantism and marginalisation campaigns by extreme fundamentalists in our system. He gave no example whatsoever of any group that is currently being financed. While he is described by some people as the attack dog for the opposition, I prefer the comments of Senator Brandis, who said people who engage in this kind of thing are more reminiscent of schoolyard bullies.

In conclusion, this motion says that we should celebrate the reality that this country has experienced a major nation-building process that is renowned around the world. A survey in the last day or so says that a significant majority of Australians support multiculturalism—57 per cent are for it and 29 per cent are against it. This is not unusual. Canadian surveys also show that about 10 to 12 per cent of people are extremely antagonistic and on the verge of racism. In the same survey a shattering 65 per cent of people said that we should not reject people entering this country in the refugee intake on the basis of religion—19 per cent disagreed. Those surveys by Essential Research indicate that the centre ground of the Australian people are supportive of a diverse intake. In recent years the Scanlon Foundation, in more significant research, traced very strong support for the current level of intake of people in this country in the belief that we gain through diversity.

Sixty-one per cent of Australians believe it is more for political gain than real belief. As I said, the attempt to politicise this area can lead to the marginalisation of people, greater suffering for individuals and families being ostracised from the mainstream of this country and the labour force, and can reinforce extremism. I commend this motion to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas)—Is the motion seconded?

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (8.10 pm)—I second the motion moved by the member for Werriwa on multiculturalism. I note the government's response to the *People of Australia* recommendation made by the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council. I note the importance of this topic to all Australians. I commend the member for his past work in this area.

Australia is a diverse nation. That is one positive aspect that makes us all Australian. The fabric of our society was born out of being an island nation. It adds to who we are and how we identify ourselves as Australians. Planned migration over many years has produced a nation that can boast much about where we are today more than ever. Some 200 languages are spoken. One in four of us were born overseas and at least half of us have one parent who was born overseas. But it is not just on the facts and figures that we judge the success of our multicultural efforts. The success of our efforts was put very simply by Hakki Suleyman, Chairman of the Migration Resource Centre North West of Victoria, when he said:

True settlement for migrants can only occur when they are full participants in civic affairs.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work and the efforts of the whole of the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council and in particular the work of its chair, Andrew Demetriou.

The *People of Australia* statement and the recommendations received by the government back in April 2010 are very important as we speak to this motion. As I travelled around various migrant resource centres, I was struck by the anticipation they shared while waiting for the release of the government's response. They shared with me their disappointment that it was taking so long for this government to respond. So, along with the many migrant resource centres and ethnic communities, I too finally welcome the release of the government's response.

The member for Werriwa calls on this House to recognise the success of a multicultural Australia and to reinforce the beliefs our diverse communities bring. The success of where we are today dates back to governments and the challenges past governments faced. In 1977, under a coalition govern-

ment, the Australian Population and Immigration Council articulated the first official definition of 'multiculturalism' that was based on the principles of social cohesion, equality of opportunity and cultural identity. Mr Fraser said at the time:

Australia is at a critical stage in developing a cohesive multicultural nation.

We are a few years on from there and the push factors and where people originate from are also different—and one may even argue there are greater pull factors—but in common with those sentiments now is the fact that people still want to settle in Australia. I think we find ourselves at a critical stage in continuing to develop a very cohesive society. The forces may be different politically and the cultural landscape is different, but the sentiment remains the same. Australia has one of the best resettlement programs in the world. I share that view with the view expressed in the comments made by the member earlier.

When the Howard government adopted the term 'Australian multiculturalism' it was reflective of Australia's unique diverse heritage, democracy and cultural identity. It was a coalition government under John Howard that endorsed the principles of civic duty, cultural respect and productive diversity in the newly evolving value of Australian democracy and citizenship. It was a coalition government that created the Council for Multicultural Australia, supported by the then Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. It was also a coalition government that introduced the Charter for Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society in 1998. We also shifted to a focus on harmony and inclusion through the establishment of the Living in Harmony grants and Harmony Day, which will occur this year on 21 March.

You see, we on this side of the House have a long and consistent history of inclusion and

the advancement of a multicultural Australia. The last multicultural policy statement was released by a coalition government and Mr Howard said, 'This new statement reflects the government commitment to promoting diversity.' There were four principles of that plan: responsibilities of all, respect for each person, fairness for each person, and benefits for all. These four principles still resound around Australia today. As I traverse this great country of ours in my role as shadow parliamentary secretary I have heard people of differing ethnic and religious backgrounds affirm that these principles hold true. People reiterate them, they understand them and above all they strive to achieve them.

Many of the issues that have been articulated in recent public debates on multicultural Australia evoke a much broader debate—a debate about concepts, tensions and challenges and about the reality of what it means to live and exist in a multicultural Australia. Our support for a multicultural Australia has been evident for many years as we led the way in this area. We have demonstrated our bipartisan support and we seek to assure those on the other side that we will continue to do so.

I broadly support the motions put forward by the government in the People of Australia multicultural policy. The great work done by the advisory council is very evident in this document and I note on page 6 of the document, under the heading of 'rights and responsibilities', that Australia's successful multicultural society and our democracy are built around shared rights and responsibilities that are fundamental to living in Australia.

In the citizenship pledge taken by new Australians they pledge loyalty to Australia and its people. I agree that according to government policy Australia will continue to have an ever-evolving and ever-diversifying

population. While our nation is evolving and diversifying, its people should continue to strive to become good citizens irrespective of ethnicity, religious or cultural origins. My view is that the sacred right that Australian citizenship delivers transcends ethnicity.

I accept the key initiatives of the expanded Australian Multicultural Council to act as an independent champion for our multicultural nation. However, I caution that we must not dismiss our responsibility and the role that we play in this House to act as leaders in this area for our nation. We must, in all areas, seek to uphold and support the council.

I congratulate the National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy outlined in the policy document. I have no tolerance for racism. As someone who experienced racism as a young child I know there is no place in Australia for that. A member earlier spoke about German immigrants being hounded during the war period. My grandfather was sent to a prisoner-of-war camp in South Australia when the war broke out. He spent some three years in that camp, although he had been accepted as a migrant. So there is that history in Australia, although the political leaders at the time thought they were doing the right thing. But my grandfather was able to continue on and to form a very valuable partnership. He established himself in this country and became a great migrant.

So there are examples in the past where we have not got the policy right in this particular area but, as I said, I have no tolerance for racism. I think everything must be done to seek to address the barriers and hurdles to settlement and social inclusion for citizens of our country. Citizenship and inclusion and the direction of government resources must correct inequalities and provide a fair go for the individual. I question this government's commitment in this area after their recent cut

of \$6.8 million dollars from the multicultural program.

Whether we have come to hold our sacred Australian citizenship by birth or by choice we have been united by a common goal: to live as individuals within a peaceful democratic, culturally pluralist society free from the ugly, extreme elements of racism. On this side of the House we have set the national agenda in this place by displaying leadership in tolerance and inclusion. And we have done that in spades over the years.

I now call on individuals outside of this place to echo the People of Australia policy and reflect its attitudes. Collective and individual responsibility is the crux of what is required here. No policy document and no amount of rhetoric can replace the actions and words of individuals in our society. I want positive stories to be told of settlement and citizenship in Australia; I want these stories to be told in homes around our nation. These ought to be positive stories of the hopes, dreams and aspirations of individual citizens who are advancing Australia in a multicultural, inclusive society.

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (8.20 pm)—I want to join the member for Brisbane in congratulating the member for Werriwa for bringing this motion to the House this evening. As the former Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, I know that the member for Werriwa has worked hard in that portfolio and played a very important role in providing the basis for the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council's statement on cultural diversity and the recommendations to government.

The member for Werriwa's strong commitment and understanding of this issue is reflected in this motion and I welcome the opportunity to speak on it. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the federal government's formal response to the

statements and recommendations provided by the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council to the government. The People of Australia's 10 recommendations have all been supported or supported in-principle and I commend AMAC's efforts and contribution to the government's policy development on multiculturalism.

When we speak of the social and economic benefits of multiculturalism today, we speak about the enrichment of the community in the development of Australia's language capacity, enrichment in the areas of business and commercial work, and enrichment of Australia's productive capacity. Our patterns of migration and our multicultural policy have been embraced by a diverse and harmonious society that has formed the instrumental building blocks for the development of our social and economic capacity as a nation.

Who can ignore the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme, where, in the post World War II era, 100,000 workers—two-thirds of whom came from thirty countries around the world—built one of the most complex water and electricity projects in the world. Towns were built around the project, and today this project is still the largest renewable energy generator in mainland Australia. It stands in its monumental capacity to generate a vast proportion of 67 per cent of our national electricity market. This is innovation; one of the largest and most complex hydro-electric schemes in the world, and it was built by Australia's migrants. It is an icon of migration's contribution to our economy. If the reactionary, small-minded approach of some were taken into account at that time, where would Australia's productive capacity be from the lack of this project alone? This defining project stands tall as a symbol of Australia's identity as an independent, multicultural, resourceful and innovative country.

Who can fail to mention the contribution of migrants to our manufacturing and industrial base? When we speak of independent entrepreneurship, who can go past Brunswick Street, Fitzroy Street, Sydney Road, Acland Street and Lygon Street—streets in my home town of Melbourne—areas renowned for their vibrancy and cosmopolitan nature, with a vast array of independent small businesses. For every John Ilhan, Ahmed Fahour and Frank Lowy, there are many thousands of migrants, unknown to us, who are a part of Australia's success stories. Their small businesses have built and sustained the bedrock of our local and national economy.

As we move into more modern times we can benefit from the contribution of migrants to meet Australia's skills deficit. As history has shown, migrants have driven innovation, and as such are building and continue to build our economy. They are not just doing the grunt work. As working Australians building the foundation of our national economy, they are also driving innovation to build and expand our social and economic outlook. In all our aspects of the Australian economy, our migration policy and the migrants who have made it successful have led the way. Ours is a society that is culturally diverse, linguistically diverse and ultimately Australian, and we must acknowledge and be proud of this.

It would be remiss of me not to point out the fact that often when we talk about multiculturalism, people think solely in terms of migrants who have come to this country. But if multiculturalism means anything it must also be about our Indigenous peoples. Finding a place for their cultural diversity, their linguistic diversity, and finding a place that recognises their rightfulness as this nation's first people is paramount to our national dialogue. They are our asset, one of our greatest, and as our first people, as this nation's Indigenous people, they are very much a part

of our collective identity. Acknowledging their place in our society is very much an important part of what I understand multiculturalism to be. We want them to succeed in the same way migrants have succeeded in this country, a success which they all too often have been denied. We have succeeded in doing that symbolically here in this parliament; it is time now to close the gap.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (8.25 pm)—I rise to respond to the motion moved by the member for Werriwa and to take this opportunity to inform the parliament and the Australian community of the remarkable record of the coalition in relation to services and support for Australia's migrant community. The coalition has always supported a non-discriminatory migration and refugee policy. From our start as a coalition in 1949 under the leadership of Sir Robert Menzies we took the first step towards a non-discriminatory immigration policy when the immigration minister at the time, Harold Holt, allowed 800 non-European refugees to remain in Australia and Japanese war brides to enter Australia.

Since 1945 approximately 6.5 million migrants, including over 700,000 refugees and humanitarian applicants, have migrated to Australia. The diversity and size of Australia's migrant population has made a significant contribution to shaping modern Australia, and the coalition has consistently supported diversity.

Our population of approximately 22.27 million people, identifies with around 250 diverse ethnicities, and around 200 other languages are spoken. In the 2006 census, 45 percent of the resident population were people born overseas or people who had a parent born overseas—my husband and my two children included. Over the 17 years of a Robert Menzies led coalition government, we continued to break down the walls of dis-

crimination. In 1957 the coalition changed the residency requirement, and in 1958 introduced a revised migration act, which, amongst other things, abolished the controversial dictation test and removed forever any references to race. In 1966 the coalition recognised that migrants offered much more than an economic benefit to the nation, and we were the first to expand non-European migration, ease restrictions on temporary residents and establish a new visa category that no longer looked at race, religion or creed but looked at the applicant's qualifications and suitability to settle, with skills that would benefit Australia. In 1973, Labor was elected and, while there was much talk, migration was reduced during their term. It was not until a coalition government was re-elected that migration numbers and sustained funding for services were increased.

The coalition took the lead on migration policy and continues to review and renew its approach to emerging needs and future trends. Under coalition prime ministers we introduced: the Humanitarian Settlement Services; the Settlement Grants Program; the Adult Migrant English Program; the Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors Program; financial support for the National Translators Accreditation Authority; migrant resource centres, a much-needed service across multicultural communities; a national action plan to build on social cohesion, harmony and security; and representative organisations to promote community harmony and the benefits of diversity. We established the first Minister for Multicultural Affairs and supported the establishment of representative groups. Our policies endorse the principles of civic duty, cultural respect, social equity and productive diversity as the foundation for nation building in the unique Australian historical, democratic, and cultural narrative.

The services we introduced and the principles that underpin them have contributed to

community harmony and social cohesion. It has been coalition's policies that have empowered our migrant and refugee communities, and served the nation's best interest. And we will challenge the government if there are cuts to effective policies or programs that go against the best interest of all Australians. The coalition has consistently and judiciously developed policies that support our many and diverse migrant communities and which reinforce the benefits diversity brings.

Earlier speakers have talked about racism. My own children have experienced that. As a nation, as a community, as peoples across this nation we say 'no' to racism. Tonight is an opportunity for all of us to agree that together we can build a unified, cohesive nation. We should be talking about what unites us, a common set of principles, the value and contribution of each individual and the richness of diversity in all its vibrant culture that makes up the fabric of this nation. We should be, we would be and we will be a stronger, better and more cohesive nation for doing that.

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (8.30 pm)—I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Werriwa before the House, and I congratulate him for bringing the motion before the House. I endorse all that he has had to say in relation to the motion and I commend each of the speakers to date. This is an area where many on both sides agree. There is the odd one who does not agree. His name will not be mentioned by me. I will not dignify the name, but there is a certain person who should not be on the frontbench of the opposition because of comments he made recently. I am talking about someone in another place.

The truth is it allows us to talk about this, it allows us to discuss it and it allows us to defend what is a very defensible position in

the electorate. Part of the problem has been that we just think that our electorates automatically have our views and we do not go out and argue the case. I want to say that Minister Chris Bowen and Senator Kate Lundy, in responding to the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, had this to say:

Multiculturalism requires an ongoing commitment based on a shared vision for the future prosperity of our nation.

I also want to endorse the statement on cultural diversity by the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council on 30 April 2010, part of which said:

Australia has been strengthened and enriched by migration and our diversity is one of our greatest assets and a source of strength.

Our national unity is based on mutual respect ...

We all rave on about how well the 2000 Olympics went. The truth is there would have been no Sydney Olympics, there would have been no 2000 Olympics in Australia but for our multiculturalism, our diversity, the respect that we had for one another and our ability to showcase to the rest of the world what a tolerant and understanding nation we were. There were many people in migrant communities who were lobbying their own communities back home about their own experiences and how well they were treated in this country, and African nations were also quite successfully lobbied.

My electorate of Banks was radically altered at the last election, but it is worth quoting some statistics. I have four councils in my electorate. Hurstville council is the largest. I also have Kogarah council, the next largest, Canterbury council and Bankstown council. In relation to those local government areas and the proportion of people born overseas who live in them: 46.9 per cent of Canterbury was born overseas, 37.5 per cent of Kogarah was born overseas, 37.3 per cent of Hurstville was born overseas and 35.8 per-

cent of Bankstown was born overseas. In relation to language other than English speakers: Bankstown, 50.5 per cent; Canterbury, 62.6 per cent; and Hurstville, 42.8 per cent. These are enmeshed in the communities in which I was raised.

So what has it done? It has given me a perspective because all of my life they have been the people I have mixed with. Indeed, my parents and grandparents came to Australia in the mid-1920s. My father went home, married and brought my mother out and had 10 children. Of the 10 children, six are university trained—one doctorate, three Masters, six normal degrees—and four are TAFE trained; one topped the state in carpentry; one topped the TAFE in carpentry: four teachers. The most useless of the 10 is me, a member of parliament. Each of them is contributing and putting back into the local community, and all are well-respected. That is one story of many hundreds of thousands of stories replicated across our nation. We should not apologise for the fact that migration has enriched this nation and we should take on those who are basically pushing prejudice through ignorance. It is the ignorance that feeds the prejudice. So we have a story to tell in relation to multiculturalism, and we should not apologise for it.

I am very pleased at the tone of the debate because the truth is that the Liberal Party does have a good history in this area. Indeed, you can take an oath of allegiance to Australia now and not have to renounce your former citizenship. The Liberal Party brought that legislation in when they were in government. The Labor Party supported it. It is an acknowledgement that you can retain your citizenship of birth and still be a good Australian. That is the way forward.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (8.35 pm)—I congratulate the previous speaker, the member for Banks, for his passionate speech. I know

he is a passionate man with regard to this area, and it is good to see him in here quoting statistics about his electorate.

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate and this issue before the House this evening on multiculturalism. I will probably speak about my electorate a bit too; most of my speech is focused on that. The 2006 census statistics show that 57 per cent of people in my electorate of Swan were born in Australia. Obviously the remaining 43 per cent were born overseas. This is an interesting statistic in itself but the picture becomes more interesting the further you drill down into the detail. About 8.1 per cent of the Swan electorate were born in the United Kingdom but no other ethnic group contributes more than 2.5 per cent to the total. What this means is that there is an incredible diversity of ethnic groups in my electorate, all living relatively peacefully alongside each other. It is an absolute privilege to be able to stand here today and represent all these people in the federal parliament.

When I attend citizenship ceremonies in my electorate of Swan it is clear that that people want to be in Australia and respect Australian values and laws. They actually swear an oath to do so. Some people wear their traditional dress as they take the oath of allegiance, while others are surrounded by their relatives and new Australian friends. I must admit that the African women are probably the most gregarious people at these ceremonies. The dress they wear is fantastic; it is very bright and colourful and you cannot miss them. I see many pieces of clothing that represent our national flag, and it encourages me to see people who are becoming citizens and having pride in their new country. None of these people will forget where they came from and all are loyal and grateful to Australia for allowing them to become citizens. I am sure all members of this parliament

would tell similar stories of the citizenship ceremonies in their electorates.

My own foster parents, who migrated to Australia from South Africa back in 1959, were happy to embrace the Australian way of life, which was less conservative than the way of life they left in South Africa. I know from speaking to dad years later that he was impressed by the fact you could go to a pub at lunchtime and have a beer or a wine without it being frowned upon. In South Africa you were considered to be a drunk if you went to have a drink at lunchtime. I can hear the member for Herbert laughing over there. He obviously knows a bit about that! I grew up in a society that was welcoming citizens from Europe in droves, and those migrants who arrived during the sixties and seventies all faced the enormous challenges that current-day migrants face. There were cultural differences and there were language barriers, but they mucked in and worked hard and became an integral part of our communities.

In addition to citizenship ceremonies, I attend gatherings and functions of different ethnic groups in and outside my electorate. I have always felt welcome and have been treated with great respect. Our ethnic group leaders are to be commended for their efforts to integrate and educate the people they represent, and I feel proud to be able to represent the diversity of ethnic groups in the Swan electorate. However, whilst it is often said that Australia is a happy and peaceful multicultural society, debate seems to rage over whether we as a society should endorse multiculturalism as a goal or instead pursue integration. I get the sense from some of the other members in this place that there may be some racial problems in the eastern states. It is usually localised incidents that create and drive these debates, and it is important always to keep these matters in proportion.

I can understand some of the concern that arises when our TV shows report the teachings of radical preachers preaching intolerance. This concern and anxiety is highlighted by the media and it would be good to see some of the many positive stories about migration in our nation shown by the media. Where there is true racial intolerance, we must be quick to condemn, but we must also be quick to realise that these people account for such a small proportion of Australia's immigrants. I also understand that Australia is a tolerant society, but in return we expect tolerance for the way we live our lives in Australia. But if it is a case of applying common sense, unfortunately governments do not have the power to enforce that; it must come from the community.

But what we do have power over is our immigration policy. I would certainly always advocate a strict policy, balanced with the economic needs of our nation, so that the imbalances are not allowed to develop. And we should maintain our humanitarian involvement as well. I think most Australians would agree with that. Where there are problems, governments should act to address them. Intolerance should not be tolerated.

In conclusion, we live in an Australia which has welcomed different nationalities from all over the world. When I am out in the electorate speaking with different people from diverse backgrounds and nationalities, they sincerely tell me that all they really want is to have a happy and peaceful life. I am proud to be a Liberal member of a parliament that has brought many good things to immigration policy in Australia.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—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.

ASSISTING THE VICTIMS OF OVERSEAS TERRORISM BILL 2010

Consideration resumed from 21 February.

Second Reading

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (8.41 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am very pleased and proud to rise in this House to support this piece of legislation which was introduced into the previous parliament but unfortunately lapsed when the parliament was prorogued. I have reintroduced it into the parliament because I believe this is an important gap in our provision for people who suffer simply because they are Australian. As I have already indicated to the House in the first reading speech, this bill is designed to support Australian victims of overseas terrorist acts. These are people who suffer because they have been deliberately targeted by terrorist groups by virtue of being Australians or of being Westerners. What I am attempting with this piece of legislation is to ensure that support exists for them which is analogous to the support which has long been available to the victims of ordinary crime under the state and territory victims of crime schemes. What I am proposing is not radical, it is not particularly expensive, it is not novel, it is not, in the Sir Humphrey Appleby sense, courageous; it is simply extending to the victims of international terrorism the same kind of support that would be extended to the victims of domestic crime by the states and territories. It is a very modest but important measure to fill a significant gap in the support that our country gives to people who have suffered through no fault of their own.

In no way do I wish to score political points here. In no way do I wish to gain political kudos. I simply wish our parliament, our government and our country to accord to Australians who have suffered through ter-

rorist acts this additional measure of recognition. Nothing would give me greater satisfaction than to see this measure, or a measure like it, or an improved measure taken up by the government and adopted as a government measure. I would be thrilled if the Attorney-General or the Prime Minister were to so act.

I want to pay tribute to the Attorney-General and also to the former Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, for the sympathetic consideration that they have given to my bill. My office was briefed by officers of the Attorney-General's Department on the government's general issues. One of the questions that were raised was about the potential problem, as they saw it, of Australian citizens overseas—in, for instance, Middle Eastern countries—who are caught up in terrorist incidents being eligible for this kind of assistance and blowing out the budget. I think there is a very straightforward way around this. The scheme that I am proposing is to be set up by regulation made by the minister and, if there is genuine concern on the government's part about this, there is a very easy way around it—the scheme would only apply to people who are Australian domiciled as well as Australian citizens. That way, Australian citizens who are not living here in Australia and are caught up in terrorist incidents would not be covered. So there is an easy way under the bill as submitted to the parliament, being debated tonight, to address the issue that was raised by officers of the Attorney-General's Department.

I do not wish to detain the House long, given that I had my 10 minutes in introducing the bill and given that I have spoken to it before in this chamber and in the Main Committee. I do believe that it is important to give others the opportunity to speak, should they wish to speak, in the time allocated to this debate. I simply wish to reiterate that there are ways within the bill as drafted to address all of the various problems that

have been put to me by people who I have been promoting this bill to. There are ways of handling them. As I said, nothing would give me greater satisfaction than to see this bill adopted by the government. In that way, the whole of the parliament, and the government in particular, could take the credit for addressing the serious problem in our current levels of assistance for people who are hurt simply because they are Australian by people who have a hatred for our way of life.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (8.47 pm)—I rise to speak against the Assisting the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Bill 2010. This is not a well-drafted piece of legislation. With words like 'scheme', 'plan', 'framework' and 'guidelines' it is vague and esoteric. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to develop a scheme in relation to this matter, he should particularise in great specificity what he actually proposes. Too much is left up to regulation and to ministerial discretion. Even section 10 of the bill does not specify clearly what he wants. It is not well-drafted and, if he wants to be clear about it, he should do so.

Mr Baldwin interjecting—

Mr NEUMANN—I have read it; that is why I am making comment in relation to it.

This is an important issue, and I do not believe the Leader of the Opposition when he says he does not want to play politics. Everything that he has said in relation to this matter, in my respectful submission, is about politics. This is an important issue and we take it very seriously. I think the protection of our citizens at home and abroad is simply the highest priority any government can have. We have lost Australians in acts of terrorism in the last 10 years or so. We lost Australians in New York in 9-11, for instance, and since that time we have stood with our American friends and allies in the fight

against terrorism. It does not matter which side of politics has been on the Treasury benches; we have fought against terrorism, against those people who would destroy our way of life and who attack our citizens abroad and at home. That is simply what governments of any persuasion ought to do.

Many people have suffered terrible trauma, injury, illness, psychiatric problems and psychological difficulties due to acts of terrorism. We need to take steps to assist them. Since 9-11 more than 100 Australians have lost their lives in terrorist attacks, from Mumbai to Bali to Jakarta. This is a very serious issue. Helping those people and their families recover is simply impossible, but we can provide *ex gratia* assistance for health and psychiatric help. We can provide the Australian government disaster recovery payment. We can provide all kinds of short-term and long-term assistance. We can provide consular assistance and assistance in relation to counselling.

Of course we want to keep Australians safe from terrorism. We work hard at home and abroad with our partners to bring down terrorist networks. We have seen Australian security forces involved overseas, including the SAS in Afghanistan and other places struggling against Islamic fundamentalism; and the Australian Federal Police in Indonesia, liaising with other security organisations in the Asia-Pacific area. Where terrorists strike, the federal government must be there to help. National security is a top priority and there are a number of ways we help people.

These mechanisms include the *ex gratia* payments I referred to, healthcare assistance schemes and the Australian government disaster recovery payment, which some people in my electorate have recently received as a result of the floods in South-East Queensland. The Australian disaster recovery payment provides immediate short-term finan-

cial assistance to Australians adversely affected by a major disaster. In the past, governments have assisted victims of incidents overseas—such as in the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India—through healthcare assistance schemes. Those schemes assist with a range of costs for health care delivered in Australia, including hospital costs, pharmaceutical costs and counselling costs. We cannot do enough for those poor people who have suffered so much. The government may also, depending on the circumstances of the case, provide financial assistance through the AGDRP. We have provided *ex gratia* assistance to the victims of terrorist attacks overseas including the events in Bali in 2002 and 2005, London in 2005, Mumbai in 2008 and Jakarta in 2009.

These *ex gratia* packages have included financial assistance for family support, funeral and bereavement costs, travel costs and recognition of forgone wages resulting from the terrorist act. I think what we need is a whole-of-government approach. One-off things like the Leader of the Opposition is proposing is in my view an attempt to play politics. We need to undertake a comprehensive package to ensure Australians caught up in a terrorist attack overseas get all the help they need. That comprehensive package needs to provide not only assistance to families but also to extended loved ones.

I mentioned before consular assistance. People have made reference to the fact that Australian embassy staff have provided tremendous help, friendship, fellowship, counselling and guidance. People also need support from health professionals—doctors, nurses and allied health professionals such as psychologists and psychiatrists. Practical assistance with funeral arrangements are always difficult. Anyone who has had a friend or even a friend of a friend who has died overseas knows how difficult it can be in

those circumstances when you are out of your depth and out of your country.

The Attorney-General has made it clear to the Leader of the Opposition and to the member for Paterson that a whole-of-government approach on this package is important and will be considered shortly. Consultations have already commenced with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Treasury and the Department of Finance and Deregulation. Officers from the Attorney-General's Department have worked closely with the Department of Health and Ageing and the Department of Human Services to provide practical ways to provide support for victims of overseas terrorism. On 31 January 2011 the Attorney-General wrote to the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Attorney-General and the member for Paterson in relation to work done by the federal Labor government with respect to the provision of assistance to Australians affected by terrorist incidents overseas. We recognise there are a genuine concerns in relation to these matters and that all members of this House should be concerned to help fellow Australians who have suffered terribly in these circumstances. As such, on 21 February 2011 the federal Labor government provided the opposition with a comprehensive briefing on these issues. We would welcome the constructive and positive engagement of the opposition, should they so wish, on this issue if they want to engage in a comprehensive strategy rather than the one-off thing they are proposing now. The federal government would explore all options in relation to this matter in terms of assistance. Our door is always open if they wish to be constructive.

To summarise, we have provided and will continue to provide targeted assistance to Australian victims of terrorism through financial, counselling, consular and medical assistance. There are a range of mechanisms

in place. We remain committed to undertaking a whole-of-government approach on this. We want to consider everything—the costs involved, the relevant policy considerations and the logistics. It is my submission that the bill as it is currently drafted is vague, esoteric and leaves too much to ministerial discretion. As the government has outlined in a letter to the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Paterson—who is in the chamber now—and the shadow Attorney-General, we are looking to a whole-of-government approach. Should the opposition wish not to play politics on this issue but to work constructively with us in a bipartisan way we will do everything we can to make sure they are in the loop and work cooperatively to get a response so that victims of terrorism overseas and their families can be supported. This is what the Australian public would expect of us, what the Australian public would demand of us and what they would expect of the opposition, rather than playing politics.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (8.56 pm)—I rise to support the Assisting the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Bill 2010. This bill is about human compassion. This bill is about providing support to our fellow Australians, who, through no fault of their own—only through circumstances of the location they were in at the time—have suffered at the hands of merciless terrorists, who hate us for who we are and what we are. I have never heard a speech like the one just given by the member for Blair—lacking any ounce of human compassion for his fellow Australians.

On 24 November 2009, the Prime Minister gave a commitment in this House that he would push to have this incorporated as part of a national disability scheme. In fact, on that day in the parliament Prime Minister Rudd berated me for questioning the integrity of that scheme and how it would apply to people that have been affected by terror-

ism—acts of terrorism such as the twin towers of September 11; the 12 October 2002 Bali bombings in which 88 Australians were killed; the London bombings in 2005, where one of my constituents, Louise Barry, hid in the underground in London and then on the No. 30 bus; and the October 2005 Bali bombings at Jimbaran Beach, where four Australians were killed, including three from the Hunter—Jennifer Williamson and Colin and Fiona Zwolinski.

This bill is about having a heart. We are asking for our fellow Australians nothing more than what they would get if indeed they were the victims of crime in any of the states here in Australia. Crime in Australia is a risk which is managed. But people travelling overseas do not go over there with the understanding that they are going to be attacked by terrorists. I say to this government that you need to be compassionate and you need to be supportive. In fact, the cost of this measure would be less than the government debt generated during the time of the debate on this bill. The amount of money that the government is borrowing while this debate ensues is more than the measures would require annually. These victims do not ask for much. It is true that we have provided support through Centrelink and we have provided emergency evacuations, but they need to get on with their lives. They need to know that the government is behind them and providing a level of financial support.

One of the victims of the Bali bombing is Paul Anicich. I first met Paul Anicich 16 years ago when he was one of the leading lights of the legal fraternity in Australia. He went on a reunion with some family friends and school friends to Bali. They went out to watch the sunset and then disaster struck. If it were not for people like Adam Frost, who is from the Hunter, who decided not to go down to watch the sunset that night—and, I have to say, the Leader of the Opposition,

Tony Abbott, who played a key and instrumental role in providing support services and making sure evacuations and medical treatments were delivered to these people—who knows what the situation of those who survived the bombing blasts would be. This money can make a difference. It will allow people to get on with their lives. An email from Paul sent to me today reads:

I never thought ... my life would include involvement in such an act or that I would, for myself, my wife and others be addressing matters such as this. My working and income producing life has been ended by the stroke I suffered during the bombings. While I apply myself in a manner of which I never thought myself capable of physical strength, the brain has its own 'timetable' I'm told. I've had quite a few admissions to John Hunter with continuing symptoms from what happened. I appreciate the support given by both Governments in respect of the cost of medical treatments and further appreciate the prospect of compensation in a Country which has always demonstrated its willingness to look after its people.

This financial support is not just to help those who have been affected. In a time when we have increasing acts of terrorism across the globe it is to provide for those who are yet to be affected. Whether it is providing support to those who were orphaned, Isaac and Ben Zwolinski, when their mother and father, Fiona and Colin, were killed or whether it is providing support to Bruce Williamson, who was affected, or indeed his children, Adam, Duncan and Megan—they need our support. Another person who I knew quite well is Tony Purkiss. His wife, Mary-Anne, was also severely affected. Tony is now blind and cannot work. He is without an income. He was a man who was doing a tremendous job down in Lake Macquarie at the yacht club.

What I say to this government is: have compassion. It was 15 months ago that you determined you would actually do some-

thing. In 15 months we have seen no action. All we have heard is rhetoric. We have had some meaningful discussions with the Attorney-General. I have had private meetings with the Attorney-General and I just ask of him to do what he can in this relatively small cost to the government bottom line to help fellow Australians. They are indeed fellow Australians.

I know this bill is going to be supported by the next speaker, Sharon Grierson, because in an email to Paul and Peni on 9 November 2009 she said:

It is good that Tony Abbott is raising this private members bill in the next session. It has my complete support and I will continue to lobby my colleagues on this matter.

She goes on to say:

Only Tony speaks on the Bill, unless it comes back a second time. If that does happen then I will speak in support.

There is the opportunity for the member for Newcastle tonight. She also says:

I agree with you that innocent victims of crimes of terrorism committed against the country and its government should be extended special compensation and consideration.

The local experiences demonstrate this need very clearly. Perhaps a special fund could be set up and be self-generating over time. I will look at Tony's proposal.

Today is the day of action. You see there is not much point in putting the rhetoric out there; the rubber actually needs to hit the road. The money needs to flow. The support needs to be provided. If we do not do that, what does it say? Are we going to go another 15 months or another 15 years before we see any action?

People go overseas mostly on holidays with the intention of having a good time, not being involved in a disastrous situation. Through no fault of their own they are affected. The Leader of the Opposition has said

tonight that one of the concerns that has been raised is the number of people who are Australian citizens who are resident overseas. This bill could be limited to those who are domiciled in Australia. So you must be domiciled in Australia and if you are affected by an act of terrorism then you are able to access this support.

For those that have been killed you could say that it is relatively easy. They do not need the financial support, but their families do. I have met these people. I know them, I have spoken to them and I understand the considerable pain and anguish that they go through. I have seen successful careers ended. I have seen families torn apart and I think that this money should be no different to what would be provided if indeed this bomb had gone off in Australia. If this bomb had gone off in Australia there would not be an issue. Straightaway they would have access to the victims of crime compensation in Australia. Because it happens to Australian citizens in an offshore land, as I said, through no fault of their own, they are denied any level of support.

Right from the beginning the speech by the member for Blair talked about the politics of this. There are no politics; this is about compassion. This is about supporting Australians. There was a scheme that was set up after the initial Bali bombing to provide support services, but more needs to be done. This, if you averaged it out at around 30 victims per year, which is what we have seen over the past decade, would cost the government about \$2.25 million—let us say \$3 million—per annum.

As I said, the government at the moment is borrowing about \$100 million a day. In the length of time taken for this debate the government will have raised more than was required just to fund its debt. I implore all members—whether it is the Independents or

members opposite—to think about those fellow Australians, many of whom are known to people in this place—not just to the Leader of the Opposition and me but to many. I acknowledge that the member for Newcastle was there and very supportive of those in Newcastle who were affected at the time. Now it is time for the rubber to hit the road, to end the rhetoric and to start to see action. I commend this bill to the House.

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (9.05 pm)—I rise to speak on the private members' bill, the Assisting the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Bill 2010. As was the case when this bill was last presented, in late 2009, the government cannot support it in its current form and neither can I. Compensation for victims of overseas terrorist attacks is a serious issue deserving of careful and detailed consideration. But, in deciding whether to support this bill, there is a simple question before all members: does this bill advance or improve the situation of victims of terrorist acts? The simple answer is that, in its current form, this is not guaranteed.

But before I set out in detail the ground on which the government and I intend to oppose this bill, I wish to underscore the importance of this debate for the people of Newcastle. I too acknowledge my constituent Paul Anicich and the work he has done to pursue this issue. I applaud his motivation and sincere concern for his fellow victims.

The member for Paterson mentioned an email exchange. I would like to clarify that at the time I was of the belief that the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, was putting up a private member's motion, something that everyone could have supported and could then have been taken from there. But I was wrong at the time; it was a private member's bill. I clarified that misunderstanding with Mr Anicich at the time.

The Bali bombings of October 2005 carry particular significance for my electorate. Three Novocastrians—Colin Zwolinski, Fiona Zwolinski and Jennifer Williamson—tragically lost their lives. Other Novocastrians also suffered terrible injuries as a result of that malicious and unprovoked attack and many more were traumatised by the events. I have put on the record before, and will do so again, the gratitude I hold on behalf of the people of Newcastle to the member for Warringah, the Leader of the Opposition, for his assistance to victims of the 2005 terrorist attacks in Bali from my electorate. In particular, Mr Abbott worked closely with Novocastrian Dr Adam Frost, who was also in Bali that night, to secure the most appropriate medical assistance and arrange rapid evacuation to other medical facilities or back to Australia. Dr Frost was recognised in 2007 when he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for 'service to the community' for his actions providing medical aid to victims on that most terrible of nights. My constituents and I remain deeply grateful for both these gentlemen's actions on that night, so it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge their efforts.

There will be a number of points of policy, though, on which members from both sides of the House will disagree today. But one principle that I believe unites all members is our common concern to provide whatever support is available and appropriate to Australian victims of terrorist attacks. Despite this common concern, however, the government cannot support this bill in its present form, and that is because this bill will do little to nothing to support the Australian victims of overseas terrorist attacks. It is disturbingly light on details and leaves crucial questions unanswered. It fails to set out by what mechanism, by what criteria and in what form compensation should be paid. Will it cover funeral costs? Will it cover the

cost of counselling for those psychologically scarred by terrorist attacks? Will it cover the cost of an individual or family evacuation back to Australia? Will it compensate their loss of income? These are vital questions that deserve careful consideration. This bill, however, is silent on all those issues. Indeed, the actual concrete measures to be put in place under this bill are few and far between.

Clauses 5(1) and (2) of the bill call on the Attorney-General to 'determine guidelines' on eligibility requirements for the 'disbursement of financial assistance', yet there is no reference to what the content of these guidelines should be, nor how they will be implemented. Clause 10(b) of the bill provides that no compensation payout should exceed \$75,000. And clause 11(c) also provides that 'procedures and practices' established under the bill should be 'broadly commensurate with the procedures and practices established under state victims of crime compensation cases', which, of course, vary from state to state. And that is the sum total of substance in this bill. Put frankly, this bill in its current form is plainly untenable and unworkable. No responsible government could support a bill that is so devoid of detail, short on content and leaves such important questions unaddressed. But, most importantly of all, this bill would not improve the situation of victims of terrorism one little bit.

The more cynical would be entitled to ask why the Leader of the Opposition has elected to move this motion now, rather than while he occupied a position in cabinet, up until 2007 when the terrorist attacks occurred. They might also ask: if a scheme along the lines proposed by Mr Abbott is good enough today, why wasn't it good enough in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 or 2007 when he had the resources of government to frame legislation? But I make no comment on the motives of the Leader of the Opposition. I accept his

genuine concern but not his drafting attempt at this legislation.

Federal governments of both persuasions, Labor and coalition, have always provided generous support to past victims of terrorism, as they should. The federal government has provided *ex gratia* payments to a number of victims of recent attacks which provided financial assistance for family support, funeral and bereavement costs and travel costs and recognised forgone wages resulting from the terrorist act.

When this issue was last debated, in 2009, then Prime Minister Rudd urged any Australian victims of terrorism to bring forward any requests for further assistance they required. I then wrote to my affected constituents urging them to take up the offer. Two of my constituents chose to do that directly through me and we sought various forms of assistance from the federal government. Following that intervention, all their concerns were considered and some resolved to both parties' satisfaction.

I reiterate this offer to my constituents and encourage any Australian victims of terrorist attacks to raise with their elected member, and in the case of my constituents to raise with me, any further assistance they require. What is more, as Mr Abbott and those on the opposite benches know full well, the government is already moving ahead with the long and difficult work of putting together a comprehensive and workable scheme for victims of terrorism. The federal Labor government is determined to ensure that arrangements for supporting victims of terrorism are more effective than those in place under previous governments, including the Howard government.

What the victims from my electorate deserve is a single, comprehensive and properly considered package of support, one that would ensure they receive all the help they

need and deserve. The federal Labor government is determined to deliver just that—not just a well-intentioned thought bubble, like this private member's bill before us today, but a workable package to support those whose lives have been scarred permanently by terrorism. As the opposition knows full well, the Attorney-General is currently doing those hard yards to pull together such a package, which we anticipate will bring together consular support, assistance with funeral arrangements, support from health professionals and financial assistance for other needs. Indeed, the release today of the Productivity Commission's report on disability care and support also provides a number of important pointers to what the shape of any single and comprehensive compensation scheme should look like and includes a section covering catastrophic events. The opposition's support for these efforts would be very much welcomed.

In introducing this bill, the Leader of the Opposition rightly noted that victims of terrorism need more than just mere concern. I would again applaud both governments for the direct and ongoing support they have given to every victim of terrorism, which members tonight have mentioned. No member of the House could disagree with this. But victims also need more than just the tokenistic framework offered in this bill. I was pleased to hear the Leader of the Opposition say he has had discussions with the Attorney-General. It has always been my view that a private member's motion which would have had absolute bipartisan support could have been the initial stepping stone for developing legislation which would also have had bipartisan support.

Our affected constituents deserve a very well thought through and comprehensive compensation package that will provide them with relevant material support in their hours of greatest need. It is my intention to con-

tinue to make sure the federal government will deliver this. Unfortunately, the private member's bill we are debating tonight does not.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (9.15 pm)—I rise tonight to support in the strongest terms the Leader of the Opposition's motion for the second reading of the Assisting the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Bill 2010. In doing so, I think it is important to note that this House has a common, shared concern for the victims of terrorism, and that is good to hear from members opposite. We have all seen the horrific impact of terrorism on our citizens abroad and the ongoing horrific effects on their lives and the lives of their families and others around them. I do find it odd, however, that the government, while having a concerned demeanour and sharing our concern for the victims, does not have a commitment to action.

That is why the Leader of the Opposition's bill is before us today. We have a commitment to action, to seeing something actually done for the victims of terrorism. Considering that we live now in a world that is so dangerous, where the potential for further terrorist and other acts, both internationally and domestically, is only increasing—particularly when you look at what is happening in the Middle East—and there is a real prospect that Australia citizens will be the subject of terrorist acts in the very near future, it is an appropriate juncture for us to act, to move, to say, 'We do need to look at ways of compensating the victims of terrorism.'

Over 300 Australians have lost their lives in the past decade, and government arrangements have been unsatisfactory in those cases. I think we can all acknowledge that. Our support is limited to Centrelink, medical expenses, some ex gratia assistance—not what the government is talking about here.

The lack of a comprehensive method of delivering real and tangible support to the victims is unsatisfactory. We would all acknowledge that.

The government members' arguments tonight have been very odd, and I do not think they need to be so political. Whether they are thinking about a whole-of-government approach or waiting for a comprehensive package, whatever it is they have in mind, I think we really ought to all commit to taking the steps that are before us tonight. Both the government members who have spoken in this debate tonight said that the bill is vague in its intent and it is somehow technically imperfect. I find that to be a very flawed argument, because the bill is deliberately vague in its construct in order to give the government the scope to do what it needs to do via regulation to deliver an outcome for the victims. That is why it is deliberately vague in its design—deliberately vague, not accidentally vague. It is not technically flawed but concise and clear in its intention to give the government the scope to deliver the outcome to the victims of terrorism. It is deliberate. I think the members opposite have accidentally read something into the bill that they ought not to have read into it.

We are saying to the government that we are not going to prescribe every single circumstance that people might be in—which is not possible to do. We are saying that there are working examples and models of victims of crime legislation in every state and territory in this country. The member for Fowler, who has just joined us in the chamber, has a great interest in policing matters and knows that victims of crime legislation functions very well. The member for Newcastle mentioned such legislation, and I would ask her to reference it. This is perhaps where we are seeing a flaw in the operation of the federal government. We cannot possibly prescribe every single circumstance to which compen-

sation might apply. We need a deliberate scheme that says that, by regulation, the government can design circumstances that are appropriate to the situations that emerge.

The financial impact of this legislation is absolutely negligible. There has been talk of \$75,000 payments. This is a private member's bill that would have no impact on our bottom line other than the most minor. It would not be open to rorting or any abuse of the system. The kinds of contentions that we are hearing from members opposite are, I think, of a purely political design to attempt to pass off this bill and move on to something else.

I stand here tonight and say to every single member of the Labor Party: if you have a bill in the pipeline, that is fantastic—bring that forward. Bring it forward today. Bring it forward tomorrow. Bring it forward next week. But let us not pass up this opportunity by saying that the Leader of the Opposition is playing politics, if you do not have an alternative strategy or response. Let us see that response. The Leader of the Opposition has put forward this bill with the best of intentions, realising that there has been a lapse in government support over the last decade in terms of the emergence of the terrorist situation. I urge members opposite to get with this agenda and do something rather than express concern about this bill.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (9.20 pm)—Sadly, it is a fact that Australians have experienced and still are experiencing grief and suffering as a result of terrorist activities around the world. Since September 11, in 2001, over 300 Australians have been either killed or seriously injured in terrorist incidents overseas. Providing assistance to the victims of terrorist acts is undoubtedly a highly significant issue and, certainly, one that the government take seriously—and I do not think that has been contested by anyone—as, by

the way, did the previous, coalition government, particularly after the Bali bombings. So I am a little surprised by the way this matter has been brought before us, in the Assisting the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Bill 2010. The Leader of the Opposition knows full well the position of the Attorney-General's Department and the work that is being undertaken there presently to progress this in a cooperative way that hopefully satisfies everybody's interests. However, bringing forward a bill that is deliberately vague—as we were told—lacks specificity and relies on regulations is not the way to go about providing proper opportunities for redress for the victims of terrorist attacks overseas.

I will digress slightly. In order to combat the rising global issue of terrorism, Australia has certainly been taking action, both here and abroad. Experience shows that the most effective way to protect Australia from the threat of terrorism is to take the fight to the source. In our region, the Australian Federal Police work particularly closely with their Indonesian counterparts on counterterrorism matters. The Australian Federal Police were successful in establishing the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation, whose responsibility it is to enhance the ability of regional law enforcement to deal with transnational crime, particularly with a focus on counterterrorism. Much is happening in that space with the AFP providing critical assistance in the aftermath of the Bali bombing in 2002, the Jakarta embassy bombings and the Marriott Hotel bombing in 2005. The AFP has also deployed counterterrorism assets overseas.

When it comes to victims and their families, I know the Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare, Kate Ellis, sitting at the table, some time back, when we were in opposition and after the attacks in Bali in 2005, made requests of the then Attorney-General, Mr Ruddock, to address this

very issue. Clearly, the way the government at the time responded in Bali was quite effective. I know Mr Abbott, the Leader of the Opposition, played a very significant role in that as well to make sure that people were looked after. But that does not mean to say that is the way it has got to stay.

When it comes to providing for the victims of terrorism and their families, we do have a responsibility. We will not be able to avoid that by simply saying that there is no legislation to support it. It happens and it happens now. The Attorney-General's Department, which is accessing all the various agencies, is looking at the best ways of ensuring that we do put into a legislative scheme an arrangement that provides for matters such as ex gratia payments to victims of terrorist attacks overseas, provides for the families, provides assistance for funerals, provides for bereavement, provides for travel costs and recognises things such as lost wages that occur from terrorist acts. These are not uncommon things and I believe the Leader of the Opposition knows that because he has had discussions with the Attorney-General on these things. He knows this is being progressed. These are matters that should not be coming into this House as a way to politicise the fact that the legislation has not yet been produced.

Mr Abbott—Well, produce your legislation then.

Mr HAYES—Tony, as you are aware, this is being progressed. You are being consulted on it. This is not being done a partisan basis. This is one that you have personally been consulted on. To take those consultations and bring this bill before the House—*(Time expired)*

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (9.25 pm)—I rise to strongly support the establishment of a process to assist those who are injured overseas due to terrorist acts. I also point out

that the Leader of the Opposition has opened this debate tonight in an effort to gain bipartisan support for what I think is a very important addition to the support that is currently available. I want to acknowledge at the start of this debate the families of those who have been injured, have been wounded and have been disabled due to calamitous, unforeseen, unpredictable and terrible events such as the bombings in London, New York and South-East Asia. There is not a single person in this chamber who would not wish for them to have the finest medical care available.

That is not what the debate is about tonight, but nor is it an opportunity to criticise the health system that we have and say that it is insufficient. What this debate focuses on explicitly is the unique nature of these events. The fact is that Australia is involved in an asymmetric war and one that will take long-term dedication to win. For those who are caught up in it overseas, in a range of destinations far from home, they know that they have our full support. It is not enough to simply say the wheels are in motion and the services are available. To the speakers from the government side, I only need to look into the eyes of people who have experienced such horror to know that I never want to see them walking around soccer clubs selling meat trays and I do not want them to see them begging to be placed on a waiting list. I do not want to see them struggling to get health services, recovery services and rehabilitation services that no-one in this room could disagree are well deserved.

Let us remember the context here. We are a nation standing shoulder to shoulder with other Western economies determined to win this fight. The best way that we can do that is by saying that no matter where you fall, no matter where you are struck down in this unique war against terrorism, we will be behind you. It has already been said on this

side of the chamber that if these wheels are in motion, if the plans are in place and if the bureaucrats are busy scribing away with plans to help people like this then please just bring them forward and show them.

This debate was not an opportunity to criticise or to undermine; it was simply a chance to say, 'Let's move right now. Let's not go to the past and say, "Why didn't it happen last year or the year before?"' It is not a chance for the member for Blair, over here, to read out an almost legalistic defence, which, it seems, he does every time he is presented with words from the Prime Minister's office to read out. He is objecting to what I think is a completely meritorious proposition. He presents an almost legalistic opposition to a bill that is grounded in all the right reasons and grounded in the belief that we should do something for families like this if we possibly can.

It has been pointed out by the previous opposition speaker that this is not a large sum of money. It is not about the money. No-one could possibly say that. Nor should it be about a pernickety nickel and diming of this effort to look after Australians who are injured overseas. The line has to be drawn somewhere. That is how public life is. The case we have made on this side is that it is not about where one falls or where one is injured. It is about the unique nature of a terrorist act—that, no matter where it occurs, whether it occurs on our shores or overseas, this government will support those affected and their next of kin.

The Assisting the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Bill 2010 is intentionally broad enough to allow for those provisions to be further negotiated through regulation. It is a shame that this is being misread as being vague or non-specific. When I listened to the member for Newcastle's speech, I was certain that, although you put that punchline in

that you are not going to support the bill, deep in your heart you can see that this bill is a genuinely important advance for families who are affected by such unforeseen events as these. The government, late at night, has a chance to stand with us, both sides of the chamber together, and make an important, small but truly valuable advance for people who are affected in situations like this. It appears that chance is being passed over. To me that is a great shame.

I think we are a nation that could say we will do everything we can for people caught in the situation of a vile and detested terrorist act. We stand shoulder to shoulder in our abhorrence of such acts and yet it seems we cannot get bipartisan agreement to support what I think is such a meritorious, simple proposition: that there is financial assistance there to pay for rehabilitation, to ensure that services can be accessed and to make sure there is a range of financial options for people to be able to help their own family members in the case of an act of overseas terrorism.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—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.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! It being 9.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Australian Heroes

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (9.30 pm)—On 8 February, the first sitting of parliament for 2011, the Prime Minister made a commitment to honour Australians who by their actions had helped save lives and volunteered during the recent national flood crises.

I have been so touched—
the Prime Minister said—

by the stories of bravery, of courage and of mateship that I felt an obligation to honour these wonderful Australian traits.

She continued:

I have sought approval from the Queen to introduce honours for Australians who have gone out of their way to extend the hand of mateship during times of crisis.

Next Australia Day I'm confident we will present our first awards to those who have performed heroic and selfless acts and volunteered their services across Australia in times of crisis.

The Prime Minister said that these awards would be backdated to include those who reached out to each other during the 7 February 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, which tragically claimed 173 lives. I believe we could and should go a step further and give such an award in the form of a medal named after two of this country's finest heroes.

'Heroes' is one of the most overused words today. Every sportsman or woman who scores a winning goal or finishes first in a race is lauded as a hero or heroine. But the real heroes of this nation are in fact our volunteers, our doctors and our surgeons, our emergency workers, people who go above and beyond the call of duty to assist the disabled and the underprivileged as well as those who selflessly put their own lives and limbs at risk to save others.

Two such heroes now belong to the annals of history. One was from the Riverina, the region I proudly represent, although long before Federation was reality. He was Yarri, an Aboriginal man, who was the hero of the Gundagai in the devastating flood of 1852 in what was then the worst disaster on record in the colonies. The other miracle worker, I feel, who ought to be nationally recognised in the conferral of an award to honour Aus-

tralia's greatest heroes is John 'Jack' Simpson Kirkpatrick. Better known for his courage under fire at Gallipoli in 1915, this noble soldier, who enlisted as John Simpson, and his donkey rescued many wounded comrades, until his untimely demise just 3½ weeks after the original landings. Yarri and Simpson are names which belong to the ages. How appropriate it would be if their names adorned a medal to be struck to commemorate our modern-day heroes of the Victorian bushfires and the 2011 floods—the Yarri-Simpson Medal. It has a nice ring to it.

By fittingly bringing together these two heroes of yesteryear, the Commonwealth will also be in a sense 'closing the gap' between the people of our first nation and those of Australia's Anglo-Saxon heritage. This would be a significant cultural and historic step. What a marvellous learning opportunity for Australia's Indigenous and non-Indigenous schoolchildren to know that two of their forefathers made such an important and heroic contribution to the history of our great nation.

When I was at high school in Wagga Wagga in the 1970s one of my favourite teachers was John Egan, who approached me just the other day to extol the virtues of Yarri. 'He ought to be nationally recognised,' Mr Egan—and I still call him that out of respect for his seniority—said. 'Quite right,' I replied. My scholarly friend was dismayed that there was little to honour Yarri apart from a marble headstone placed over this great warrior's grave and a sundial erected in Gundagai by descendants of Fred Horsley, who was one of those saved. Yarri's tale of heroism is quite remarkable and is one which should be taught in Australian history as part of the national curriculum.

The original town of Gundagai in 1838 was situated on the right-hand bank of the Murrumbidgee River flood plain. The town

was hit by several large floods of the Murrumbidgee. The flood on 25 June 1852 washed Gundagai away, killing at least 78 people and more likely 89 of the town's population of 250 people. But for the efforts of Yarri, Jacky Jacky, Long Jimmy and one other Indigenous man in saving many Gundagai people from those 1852 floodwaters, there would have been a lot more killed. They were brave beyond belief. They went out in their bark canoes, rescuing people—white people—one after another after another and taking them to safety.

Jack Simpson and his donkey gave their lives so that others might live. Day after day and week after week at Gallipoli, Simpson and his donkey would wind their way through the hills and valleys looking for wounded soldiers. Even though it was very dangerous, Simpson would crawl on his belly and drag soldiers back to safety. He would then put the injured soldier on the donkey's back and lead him down to the beach. Simpson's sacrifice for his fellow man was mirrored in 13-year-old Jordan Rice, who gave up his life to save that of his 10-year-old brother, Blake, in the Toowoomba flood.

Jack Simpson, the man with the donkey, is commemorated at the Australian War Memorial by a bronze statue—the War Memorial, a place which ought to be fully funded forthwith. His name and that of Yarri, I feel, should now be part of a new national award, the Yarri-Simpson Medal. (*Time expired*)

Blacktown Police-Citizens Youth Club

McLean, Ms Coral

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (9.35 pm)—I rise to, firstly, highlight the pivotal role that sport plays in my community and its contribution to social inclusion. One of the great examples of the power of sport to contribute to social inclusion is the work of the Blacktown Police-Citizens Youth Club. The

Blacktown PCYC targets children at risk and offers them opportunities in sport which would not otherwise be open to them. The PCYC has a fine reputation for teaching these children, through sport, the values of team participation and leadership whilst also fostering a community spirit.

Those who benefit from the work of the Blacktown PCYC come from a range of up-bringsings. Many come from unstable homes with issues surrounding drug and alcohol abuse. The PCYC has a long history and solid reputation in the Blacktown community. It keeps kids off the streets through participation in sport and aims to help children who are victims of circumstances, empowering them to choose sport as a productive activity. The PCYC in Blacktown prevents crime affecting children and in turn diverts young people from committing crimes such as graffiti and vandalism.

Due to the hard work of individuals within the PCYC and those who support it, such as Superintendent Mark Wright of the Blacktown Local Area Command, the PCYC has taken the lead in fostering new Australian citizens and including them constructively in our society. The Blacktown PCYC caters for a diverse range of ethnicities. When my electorate of Greenway began to see many new settlers from Africa a few years ago, the PCYC was so important in including these new citizens, particularly children, in society through participation in a variety of sporting activities.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate the many winners at the individual, team, coaching and administrator levels of the 2010 season Blacktown City sports awards who were honoured at the presentation evening on Saturday at Blacktown RSL club. Along with our special guest for the evening, champion athlete Melinda Gainsford-Taylor, all who were present marvelled at the depth

and diversity of the local sporting achievements of Blacktown City. We are indeed the home of the future sporting champions of Australia.

I also rise this evening to pay tribute to a great woman, known to many as the 'Mother of Mount Druitt': Coral McLean. Coral, whose body finally succumbed to cancer, will be buried tomorrow by another great Mount Druitt figure, Father Paul Hanna. Coral McLean was a remarkable community leader and a great Australian woman. She devoted her life to the service of people whom Father Paul so accurately describes as the wounded in our society. For over 20 years she tirelessly worked and advocated for displaced young, Indigenous and often, quite frankly, hopeless people in the Mount Druitt area.

As a director of the Holy Family Education Centre in Mount Druitt, she ran literacy and education courses that became a safety net for thousands of people, young and mature alike. Father Paul conservatively estimates that Coral gave over 100,000 hours of community service in her activities, which ranged from organising the reconciliation committee's first reconciliation walk in Mount Druitt, which is in fact home to the largest urban Indigenous population in Australia, to establishing the Mount Druitt Community Legal Centre to provide access to justice to those who would otherwise be shut out.

So many deeds of Coral McLean will go unnoticed; however, I believe they need to be recognised. She had courage and compassion that is rarely seen. One of her most pertinent roles was as a comforter to those in times of need. She literally walked hundreds of local families through the funerals of their loved ones. In her final funeral tomorrow, her own, Coral will be remembered as someone who passionately believed in people and the lib-

erating role of education. I also speak for the member for Chifley, who is with me in the chamber this evening, when I give thanks on behalf of our communities for the precious gift that Coral McLean was to the people of Mount Druitt.

Paid Parental Leave

Ms LEY (Farrer) (9.39 pm)—I rise today to speak of my concern at the double-dipping occurring with the government's new Paid Parental Leave scheme. I take the House back to question time last week when the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs said:

It is not just mothers and fathers who are pleased with paid parental leave; it is also business. Business is very pleased with the benefits that are coming to them from paid parental leave being delivered by this government.

I advise the minister that there is a body which is even happier, and that is the Public Service. I have received a number of complaints from people who were questioning why public servants are receiving two sets of taxpayer funded parental leave.

In the government's haste to enact their scheme, they failed to act to address the double payments being made to those paid from the government purse. Government employees already had generous maternity and paternity leave arrangements. However, under the government's new Paid Parental Leave scheme, Australian taxpayers are having to contribute twice for these employees. This is not a criticism of the Public Service—we love them and they do good work—but this is not right. So, in addition to the \$570 a week paid to those on less than \$150,000 a year, public servants will receive their 12-plus weeks leave at full pay, plus superannuation.

Australian taxpayers are being slugged enough by this government. Not only has the cost of child care risen—and it is set to rise

further—but we have a government intent on making taxpayers pay a flood levy and fund an outrageously overpriced National Broadband Network. It is persisting with the ongoing debacle that is grandly known as the Building the Education Revolution, not to mention the recently introduced, brand-new, big, fat carbon tax. There is certainly no value for money with the Gillard government. Australians will have to continue to dig deep into their pockets to fund Labor's harebrained and poorly designed schemes.

Double-dipping is now also occurring in the private sector, with businesses who introduced their own paid parental leave schemes still being required to pay employees who are now also in receipt of the government funded PPL. Small business is very different from the public purse; this could hurt them and will hurt them. Did Minister Macklin survey these supposedly 'happy' businesspeople as well?

The coalition are certainly supportive of paid parental leave—in fact, our own proposal was considerably more thorough and purpose fit than Labor's current model. Leaving aside the perverse examples I have mentioned, there is a real problem right now with people receiving less than they should technically be entitled to. Where employees are currently offered full wage replacement by their employer, they should be entitled to maintain this—after all, this was the coalition's policy. We recognised that the government scheme of a minimum wage, as opposed to normal salary, may force people back to work early.

The bottom line is that Australian taxpayers should not be funding both sets of leave for public servants, which results in them being paid more for being on leave with their newborn than being at work. The reality is that Australian families would be far better off with the paid parental leave scheme pro-

posed by the coalition. We committed to 26 weeks leave at full replacement wage, including superannuation. Parents would have had more time to bond with their newborn in those critical first months. They would not be facing the possibility of being forced back to work early for financial reasons. Under this new PPL, many people are concerned they will not be able to manage financially, with the dramatic decrease in their current take-home pay to the minimum wage.

I go back to the glowing account by Minister Macklin. In praising her new leave scheme, she said:

... Australia finally caught up with the rest of the developed world ...

If double-dipping, putting financial stress on new parents and further recklessly using taxpayer funds is Labor's developing dream world, perhaps the minister should get out more often, because it is not the real world.

Energy Policy

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (9.44 pm)—Alternatives to fossil fuelled energy sources are much in the news these days, especially as the risks arising from global warming driven by carbon dioxide pollution become ever more apparent. I have previously spoken in this place about Professor David Mills and his development of large-scale solar energy collectors to replace the burning of coal in existing power stations and for constructing new zero-emission power stations that use no fossil fuels.

I have been privileged to see for myself the construction of Professor Mills's revolutionary solar thermal power collector at Liddell Power Station in the Hunter Valley—work that led to the establishment of a very successful solar power company in the United States of America. I must point out that this important industry, based on Australian technology, was driven off-shore by the hostility of the Howard government, con-

trolled as it was then—and as the opposition is now—by entrenched climate change deniers unwilling to contemplate any change to the dominance of fossil fuels for the generation of electricity. Indeed, as we know, the present Leader of the Opposition, wilfully denying the very compelling evidence, continues to enforce within the opposition his destructive fantasy that carbon dioxide driven climate change is, as he says, absolute crap.

Australia has a sunny climate that is well suited to the use of solar energy for year-round electricity generation and, given the will, many of our energy needs could quickly be met by renewable energy from this source. In the view of internationally recognised experts such as Professor Mills, solar thermal electricity could be a large part of that supply.

While Australia has the advantage of access to solar energy, many Northern Hemisphere countries are less well endowed and, as a consequence, have devoted large resources to the development of other sources of power. Prime amongst these is the earthly exploitation of the energetic process that powers the sun—nuclear fusion. Technically, nuclear fusion differs from nuclear fission, which was developed in the 1940s, in that rather than splitting heavy atoms like uranium, nuclear fusion involves the fusion of atoms of light elements such as hydrogen to form heavier elements such as helium. Both of these processes release vast quantities of energy, with the practical difference being that while nuclear fission reactors are comparatively easy to engineer, only in the last decade have scientists and engineers overcome the very considerable technical difficulties involved in designing a workable nuclear fusion reactor.

While operating nuclear fission reactors may contain over 100 tonnes of uranium

mixed with long lived radioactive waste that may, as experienced at Chernobyl, accidentally end up poisoning thousands of square kilometres of countryside for centuries, nuclear fusion reactors cannot undergo a runaway chain reaction and in operation contain no more than a few grams of radioactive materials that have short half lives. As well, fusion reactors cannot be readily used to manufacture plutonium for nuclear weapons. And rather than uranium, the fuel for fusion reactors is largely the abundant non-radioactive isotope of hydrogen known as deuterium that can be readily extracted from sea or tap water by distillation.

Although there are problems with the small radioactive inventory that may be held in future fusion power plants and with radioactivity induced in reactor components, these issues pale into insignificance compared with those with existing fission reactors. For these reasons and others, the governments of the United States, the European Community, Japan, Russia, South Korea, India and China agreed in 2006 to combine resources to construct an experimental fusion reactor in the south of France, to be completed by 2018.

ITER or the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor is intended to be followed by DEMO, the demonstration power plant that will produce sufficient fusion heat to drive a large base-load power station. The likely success of DEMO could make electricity available from fusion energy within the foreseeable future.

Although leading Australian researchers urged the Howard government to join this most important international collaboration, typically that government refused to participate—a further example of a regular failure to understand or support important scientific research projects, in this case one that has great potential to benefit both this country and the other nations of the world.

Finally, I call on the opposition not to ruin yet another important opportunity for our environment and our economy, and to support a bipartisan approach to carbon pricing in the national interest.

Petition: Breast Screening

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (9.49 pm)—I rise today to present to the House petition No. 348/621.

The petition read as follows—

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives the cancellation of mobile breast screen units in New South Wales which were of vital importance to women living in less urban areas of the State.

We therefore call on the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives to return mobile breast screen services to New South Wales.

from 2,274 citizens

Petition received.

Mrs MARKUS—I state from the outset that this petition is a matter of utmost importance and requires the immediate attention of the minister. This petition draws to the attention of the House the callous cancellation of mobile breast-screening units, by the NSW Labor government, in Richmond and Springwood in the electorate of Macquarie.

The principal petitioner is Coral Cleary of Pitt Town, who resides in the electorate. I take this opportunity as a woman, mother and wife, to thank Coral and the 2,274 signatories who took the time to put pen to paper and raise awareness of this appalling decision to remove access to critical health services. One in nine New South Wales women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime. Many of us know someone who has been touched by breast cancer. It is so impor-

tant to make access to services such as breast-screening easier rather than harder.

Mobile services in places like Springwood and Richmond have been replaced by screening units set up in select Myer department stores, with the closest being Parramatta, Blacktown, Penrith and Lithgow. While this option may be helpful to people who can travel greater distances, it is not helpful for many older women, women with health and/or disability issues, and women who simply cannot afford the cost of the trip. With rising costs of living in groceries, utilities and fuel, many more women will be denied the opportunity to have a regular breast check.

I am gravely concerned that access to such a vital service has been removed instead of increased, and that regional and semi-regional residents are missing out on equitable access yet again. And why were these vital important services cancelled by the Labor government? It was a cost-cutting measure. The cost of fitting out the breast-screening unit was too much so now residents are forced to drive long distances to neighbouring cities to be checked.

Apparently the Labor government in New South Wales does not think women's health is a priority. This is a ridiculous and dangerous decision when you consider that breast cancer is the second most common cause of cancer related deaths in Australian women. With the cost of living rising due to Labor's reckless spending there is the real potential that some women will not have themselves checked.

It is vital that mobile services be reinstated to Richmond in the Hawkesbury, and Springwood in the Blue Mountains, along with the rest of greater New South Wales. This will ensure women in our local communities will have easy and equitable access to

screening now and into the future. Mr Speaker and members of the House, I present the petition and call on the minister to actively support the return of mobile breast-screening services to the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains and to the rural, semi-rural and outer urban areas of New South Wales. This is a priority.

**Page Electorate: Meat and Livestock
Australia**

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (9.52 pm)—I rise to speak on an issue of concern to a significant number of my local beef producers. These farmers predominantly run family farms and, like most, are happy to do a hard day's work for a reasonable return and fair play. They also want reasonable representation by me as their local federal member of parliament and, more to the point, by the local bodies that are legally charged with representing them. This brings me to the MLA. A significant number of my local beef producers tell me that they are not happy with the representation they receive from this body. I am told, and I read, that there are others across Australia who share that view.

This body was set up in the late 90s under the stewardship of the former Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the National Party the Hon. John Anderson. From my reading of the parliamentary debates as well as the subsequent legislation and the legislation that he championed at the time, the setting up of the MLA was, among other things, a move towards self-regulation. In terms of industry sector representation, that in itself is not the problem. But this body has particular research and promotional responsibilities and, from my reading, those responsibilities are mandated by the legislation and the relationship of the levies that are paid by the beef producers across Australia.

Research responsibilities alone are quite onerous. In my view, they are best located

within a particularised research setting that has expertise in research in general as well as academic inputs and integrity and research literacy in the field both nationally and internationally. I am not saying—although some of my local beef producers as well as others across Australia do—that the MLA does not have this, but I do have apprehensions about the structure of the MLA. The first of these is a critical one. It goes to what I consider to be the structure itself.

The MLA has a corporate structure subject to corporate law, and that is built into its constitution. That structure, in my view, does not lend itself either to the research work that I outlined or, tellingly, to participatory representation—and therein lies the rub. I understand from my readings that there are approximately 150,000 red meat levy payers in Australia, but only about 45,000 are signed up as members of the MLA. Of those 45,000, approximately 10,000 registered to vote at the MLA AGM.

The MLA voting structure allows the top 50 levy payers to outvote those thousands of members who pay the levy. That is problematic to my way of thinking. Maybe there is something in the structure that I do not know about, but of itself that is quite problematic. I can understand why those at the top—the ‘top dogs’ as I call them—may feel some sort of proprietorial right, but I understand even more why the ‘small dogs’ and the local family farmers and levy payers feel disenfranchised and disempowered by this.

This brings us back to the 1996 task force report which preceded the establishment of this structure, which included the MLA; it was not just the MLA standing alone as it does today. To be more precise, it was the red meat industry organisational structure. One of the things that were emphasised in that report was:

Representation and involved ownership is necessary to achieve the essential participation of the industry itself in their own levy-funded industry organisation.

A lot of my local farmers say that they do not feel that, and that is what they are making representations about. There has recently been a report done by the Productivity Commission on rural research and development corporations. It has already been sent to the government and I eagerly await reading that report. (*Time expired*)

Longman Electorate: D’Aguilar Highway Bribie Island Bridge

WYATT ROY (Longman) (9.57 pm)—I would like to take this opportunity to draw attention to major infrastructure concerns in my electorate of Longman. For a long time now, the D’Aguilar Highway, running through the middle of my electorate, from the Bruce Highway towards the west, has been claiming the lives of those who use it. The most recent tragedy occurred on 24 January, when another life was lost on the highway. The highway is becoming increasingly busy and this is further indication that Longman is part of Queensland’s fastest-growing region. And, like much of the infrastructure servicing the area, it is simply not keeping pace with the demand placed upon it.

Members will be aware that South-East Queensland has been identified by respected social demographer Bernard Salt as a pressure point in Australia. Population increases are inevitable and, with them, the contingent pressures on our roads, hospitals and schools. The pressure on the D’Aguilar Highway is only going to increase as more and more people move to the area, and it is the responsibility of all levels of government to ensure that it is in a fit state to respond to those pressures. This is clearly not the case at present.

I held a listening post in the community of Woodford on Saturday, 12 February, and the state of the highway was by far the issue that was raised with me as the greatest concern for residents in the area who have to use the road every day. The bottom line is that it is just plain dangerous and it needs to be fixed urgently. During the last election campaign, I was very happy, along with many locals, that the coalition recognised the urgent needs of my community and committed \$12 million worth of additional funding to upgrade some of the most dangerous areas of the highway.

Some of the urgent work that needs to be done includes improving drainage to limit cars aquaplaning out of control during periods of heavy rain—and there has been no shortage of that in Queensland this summer. Essential improvements that are needed are new and replacement guardrails, and the removal of vegetation from the side of the road to improve line of sight for drivers. There are particularly dangerous intersections in the stretch of the highway between Caboolture and Kilcoy that need urgent attention.

I have written to the federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and I was disappointed by the lack of commitment to addressing the issues by providing additional black spot funding. I have been immensely disappointed by the apparent lack of interest shown in the issues by the state Labor government. This is, after all, a state government road. After the last tragic loss of life, my colleagues Andrew Powell, state member for Glasshouse, Fiona Simpson, state shadow minister for transport and main roads, Warren Truss, federal shadow minister for transport and infrastructure, and I called yet again on all levels of government to provide funding to make the highway safe, and in particular for the state Labor government to recognise the urgent needs of my local community

and fund the construction of critical passing lanes.

I have spoken before about the Bribie Island bridge which joins the Bribie community to the mainland. It is in fact the only access available on or off the island. The current bridge is also clearly inadequate to service the needs of the Bribie community. I raise this issue again because again I have been disappointed by the state Labor government's inaction. When the Bribie Island bridge was built there were few people on the island. There is now a major population base there and in the summer Bribie attracts many visitors. Much of the population on Bribie Island is also elderly and they rely on medical and other support on the mainland. Any accident on the bridge is a potential catastrophe. Any accident on the bridge simply cuts access to and from the island. It needs upgrading.

I, along with countless locals, am forced to ask the question: is Labor's inaction simply because of an inability to listen to the needs of my local community, or is it because of an inability to deliver basic and essential infrastructure because of the waste and mismanagement of Labor government? Governments should exist, first and foremost, to deliver basic services, such as roads, to taxpayers. Without this maladministration, my local community would have seen forward planning that catered for growth in the region and ensured the safety of residents. Instead, my community is again today faced with the harsh reality that Labor government waste and mismanagement has resulted in a situation where Labor governments cannot provide the most basic and essential of infrastructure.

Automotive Industry

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (10.02 pm)—Today the Prime Minister drove the first Australian made Holden Cruze off the line at General Motors Holden Elizabeth, and more than 1,000 staff attended this very important launch. It is a great day for Holden, it is a great day for Elizabeth and it is a great day for all of those workers at the Holden plant.

Of course we know that this would never have happened without the government's \$149 million investment as part of our new car plan, as part of our green car fund. It is a great investment that has brought real benefits for workers at Holden and real benefits for Australia because we have this brand new Cruze car, which was the seventh most popular car sold in 2010. We know that it is part of the Delta platform, which is an international car platform. The Cruze can be adapted to alternative fuel mechanisms like LNG, compressed natural gas and E85. It will be able to accommodate hybrid and electric drivetrains, so it is a very important addition to the Holden factory. Holden also make the Commodore down in General Motors at Elizabeth.

Today there were many important guests: Mike Devereux, the Chairman and Managing Director of GM Holden, Martyn Cray, the executive director of manufacturing at GM Holden, the Prime Minister, Premier Rann, Minister Carr and Ian Jones from the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union. I would have dearly liked to have attended if I had been paired in this place, but such is the nature of the opposition that they refused me a chance to attend this very important event in the life of my constituency and the life of my constituents.

Holden is at the heart of Elizabeth, it is at the heart of my electorate. One in four workers in the city of Playford is employed in

manufacturing. It is an incredibly important part of our local economy. It is an important part of South Australia's economy. We know there are a lot of people out there who talk us down, talk manufacturing down. They say there is no future in it. They were saying that in years gone by, but today, a day where we have launched a new small car, part of a global General Motors platform, we know that we are turning the nay-sayers' nay-saying upside down. These are very important events for Elizabeth and for jobs in South Australia.

With regard to jobs, there are some 60,000 workers who are employed across the country in automotive manufacturing. I know that Holden has about 4½ thousand. This new car has helped create an extra 265 jobs at the factory. It has helped to support the workforce in a time of economic crisis around the world. The workers down there at Holden made a number of sacrifices—going to one shift, working week-on week-off shifts in order to keep the whole workforce down there employed—to make sure that people continued to get work through the global financial crisis. It was that sacrifice and the arrangements they made through their enterprise bargaining agreement that ensured that not only did they win the new car contract, but also that the plant is well-positioned to be able to export to America. We know that Holden is already a proven supplier of exports to America, and we hope in the future to be able to supply police fleets in America, which is a niche export market. It is incredibly important for us to secure an export market. We know that North American law-enforcement fleets already account for about 70,000 sales a year, so it is a pretty lucrative market to get into. We hope that the sacrifices made by workers down at the plant have helped.

I have to commend at the union led by Paul Brown, the senior shop steward, John

Gee and John Camillo for leading the union in this pretty difficult time and coming through it at the other end, being able to see this new car roll off the line. We hope in the future there are more successful exports into America and more successful cars for our own domestic market. I certainly wish the union and Holden all the success in the future.

Indigenous Smoking Rates

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (10.07 pm)—We all welcome a bipartisan approach to reducing smoking. Smoking is a great killer of both mainstream and Indigenous Australia. It is directly correlated with cardiovascular disease, stroke, peripheral vascular disease and a range of cancers. It is not only about the direct impact of smoking; passive smoking is also a killer. That is why both sides of this House are so dedicated to reducing smoking rates. In the Australian mainstream we can be very proud of outcomes. We have seen a fall in smoking rates down to the mid-teens. Apart from a few states in the United States, our smoking rates are the lowest in the world. Governments have worked hard to achieve those figures and they deserve a pat on the back for that. The smoking rate for pregnant mums has fallen from 17 per cent to 14 per cent. That is incredibly important when we are looking at perinatal morbidity and babies coming into this world as healthy as they can be.

But the story for Indigenous smoking is not so good. While there has been interest and support from all levels of government, we now have the ultimate in bureaucratise with the new implementation report for the new partnership agreement struck between the federal government and each of the state and territory jurisdictions. The measures around smoking in Closing the Gap do not for even a passing moment reflect the number of cigarettes being smoked by Indige-

nous Australians. It takes quite a lot of conception to come up with implementation goals towards closing the gap that do not actually look at cigarette smoking at all in efforts to reduce it. Instead, the bureaucrats have come up with some other ways of measuring smoking initiatives without actually looking at a reduction in smoking.

If we look at the implementation agreement in Closing the Gap between the state jurisdictions and the Commonwealth, we see that Queensland, for instance, focuses on S2 and S4, the Commonwealth will focus on S1 and S4—so they are not even focusing on the same objectives—and S3 has disappeared completely and no-one is looking at it at all. This may sound very Fawcett Towers-esque but let me put this into context. What are S1 to S4? S1 is ‘the number of culturally secure community education/health promotion/social marketing activities implemented to promote quitting and smoke-free environments’. So let us measure the programs—that is S1. You can almost imagine those who drafted these recommendations saying, ‘For goodness sake, if you’re coming up with recommendations on how to reduce Indigenous smoking, whatever you do don’t come up with a recommendation which, at some time in the far-distant future, will be looked back on and seen to have failed!’ Instead, they have come up with S2, which is ‘key results of specific evidence based ATSI brief interventions, other smoking cessation and support initiatives offered to individuals’—that is, simply offered to individuals but not looking at whether they work. S3, which appears to have entirely vanished from all jurisdictions’ attention, is ‘regulatory efforts to encourage reduction/cessation in smoking in ATSI people and their communities’. S4 is ‘the number of service delivery trained staff actually delivering the interventions’. So, as long as we have got more people delivering interventions, we are succeeding.

But the reality is that that is not closing the gap. We know that about 38 per cent of the entire gap is due to cardiovascular disease, and the No. 1 cause behind that is smoking. What every Australian would want is a far better focus on reducing the smoking of cigarettes in an effort to close the gap around smoking. But it is not happening. With this government it is more about the army that measures how many bullets they shoot as a measure of success, or the farmer who measures how many seeds they plant as a measure of their profit. Let us look for a moment at what we are actually trying to do here. We are trying to have Indigenous Australians quit smoking—go to bed tonight as a smoker and wake up in the morning having stopped it. It is fine to deliver the interventions, it is fine to be employing all the public health professionals, but ultimately a government is expected by its people to deliver services that work. We see millions of dollars being allocated to this initiative. But we can do better than this. We can do better than having four truly vague checklist representations of how we are progressing, which measure nothing but inputs—how many people are employed and how many public health programs are delivered. It is time we focused on the outcomes. But it has become lost in this bureaucratic overlay of creating outcomes that can never be proven to have failed—because they never had anything to do with what we are trying to do in the first place, which is to reduce smoking.

This is a great tragedy. We are seeing fantastic work being done by AIHW in an effort to measure the fall in Indigenous smoking. They showed a barely significant three per cent drop between 2000 and 2008. But what we know is that ultimately the only way to be sure is to work with Indigenous Australians and allow them to run these programs themselves and actually count the cigarettes that are no longer being smoked.

Carbon Pricing

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (10.12 pm)—I would like to say a few words about climate change, carbon pricing and the importance that getting this policy right has to the people I represent in the electorate of Throsby. Like many members in this place I have the great benefit of representing a region where I grew up, where I went to school and where I have spent the majority of my working life. If you spend that much time in your electorate you get to know it well and you get to know the concerns, interest and fears of the people who live there.

Since early white settlement the Illawarra has drawn a significant part of its income, wealth and employment from coalmining and, since the 1920s steel manufacturing has been a significant part of wealth creation and employment creation in the area. Over that time, we have been through many changes. We have seen the structural adjustments that were necessary in the 1980s to ensure that we continue to have a viable steel industry in this country. Throughout the 1980s we also saw a significant change in coalmining in the Illawarra as mine ownership changed, the price of coal on international and local markets changed and there was a significant number of mine closures in the Illawarra area.

What I know from all of this is that structural change—economic change—can affect people in working-class communities very, very hard. I and the people of the Illawarra also know that what is even harder than structural change is the failure to make those changes as and when they are necessary. When I left school the steelworks employed something in the order 23,000 people. A few years ago it employed fewer than 9,000 people and today it directly employs, on contracts, around 5,000 people. Those changes have been very difficult on the area but we

know that unless we had made those changes there would be no steel industry at all in the Illawarra today.

We know that climate change is something that we cannot avoid. We live beside a mine, beside a steel mill and on the coast. Climate change is already having an enormous impact on our environment and an economic impact. We can either strive to have the most efficient and effective manufacturing industries and coalmining industry in the world or those industries simply will not exist in the years to come. It is with this in mind that I am very keen to have a mature, informed debate on the importance of fixing a carbon price to ensure that we can manage that economic transformation.

It was not without any surprise that we witnessed, the day after the Prime Minister made the announcement about our resolution to introduce a carbon price into the economy in 2012, the CEO of BlueScope Steel come out and make a speech representing the interests of his shareholders, as he is entitled to do, in ensuring that manufacturing, particularly steel manufacturing, would still form a vital part of our national and local economies. He also said in that speech—something that has not been picked up on by many members in this place—that, as a father, as an Australian, as a resident and as the CEO of a large manufacturing company, he saw that it was essential for us to introduce carbon pricing into the Australian economy because it was the only way that we were going to drive the necessary transformation in the way we generate electricity in this country—something that he sees as in the national interest.

We look forward to engaging with employers like BlueScope and the representatives of the workforce who are doing a lot of work in this area: representatives of the AWU, the major union at the BlueScope

Steel, and the South Coast Labour Council. The member for Cunningham and I are working hard to ensure the views of the people in the Illawarra are represented as we work through this important area. I take my hat off to the representatives of the local unions and businesses who have been working for over two years to be in front of the curve by working on green jobs initiatives. We will be working hard with those local representatives to ensure we manage that transformation with green jobs.

In closing, I cannot avoid saying that the interventions of the leader of the opposition in New South Wales have not been helpful in this debate over the last week. (*Time expired*)

National School Chaplaincy Program

National Centre for Coasts and Climate

Members of Parliament: Staff

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (10.17 pm)—This evening I want to address three issues. Let me deal first with the National School Chaplaincy Program. I am here with the member for Bowman, who was one of the co-founders of the program. It is a program which has helped provide guidance, counselling, sanctuary and support for thousands of students around Australia. In my own electorate, I have dealt with many chaplains who, quite humbly, have talked about the importance of the program, trying to play down their own role. As you discuss the program with them, they reveal the story—although never the name—of a student who was on the edge of taking their life, on the edge of the abyss, who was facing a great spiritual dilemma or who had had a family tragedy, and the way in which their intervention was able to assist. I have spoken with parents who have said the same thing and with students who have said that there was nobody they felt sufficiently comfortable to talk to other than a chaplain because of their unique circumstances.

This program was designed to make sure that it was available to students of all religions as a means of participating in schools. It is entirely blind as to the source of religion and was designed consciously that way. But let me go further. It is also entirely voluntary. No school need participate in this program; it is entirely a matter for school principals and school councils. But the incentives are fundamental and were designed to allow every school to participate.

I worry that the program is under threat, given the government's most recent paper, which I think, unfortunately, shows that the Gillard government is quietly eroding the National School Chaplaincy Program. The first threat is that the program will be undercut by progressively pushing out chaplains in favour of welfare officers. There is a fantastic role for welfare officers, but they should come under an additional, separate program—not one which is used to gradually push out chaplains from schools. The chaplaincy program has been very successful and it should not be eroded in that way.

The second great threat is the potential to put in place standards which are not about education but which, we have been told, because of certain education unions are designed to ensure that only a very limited pool of chaplains can qualify for the job. Protection of students is paramount, but ensuring that there is a full chaplaincy program across the nation is also fundamental. I challenge the Gillard government not to continue the erosion of this wonderful program.

The second issue I want to talk about is about Point Nepean in my electorate. Now that there has been a change of government in Victoria, we will push to ensure the completion of the National Centre for Coasts and Climate at Point Nepean, for which we set aside \$7 million out of a total \$50 million package. That money was taken by the Vic-

torian Department of Sustainability and Environment. It must now be returned. I invite the new Victorian Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Ryan Smith, and the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne to meet and to work on site and restore the National Centre for Coasts and Climate, to complete the vision of Point Nepean, which was established by the community, as one of the great oceanographic and climate centres in the world.

The last thing I want to do, as I mention the environment minister, is acknowledge that my former chief of staff, John Deller, has been recruited—you could say headhunted—by the minister, with the promise of being able to stay at home at night and of being able to implement a wider range of things than you can from the opposition benches. I want to take this opportunity to, firstly, thank John Deller, who did a fantastic job as my chief of staff, and also acknowledge that we do not always do all that we can to recognise the work of our current staff. I want to mention in particular: my long-serving office manager, Lynne Strahan, who does an amazing job; Denise Garnock, who does an extraordinary job balancing my diary; Tina McGuffie, who manages media and communications; and Malene Hand, who came on board six months ago. They have now been joined by Cathy Alexander. All do a great job, and I want to take this moment to acknowledge their contribution.

Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (10.22 pm)—South Australia's Flinders Ranges contain some of the most unique natural landscapes to be found anywhere in the world, including Wilpena Pound and Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary. Around 25,000 visitors from around the country and the world come each year to see the majestic beauty of the ranges, which change with each season. For some time now

a public debate has been ongoing about mining exploration within the ranges and the possibility of a large-scale uranium mine being developed within the 600 square-kilometre Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary.

The issue came to a head when last year mining company Marathon Resources had its 90 square-kilometre exploration licence within the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary renewed for another year by the South Australian government. Marathon Resources had its drilling licence suspended in February 2008 when it was claimed that the company had improperly dumped mine cuttings in the sanctuary.

Marathon has already drilled around 120 holes in the area and I understand now intends to drill a further 10 holes up to 500 metres deep. The area is believed to contain very large deposits of uranium and it has been reported that Marathon Resources has already spent about \$25 million on the Arkaroola project. Arkaroola was established as a private national park in 1967 by oil and gas pioneer Dr Reg Sprigg in order to preserve its environmental, cultural and heritage values. I understand his work and his vision has been continued by his children Doug and Marg who now manage the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary. Marg Sprigg was recently quoted in Adelaide's *Sunday Mail* as saying about Arkaroola:

This is an area that should be preserved for its rare wildlife, its extraordinary landscape and for eco-tourism.

Renowned landscape photographer Stavros Pippas in the same article described Arkaroola as:

A geological museum of global significance with unique animal and plant life.

I doubt that anyone who has visited the sanctuary would disagree with those descriptions. The mining industry argue that mining is compatible with preserving Arkaroola as an

ecotourism location. The industry also argues that hundreds of jobs will be created and billions of dollars of net economic benefit to South Australia will be generated. It is a claim disputed by many, including South Australian Tourism Industry Council Chief Executive Ward Tilbrook who, in the same *Sunday Mail* newspaper article, is quoted as saying:

Any mining activity in the award winning Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary will damage the positioning and realisation of SA as a legitimate world class nature based eco tourism destination. The impact of mining activity will damage a spectacular and unique wilderness sanctuary.

As has been pointed out by others, mining revenue is finite. On the contrary, tourism income will be ongoing. The track record of some mining industries does not leave me with the confidence that mining is compatible with preserving the unique environmental characteristics of Arkaroola. An additional concern is the millions of litres of water that will be required for mining operations. That water would have to be pumped out of the Great Artesian Basin.

With calls growing for Arkaroola to be listed as a National Heritage site and a World Heritage site the South Australian government will ultimately have to decide on whether mining rights are granted to Marathon Resources and, if so, under what conditions. Future global demand for uranium is likely to drive the price of uranium higher and the pressure on the state government to approve mining will be even greater. It will be a difficult decision for the state government, which I understand is carefully considering all the issues and presently consulting with the community on a conservation plan for Arkaroola.

I await with interest any state government decision on the future of the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary. I have contacted the federal Minister for Sustainability, Environ-

ment, Water, Population and Communities seeking advice as to whether any provisions of the Environment Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act apply with respect to any of the mining approval processes relating to Arkaroola. I believe Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary should be listed as a National Heritage site. Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary is too precious to risk. There are many uranium deposits in the world, but there is only one Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary. Because of its uniqueness, I believe Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary should even be a World Heritage listed site. Selling our uranium is one thing; selling our heritage is another. As Margaret Visciglio, vice president of the Field Geology Club of South Australia, said about mining in Arkaroola:

This sacred place will be desecrated forever for the sake of a few dollars.

Question agreed to.

House adjourned at 10.27 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Albanese to move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Member for Wentworth's private Members' business notice relating to the disallowance of the Public Works Committee Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 1), as contained in Select Legislative Instrument 2010 No. 173 and made under the Public Works Committee Act 1969, being called on immediately.

Mr Albanese to move:

- (1) that a Joint Committee on the National Broadband Network (NBN) be appointed to inquire into and report on the rollout of the NBN;
- (2) that every six months, commencing 31 August 2011, until the NBN is complete and operational, the Committee provide progress reports to both Houses of Parliament and to shareholder Ministers on:

- (a) the rollout of the NBN, including in relation to the Government's objective for NBN Co. Limited (NBN Co.) to:
 - (i) connect 93 per cent of Australian homes, schools and businesses with fibre-to-the-premises technology providing broadband speeds of up to 100 megabits per second, with a minimum fibre coverage obligation of 90 per cent of Australian premises; and
 - (ii) service all remaining premises by a combination of next-generation fixed wireless and satellite technologies providing peak speeds of at least 12 megabits per second;
 - (b) the achievement of take-up targets (including premises passed and covered and services activated) as set out in NBN Co.'s Corporate Plan released on 20 December 2010 as revised from time to time;
 - (c) network rollout performance including service levels and faults;
 - (d) the effectiveness of NBN Co. in meeting its obligations as set out in its Stakeholder Charter;
 - (e) NBN Co.'s strategy for engaging with consumers and handling complaints;
 - (f) NBN Co.'s risk management processes; and
 - (g) any other matter pertaining to the NBN rollout that the Committee considers relevant;
- (3) that the Committee consist of 16 members, 4 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Government Whip or Whips, 4 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Opposition Whip or Whips, and one non-aligned Member, 3 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, 3 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, and one Senator to be nominated by any minority group or groups or independent Senator or independent Senators;

- (4) that:
- (a) participating members may be appointed to the Committee on the nomination of the Leader of a Party in either House or of an Independent Member in either House;
 - (b) participating members may participate in hearings of evidence and deliberations of the Committee and have all the rights of members of the Committee, but may not vote on any questions before the Committee; and
 - (c) a participating member shall be taken to be a member of the Committee for the purpose of forming a quorum of the Committee if a majority of members of the Committee are not present;
- (5) that 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;
- (6) that the members of the Committee hold office as a joint standing committee until the House of Representatives is dissolved or expires by effluxion of time;
- (7) that the Committee elect an independent (non-aligned) member as Chair;
- (8) that, in the event of an equally divided vote, the Chair have a casting vote;
- (9) that three members of the Committee constitute a quorum of the Committee provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include one Government Member of either House and one non-Government Member of either House;
- (10) that the Committee have power to call for witnesses to attend and for documents to be produced;
- (11) that the Committee may conduct proceedings at any place it sees fit;
- (12) that the Committee have power to adjourn from time to time and to sit during any adjournment of the Senate and the House of Representatives;
- (13) that 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
- (14) that a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting that it concur and take action accordingly.
- Mr Hayes** to move:
- That this House:
- (1) notes that:
 - (a) the importance of high school completion in equipping young people with the skills and education levels to translate into paid employment or further education opportunities;
 - (b) the national rate of unemployment for persons aged 15 to 19 looking for full-time work was 24.2 per cent in January 2010; and
 - (c) the current rate for Fairfield-Liverpool region is 33.5 per cent;
 - (2) acknowledges that:
 - (a) education and high school retention play a crucial part in improving youth employment opportunity;
 - (b) in 2009, the Year 10 to 12 apparent national retention rate was 76.7 per cent; and
 - (c) in South West Sydney the current retention rate is: 72.6 per cent;
 - (3) calls on:
 - (a) the Government to continue its efforts to ensure an above 90 per cent high school retention rate nationwide by 2015 in order to reduce the youth unemployment rate; and
 - (b) local businesses to give, where possible, priority to the local youth searching for employment.

Monday, 28 February 2011

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)** took the chair at 10.30 am.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Wright Electorate: Queensland Floods

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (10.30 am)—I rise to inform Australians and this nation of the situation that is unfolding in my seat of Wright and, in particular, in the area of the Lockyer Valley. As people start to rebuild and try to regroup, they meet constant hurdles on a number of fronts, one predominantly being the frustration to do with their insurance companies of not knowing whether or not their house will meet the insurance guidelines so they are able to get back in and start rebuilding their lives. With that uncertainty then comes trying to get their financial situation in order.

I have risen to make a point in this chamber about concerns we have to do with the very generous amount of funds that have been given from all around Australia to the Queensland Premier's Disaster Relief Appeal. This morning that fund totalled \$224,927,722, an incredible amount of money which has been given passionately and generously by those all around Australia so that people on the ground could start rebuilding their lives. I also want to inform the House that, 50 days after the event of the devastation we received in our electorate on 10 January, we have still not received any funds from that appeal. My people who have been displaced are still either living in motels or staying with family members who have generously opened their hearts, because our state government does not have the capacity to take money out of one account and put it into another. It is totally unacceptable for this government to continue on in this way for 50 days. My office has made a number of phone calls—with 11 just on Friday—trying to get answers. Liaison personnel from Centrelink are at their wits' end in trying to get answers. We have this backlog of people—from the Lockyer Valley and other disaster affected areas—who are in crisis and trying to pull their lives back together, and this is the response that we get from an incompetent state government in trying to help these people rebuild their lives. Fifty days is an unacceptable amount of time.

I also want to let people know about the services, both state and federal, that are still available on the ground. Centrelink, the Department Of Communities, Queensland Health and the Queensland Police Service are currently on the ground. It is our role as a parliament not to abandon these people, and we need to start by having government hand out a few cheques immediately. (*Time expired*)

Fowler Electorate: Kilmore, Ms Leanne

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (10.33 am)—I recently met a rather fascinating and inspirational woman in my electorate, Ms Leanne Kilmore. Ms Kilmore told me an incredible story of her challenge through the very tough experience of being diagnosed with a very rare form of breast cancer in 2009. She described the day that she was diagnosed as the saddest day of her life. After undergoing an operation to remove a cancerous lump, she was advised that she had to go through the highest dose of chemotherapy. As the dose would guarantee that her hair would fall out, she decided, along with her daughter, Monique, to shave her head. It was an effort to 'save face' and to demonstrate also that the cancer would not run her life.

Making matters worse and adding to the emotional strain, over this period she and her husband separated. While this newly single mother of two and her young family were going through this heartbreaking journey, they were faced with some enormous and unexpected challenges. Ms Kilmore visited Liverpool Hospital to commence her chemotherapy and was advised that she would be required to pay substantial amounts of money for the chemotherapy—with each round of chemo costing \$300—and for the other medications that go with that. Ms Kilmore was required to take nine other medications. To go with that were the highly unwelcome bills that she had to pick up.

Her stress levels were increased by the reminder bills that were constantly being sent out to make sure that everything was paid promptly. This made her take the extremely tough decision to discontinue her chemotherapy after six treatments. The side effects from more treatments would have required her to leave her paid work. In order to pay the bills and provide for her two children, Ms Kilmore was under pressure to stay in the workforce while undergoing chemotherapy, all of which delayed her recovery. She sought temporary financial relief through her superannuation fund, but was eventually denied access to any moneys on the basis that she was not legally defined as ‘terminal’. I find this most regrettable. I would have thought any cancer prognosis—and, in her case, extreme if left untreated—would certainly mean terminal. All she needed was some financial assistance to allow her to stay at home to rest and recover and attend to her children.

Ms Kilmore now wants to make sure that her experiences are known and to help other people where she can. When one’s health and life are under so much stress and when a family is going through a period of terrible sadness and extreme financial stress, we as a nation and a caring community should contribute in any way possible to make her journey less stressful. *(Time expired)*

Wannon Electorate: Building the Education Revolution Program

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (10.36 am)—I rise today to talk on an issue which appeared on page 3 of the *Herald Sun* today regarding the Waubra Primary School. Sadly, after a year the students at this school are still operating out of portable classrooms. Brand new buildings placed at Waubra Primary School have been fenced off while the community waits for people to come and fit out the school. Meanwhile, the students are operating in portable classrooms and two-thirds of their play space has been taken away from them. Every day that these kids arrive at school, sadly they get a reminder of the Gillard government’s incompetence. No wonder the Gillard government wants to tax Australians even more.

This is not an isolated example of the debacle which has been the Building the Education Revolution program, but this is just the latest. When the minister says that he will get the Or-gill committee to investigate this school, I hope that he does and that he will get it done quickly. At the moment, the schoolchildren are suffering. Last week at a meeting between parents, teachers and the principal they considered reducing the school hours so the students did not have to stay in their portable classrooms so long and did not have to just look at the wire fence around their new school when out in the playground. This is where the BER program has got to: schools are looking at reducing their hours to make up for the Gillard government’s incompetence. As I said before, no wonder they want to tax us more. With debacles like this, it is no wonder they want to tax us even more.

Mr Mitchell interjecting—

Mr TEHAN—Members opposite are piping up now. How can they pipe up when it has been such a fiasco? School students have to turn up at school and just look at their brand-new classrooms, because they cannot go into them. The students are in portables. The parents and the principal have held a meeting to consider reducing the hours that the kids go to school. Sadly, this has been writ large around Wannon. I have examples from six schools where the BER has been a total disaster for the local community. It is about time Julia Gillard took responsibility for what is happening with this program. It was her program. All she does is say, ‘Go to Orgill.’ She needs to take responsibility and act to fix it now. The gross waste has to stop.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! The honourable member’s time has expired. I remind the member for Wannon of the provisions of standing order 64. He ought to refer the Prime Minister by her title and not by her name.

McEwen Electorate: Tibetan Community
Rotary Club of Kinglake Ranges

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (10.40 am)—I look forward to a Labor member opening those schools that the member for Wannon obviously does not want. Over the weekend I joined many locals and religious leaders at the Peaceful Land of Joy Meditation Centre in Yuroke to celebrate the Tibetan New Year. The centre is home to the Tibetan Buddhist Society and it is evident that the name of the centre is truly epitomised in the beautiful lush gardens and peaceful serenity you feel when you walk in. The positive energy stems not only from the magnificence of the place but also from the many volunteers who are so dedicated and committed to its maintenance and beauty, nature and peace.

Venerable Geshe Acharya Thubten Loden, who established the society, spoke about how he came to Australia as a refugee with nothing but \$10 in his pocket—and look at what he has achieved and what the society continues to give to others. This year’s theme for the Tibetan New Year Festival, ‘Change your mind, change the world’, is truly inspirational to people of all walks of life, religions and races. We must always look within ourselves, because the strength, determination and courage is in all of us to make any sort of change. This is true in whatever you do. The affirmation that real change starts with each and every one of us is a theme we must give not only for this new year but for every year. What we give to the world is what it gives back to us and if we change our mindset and attitudes in return then we will get a more harmonised and tolerant society. It was great to listen to Father Michael Mifsud speak about how despite our religious differences we are the same and we all value the same things.

As we are all aware, my electorate of McEwen was devastated by the Black Saturday bushfires on 7 February 2009. The Tibetan society raised over \$40,000 for the victims of the Black Saturday bushfires. I thank their community for that on behalf of my community. Although there is still much work to be done, it was contributions like this that helped my community get back onto its feet. Similarly, when our northern neighbours in Queensland were recently hit with unprecedented floods and cyclones, the Venerable Geshe Loden launched a fundraising appeal and the society has so far helped to raise over \$20,000 for the people of Queensland. Our country is truly a place of opportunity and generosity.

I was also pleased to attend the Rotary Club of Kinglake Ranges charter dinner, at the lovely Toolangi Tavern, and present an Australian flag. The charter dinner was sponsored by the Eltham Rotary Club. I congratulate the President of the Rotary club, Brad Quilliam, on his role and I have no doubt that the Kinglake Ranges Rotary Club will do a great job. Brad spoke very passionately about the need for service clubs and how they can be there, on hand, to help rebuild communities that are going through very tough times. Having spoken to many locals at the dinner, I know they are very excited about the future of the Rotary club as part of the 9790 region. There are clubs in that region all the way from Milawa to Ivanhoe and from Sunbury to Diamond Creek. Twenty-nine community members have volunteered to be part of the Rotary club, including Secretary Jenny Beales, Assistant Secretary Judi Wynn, Treasurer John Marshall, Denise Doerner, Joe Hollyoak, Jacky Robinson and Fred Swainston, and Sergeant-at-Arms John Leadbeater keeps them all under control. (*Time expired*).

Forde Electorate: Art

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (10.43 am)—The electorate of Forde is privileged to be home to some of Logan City's finest artwork and I was honoured to attend the unveiling of its newest sculpture in the suburb of Mount Warren Park. The latest sculpture is located in William H Cramer Park and is an interactive, solar-powered piece sharing insights of the region's history. Logan City Councillor Sean Black provided the necessary funds to commission this public artwork.

Logan City Council has over 150 artworks in the Logan Art Collection, with over 10 of these significant public artworks being commissioned during the past decade. For this particular piece, the council commissioned local artist John Coleman, whose knowledge of the area and involvement in Logan City's Regional Arts Development Fund made him the ideal person for the job. John has an Associate Diploma of Civil Engineering and a Bachelor of Visual Arts degree and for the past 13 years has been involved in the design, project management, construction and installation of major public artworks, furniture design, interactive playground equipment and water features.

The exciting sculpture provides a visual focal point upon entry to William H Cramer Park and is primarily intended to be an education play element which doubles as a seating location. The history, flora and fauna of the region and the region's Indigenous heritage to this present day are portrayed within the sculpture and the work's form and colour comment on the preserved greenery on the top of Mount Warren Park.

This interactive sculpture was funded in March 2009 and publicly launched in February. Looking through one of the windows the visitors may see an image of William Stanley Warren, the suburb's namesake and a sugar planter who established various plantations on the banks on the Albert River in 1867. By touching a doorknob you can hear a commentary about the cane farm that he owned or see and hear one of the local birds or animals that live on top of the mountain.

The unveiling of this new artwork has provided a more pleasant park experience for the residents and helps to foster an appreciation of arts and the cultural and community heritage within Mount Warren Park and the greater community. I commend the Logan City Council, the councillors, the artists and all those involved in this community sculpture for their hard work in ensuring that Mount Warren Park continues to be a vibrant and community focused environment happily displaying its rich natural history.

Adelaide Electorate: General Practice

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide—Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare and Minister for the Status of Women) (10.46 am)—I rise today to update the House on progress that has been made towards delivering on our election commitment for a \$15 million GP superclinic for the community that I am lucky enough to represent, Adelaide. Over several years I have heard from Adelaide residents about the difficulties they have faced in accessing quality GP services in certain parts of the electorate. Together we have worked to highlight the local doctor shortage caused largely by the slashes in GP training places by the now Leader of the Opposition during his stint as Minister for Health and Ageing.

We have seen local clinics closing their books to new patients as they are unable to take on any more in the local area. We have seen the difficulties in replacing GPs who have left, particularly at the Nailsworth Surgery, a situation that I brought to the attention of this parliament through the presentation of a petition signed by hundreds of local residents. This is why we have been fighting for Adelaide residents, petitioning the national parliament and welcoming our government's investment of \$100,000 for GP after-hours services at the Regency Medical Clinic.

I know just how important it is for the residents of Adelaide to be able to access quality health care in our community, which is why I am delighted to update the House on the first steps that have been made to deliver our commitment to build a GP superclinic in Adelaide. Recently the Department of Health and Ageing, on behalf of the government, conducted formal local consultations with our community to ensure that key stakeholders and residents have the opportunity to shape our new GP superclinic, its location and its operations. Of course, the consultation does not just happen at formal meetings, and I have been engaging with local residents and key stakeholders for over six months about how our GP superclinic can best meet the needs of our local community. Prior to the commitment, I called on Adelaide residents to support my petition for a GP superclinic in Adelaide and I was overwhelmed by the positive response, which demonstrated the strong support for our government's health reform agenda in Adelaide.

Following the formal consultation, I have also sought the feedback of local residents about the location and the services to be provided at our GP superclinic. I have heard from residents about the importance of ensuring that the GP superclinic is accessible by public transport and about the areas where there is a particular need. I have also heard about the need to ensure that culturally diverse services are available for our multicultural area, but broad services need to be available, with a particular emphasis on our ageing community and to ensure that opening hours provide flexibility. We work towards continued improved health solutions for the residents of Adelaide with the GP superclinic, and I commend the Minister for Health and Ageing for her hard work in delivering these.

National School Chaplaincy Program

Mr TUDGE (Aston) (10.49 am)—In 2007 the Howard government introduced a new, school based program called the National School Chaplaincy Program. This program provides up to \$60,000 over three years to each school to enable them to employ a school chaplain at their school. The program has been, as you may be aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, an outstanding success. Over 2,680 schools—that is, 28 per cent of all schools across Australia—have now been funded to provide a school chaplain and a survey in 2009 found that 97 per cent of

schools were pleased with the results and the unique spiritual guidance that a chaplain can offer. In my own electorate of Aston, in outer eastern Melbourne, I have heard nothing but outstanding feedback from parents and the school community in relation to the school chaplains who are working there and doing very important work in supporting individual children and the broader family and assisting the school community to stay harmonious and cohesive.

I am a very strong supporter of the School Chaplaincy Program, as is the entire coalition, and I was very pleased, on the eve of the 2010 election, when Prime Minister Gillard announced that she would continue the School Chaplaincy Program if she were re-elected to government. Of course, that matched the commitments that the coalition had made. However, two weeks ago the government released a discussion paper on the future of the School Chaplaincy Program, which asked for feedback on various aspects of the operation of the program. Along with many local residents in Aston, I am concerned that the government, through this discussion paper, is gearing up to change the fundamental nature of the program—to change it from a school chaplaincy program to one that is more a welfare based program.

I have no problem with schools that need them having more welfare officers in the school and I would support any initiative that provided funding to do so, but it should not be done at the expense of school chaplains. So I come here today to encourage all members of parliament to read this discussion paper and understand what the government might be coming to in relation to the School Chaplaincy Program. I also encourage all members of the community who are supporters of the School Chaplaincy Program to have a look at the discussion paper and to respond to the government and let their views be known, because I believe this is a terrific program and it should be continued as it is. *(Time expired)*

Climate Change

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (10.52 am)—I rise to talk about climate change and the need to act now. We are past making excuses. It is past the time for saying that these things are too difficult. Saying no to action on climate change is not an answer. We will not stop the temperature of the seas from rising by just saying, 'No, we are not going to look at it.' You do not stop the effects of climate change by simply putting your head in the sand and not acting. We need to act and we need to act now. We need to do it for children, our children's children and the communities in which we live.

I live on the Central Coast of New South Wales. I think everyone here would agree with me that it is the most beautiful part of Australia. Of course, one of the downsides of living in the most beautiful part of Australia is that it is a very fragile environment. We have mountains to the west, a great big lake in the middle and a coastline on the edge. My electorate, more than many, has seen the effects of climate change. You only need to go to Cabbage Tree Bay at Norah Head to see its effects. Storm surges are becoming more frequent on the east coast of Australia. My electorate is now affected by storm surges every two years. At Cabbage Tree Bay we have houses that are falling into the water. They are not falling into the water because of one event; they are falling into the water because of constant changes to the environment that are affecting communities right up and down the east coast.

At North Entrance there are houses that have had most of their backyards washed away. There was a beautiful house that I went to see a year or so ago, after the last storm surge, which had had a great big beautiful glass fence that you could now see washed somewhere

out into the Pacific Ocean. The owners had lost six metres of their backyard. Wamboral, another beautiful suburb in my electorate, has lost many houses because of storm surges.

What we are seeing every day in our communities are the direct effects of climate change. What we need to do is make sure that we properly represent our communities. To properly represent our communities we need to face these challenges. We cannot just say, 'No, we're not going to deal with it,' and, 'These issues are too hard.' If we do that we are letting down our communities, we are letting down our children and we are letting down our grandchildren. We need to act in relation to climate change. Now is the time to act; now is not the time to say no. We need to be taking steps to make sure that we are doing everything we can to protect our environment so that beautiful electorates like Dobell remain as part of Australia and do not get washed out to sea. (*Time expired*)

Carbon Pricing

Mr COULTON (Parkes) (10.55 am)—It seems to be my lot in life to tend to follow the member for Dobell with my speeches in this place, but it is quite appropriate. The member for Dobell typifies the absolute fantasy and fallacy that surrounds the debate we are having at the moment. I would like the member for Dobell and others opposite to explain to the people who are having troubles with storms how these storms will stop. How will the temperature of the earth decrease by expecting pensioners to pay more for their power? After all the discussion that we have had in the last couple of years, but more particularly in the last few days since the coalition of Labor, the Greens and the fringe dwellers of parliament got themselves together under the mantle and great leadership of Bob Brown, we are going to once again discuss issues about cooling the globe. I want to know how making people pay extra for things will change the temperature of the globe. We have used woosie words about being prepared. The member for Dobell spoke in a sanctimonious and self-righteous manner, and he is a member who represents a completely concreted and swamp-filled area.

If you look geographically you will see that the Greens tend to support and congregate in concreted, altered environments and the methods of amelioration that they propose are generally in areas where they do not live. They are expecting pensioners in my electorate—where there is no public transport, where it is 45 degrees in summer and where it freezes in the winter—to go without electricity. If you are a fixed income earner, you have no choice but to turn off the switch. We hear Bob Brown talk about the big polluters. News flash: we are the polluters. When you have an aluminium can of soft drink, you have created the pollution. Someone else has done the work, but that is yours. Electricity generators are there because of your use. If you are on a fixed income or you have a small business, you need to turn that off.

I want members opposite to explain to small business owners—corner stores, convenience stores, small independent supermarkets, butchers and all those sorts of people in their electorates—why they have to pay more for their electricity to improve the weather that we live under. I have not heard anyone explain that. We are going down the path of that great fable *The Emperor's New Clothes* and it is about time that we started to show a bit of wisdom and call this what it is.

Blair Electorate: St Mary's College

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (10.58 am)—On Friday, 4 February 2011, I had the pleasure of attending the opening mass and induction of leaders of St Mary's College at St Mary's Catholic

Church in Ipswich in my electorate of Blair. Father Peter Casey presided. St Mary's College is a Catholic secondary college committed to the education of young women in the Mercy tradition. There were representatives of the Sisters of Mercy present to show their respect and longstanding interest in the school. In 2008 the federal Labor government provided \$3.9 million in general recurrent grants to the school and the school received \$200,000 under the Building the Education Revolution for a new shade structure, external refurbishment of painting and ICT equipment.

The school accepts girls from year 8 through to year 12, and the approximate enrolment is about 650 students. Its catchment is Ipswich and the rural areas, particularly in the suburban areas around Woodend, Coalfalls and Sadliers Crossing. St Mary's College was established by the Sisters of Mercy in 1863 as part of St Mary's Parish. The Sisters of Mercy left in the early 1990s, and the college is now run and owned by the parish and administered and staffed by Brisbane Catholic Education. The college is currently undergoing a minor transformation and it is well led by the principal, Ms Diedre Anderson, who extends her dedication and commitment to the school to the greater Ipswich community; and her deputy, Mr Paul Wruck, a compassionate and committed school leader who has been involved in the Ipswich community for a long time.

St Mary's Church is one of the icons of Ipswich and a trademark that everyone recognises. It is one of the pictures that people come to Ipswich to take. It is the epicentre of the Catholic faith and it provides its students with spiritual education as the students receive education through the actual college itself. The college offers a holistic approach to education and it really does turn out young women of integrity. It has been doing so for nearly 150 years. I want to congratulate College Captain Molly Rossetto, College Vice Captains Chantel Phillips and Madison Sowden, College Mission Captain Emma Morgan, College Cultural Captain Krystal Spark, College Sports Captain Tayla Rosin, Gorry House Captain Stephanie Wright, Horan House Captain Cassie Seppanen, Murphy House Captain Theresa King and Whitty House Captain Brooke Carroll. I congratulate Molly on her wonderful sermon on the Mercy tradition and what the school means to her, her fellow year 12s and the Ipswich community. St Mary's is a wonderful institution. I congratulate the school leaders and know they are in good hands with Ms Anderson and Mr Wruck as the principal and vice principal. (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! In accordance with standing order 193 the time for constituency statements has concluded.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Workforce Participation of People with a Disability

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mrs Moylan**:

That this House:

- (1) appreciates that meaningful employment is essential to the financial security, physical and mental health and sense of identity of all individuals;
- (2) remains concerned with the low workforce participation rate of individuals with a disability;
- (3) recognises the challenges faced by people with a disability in successfully obtaining work, particularly in surmounting barriers;
- (4) notes that:
 - (a) eighteen and a half per cent of all Australians suffer from a disability;

- (b) data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveals that since 1993, workplace participation for people with a disability has steadily decreased to 53.2 per cent, compared to the continual increase of participation in those without disability to 80.6 per cent; and
 - (c) the Australian Public Service Commissioner's Statistical Bulletin shows employment of people with a disability in the Australian Public Service has linearly dropped from a high of 5.5 per cent in 1996, to 3.1 per cent in 2010;
- (5) acknowledges the findings of chapters 2.4 ('The employment experience of people with disabilities') and 2.5.2 ('Lack of Access to Transport') of the National Disability Strategy Consultation Report, *Shut Out*, that:
- (a) there are still widespread misconceptions and stereotypes influencing the attitudes and behaviour of employers, recruiters and governments;
 - (b) there is considerable misunderstanding in the community and overestimation about the cost of workplace adjustments for people with a disability;
 - (c) there is confusion about the impact of occupational health and safety requirements on people with a disability;
 - (d) inflexibility of the Disability Support Pension acts as a disincentive to employment and the loss of healthcare benefits is a particular disadvantage; and
 - (e) without access to transport, participation in critical activities such as education, employment and healthcare is difficult, if not impossible; and
- (6) calls on the Government to provide leadership and improve participation rates of people with a disability.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (11.02 am)—I am pleased to have the opportunity to bring this motion to the House. I thank the member for Gilmore for her unwavering support and for seconding this motion. I also take the opportunity to thank all of my colleagues who are participating in this debate today. Despite the continual growth of Australia's economy and increased workforce participation in general, the employment of people with a disability has been steadily declining. This trend raises significant concerns in that 18.5 per cent of Australians suffer from a disability—nearly one fifth of the Australian population. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveals that since 1993 the workforce participation rate for people with a disability has steadily decreased to 53.2 per cent. The OECD currently ranks Australia 13th, out of 19 countries, on the employment rate of people with a disability.

The low level of employment for people with a disability denies them a decent standard of living and a social context to their lives. It leaves them socially isolated. In terms of the nation, denying people with a disability meaningful employment detracts from our national productivity. It is one of the issues that I consider our greatest challenges as a nation if we want to maintain a standard of living for all Australians. Further, it forces people with a disability to rely on a support pension and increases the welfare bill. I think it is a very sad reflection on our community when each year, as the federal budget is considered, industry leaders, economists, news editorials and others call for a tightening of the welfare budget. They want to target some of the most vulnerable people in our community to make budget savings. I think this is really inappropriate and it is time we begin to look at ways we can remove some of the barriers to employment for people with a disability.

Welfare for people with a disability should not be an issue if we address these barriers—except that the government continues to ignore and continues to fail to act on the many posi-

tive recommendations that have been made in the plethora of reports that have been completed to address employment disadvantage in the disability sector. While it is a fact that not every person receiving a disability support pension is able to work, many want to but are unable to find suitable employment or are insufficiently supported to do so. It should therefore be a priority for government to dismantle the identified barriers to employment for people with a disability. Those barriers have been outlined in the National Disability Strategy consultation report, *Shut out: the experience of people with disabilities and their families in Australia*, which was released in 2009. The same barriers were also identified in 2005 in the National Inquiry into Employment and Disability by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. That report revealed the exact same barriers that were identified in 2009. But very little has been done to dismantle those barriers, and it seems to me that there is a lack of commitment to do so.

Despite inquiry after inquiry, effective action just has not been evident. While the government spends millions of dollars encouraging the private sector to employ people with a disability—many of us each year attend a special event in Parliament House that acknowledges and awards companies in the private sector, largely, who do the right thing and employ people with a disability—we see no effort made to address the declining numbers of people with a disability employed in the Public Service, and those numbers continue to go south. Employment of people with a disability in the Australian Public Service continues its downward trend, declining from 5.5 per cent in 1996 to 3.1 per cent in 2010. Surely if we want private sector employers to provide employment opportunities for people with a disability then the public sector should be taking a leading role and setting an example. The government needs to have something to say about that. The explanation in the Public Service Commissioner's statistical bulletin for this decline is that it may be due to 'a reduction in the amount of lower level positions available'; yet a cursory glance at the report's statistics reveals a relatively similar, though declining, number of people with disability across all levels of employment. The comment is also an example of the persistent perception that people with a disability are somehow less capable, a perception which can be refuted by the statistics in the very same report.

With such misconceptions continuing to persist within the public sector, how can government expect to address the concerns held by the private sector employers? Government needs to work harder to dispel the misconceptions of the cost of workplace adjustments to the employee acting as a disincentive. Data from the United States cited in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report estimates that most workplace modifications will cost less than US\$500. Such a small outlay can easily pay for itself, considering that the statistics gathered by the Australian Network on Disability show that, on average, employees with a disability have few occupational health and safety incidents, have productivity rates equal to or greater than other workers and have superior attendance records.

Other major obstacles identified in the *Shut out* report include the inflexibility of the disability support pension and the cost of travelling to work. Indeed, the accessibility of public transport for people with a disability remains a persistent issue. The *Shut out* report gives an example of 'R', who spends \$400 a week in taxi fares to get to work, as his disability prevents him from taking public transport. Because of this expense, 'R' would be almost in the same income position if he were simply to stay on the disability support pension. But compounding

the financial disincentive to work is the loss of the pensioner concession card, through the loss of the disability support pension when an individual works for more than 15 hours a week, and the loss of the healthcare card or subsidised PBS medications, which can be financially crippling.

There was another fine work undertaken by Curtin University to demonstrate the cost-benefit of disability and injury programs to re-enter the workforce. That study, in 2002-03, showed that it cost the Australian government on average just over \$3,000 for each person assisted by programs to re-enter the workforce, with a net lifetime benefit to government per individual of \$128,000. These figures speak for themselves.

The inflexibility of the disability support pension does need to be addressed, as well as other identified barriers to ensure that the cost of working is not financially prohibitive. There is no evidence that there is any meaningful work being done to remove the barriers to employment for people with a disability. Further delay by the Commonwealth in setting a lead in public sector employment is inexcusable. The barriers faced by people with a disability are well documented. If government is sincere about wanting to open the door to employment opportunity, it could act immediately to help people with disabilities surmount those barriers.

I have been in touch with the previous Commissioner for Public Sector Employment and they have to do a report every year. It would not be too difficult for the government to mandate or have some kind of program to ensure that those rates of employment of people with a disability are lifted. If contracting out is a problem, which was indicated to me in some previous discussions with the public sector commissioner, we should be ensuring that those contracts provide that a certain number of people with a disability have to be employed. Once again, I thank my colleagues for their cooperation. I commend this motion to the House. *(Time expired)*

Ms HALL (Shortland) (11.12 am)—I would like to commence my contribution to the debate on workforce participation for people with a disability by congratulating the member for Pearce on moving this motion. It is a very important issue and one that is very, very close to my heart because, prior to becoming a member of parliament, I worked for 12 years helping people with disability get into the workforce—that was my job. I find it quite sad that there has been report after report making recommendations over a very long period of time and yet nothing seems to change. In fact, things seem to get a little worse all the time.

I will start by discussing public sector employment. That was not where I initially intended to start, but when I worked in the area of disability there was a fantastic scheme operating, whereby people would undertake work experience in the public sector and, if a job became available in that area and they were qualified to perform it, that person would automatically get that job. It circumvented a lot of other procedures that existed at that time in the public sector. I must say, over a period of time I was very successful in assisting a number of people with disabilities into the workforce and to find work in the public sector. The member for Pearce mentioned that one of the problems was low-level jobs. Some of those people that I assisted into the public sector are now working at EL2 level—so they are obviously very, very capable people. But, on the other hand, some of the people who had more visible disabilities were moved out of the public sector. That happened in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

One public sector case in particular was of a young girl who was hearing impaired and also diabetic. She was working in Social Security at the time. It was determined that everybody in

Social Security had to be able to work in every job. Because of this young girl's hearing impairment, there were some jobs that she could not actually undertake, and she was made redundant. I hate to inform the House of this, but within three months of leaving there this young woman was dead. I am quite sure that she would not have died if she had remained in employment. I mentioned that she had diabetes; she had a 'hypo'. She was at home. She was isolated. She was not making contact with people on a regular basis. It was a very sad thing that happened.

It is important that we recognise the abilities of people and not look at their disabilities. For a long time some very, very dedicated people have been working hard to see whether they can address this issue. There have been a number of good programs over the years. The current government has put in place the National Disability Strategy, which COAG signed off on in February. I want to see some results out of that disability strategy. I want to see more people with disabilities given the opportunity that every other person has. From the Year of the Disabled back in the eighties until now, I do not think a heck of a lot has happened. There have been spurts, where an investment has been made in an attempt to address the barriers. Government works very hard to encourage the private sector to employ people with disabilities but, as the previous member stated, each year, when the budget is brought down, there are calls to tighten up on the budget and to crack down on welfare payments.

Every so often, when you open up a newspaper there will be comment about too many people being on disability support. There is also talk about the barriers in moving people from the disability support pension to the workforce. A person with a significant disability who works 15 hours can be put in a position where they are financially disadvantaged. Having worked with people with disabilities, I know how keen and committed they are to work. To them, that is the goal out there; they want to be like everybody else. When you meet a person, one of the first things you say to them is 'What do you do?' A person with a disability who cannot obtain work but who may have the skills cannot go from being a person with skills to a person who is working. They say, 'Oh, well. I'm sorry but I actually don't have a job at the moment; I'm on a disability support pension.' That reinforces the stereotype that exists.

I was privileged to talk to a young man who came to my office a month or so back. He was an outstanding athlete. He had an accident and is now a C56 quadriplegic. He is a very bright young man and is currently attending university, where he is doing computer technology. At the same time, he is also very interested in setting up a consultancy where he can give advice to local government and the private sector on how they can make areas more accessible to people with disabilities. He is happy to set up this consultancy for free. He wants to give that advice to people so that access is improved for people with disabilities. By improving access, he can make it easier for them to study at university. He could only attend one of the campuses at the University of Newcastle because of access issues. Better access to campuses for people with disabilities enables them to study, which in turn enables them to enter the workforce. This young man is addressing in a very tangible way the barriers that exist in relation to employment.

This is an issue that has been addressed so many times. The current ministers are totally committed to seeing that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as every other person. Both Minister Macklin and Minister Ellis are both committed to seeing that people with disabilities are not discriminated against and that they do have the opportunity to enjoy

the same things in life that every other person has the opportunity to enjoy. Minister Ellis is looking at employment programs which I hope will embrace some of the issues that have been and will be raised in this debate.

It is only by the actions of this parliament, by showing leadership, that we can make the lives of people with a disability better. It cannot be endorsed that people with disability are discriminated against in relation to employment on economic grounds, because this is a wasted resource. These people have ability. They can contribute to the economic activity of our nation, and refusing to give them that opportunity, by discrimination remaining entrenched in society in the way it is and has been for so many years, means that Australia is losing a valuable resource. As a nation I do not think we can afford to do that. We are impoverishing the lives of some Australians simply because they have a disability. Let us look at their ability. Let us give them the opportunity. I thank the member for bringing this motion to the House.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (11.22 am)—I want to begin, firstly, by commending the member for Pearce and the member for Gilmore for moving a motion that I think has great scope in terms of what it seeks to get government to do. I know the member for Pearce and the member for Gilmore have long records as advocates for the disadvantaged and people who need assistance in our community, and I want to praise them on that record; it is something to be very proud of.

There is no doubt that society and civilisation are judged by the way they treat their weaker citizens. It is something that has been said often throughout history, and I welcome motions that call the attention of government back to core priorities of addressing the issues of our weakest citizens. I want to say at the beginning that I do think there has been government failure and systemic failure over a number of years in disability services. Whilst there has been report after report calling for change, progress and different approaches, there are some barriers. Although, it is not all bleak. I think we are better at what we do today than we have been for a long time: there is more recognition and more time given. But when you consider that the federal budget takes so much out of society—we take \$117 billion off in individual income taxation and \$114 billion goes back in terms of welfare payments, human services, and a lot of that is pensions, and disability support pensions are part of that—there is plenty of money in our system to do better for the people who need us the most.

I want to report a story, which I think is important to draw to the attention of this House. In New South Wales we have a government which is at perhaps the lowest moral and ethical point that we have seen in New South Wales in living history, and it was a salient reminder of the failure of government in disability services to watch the Minister for Disability Services, Graham West, a fine man with a lot of integrity who went into politics with a vision for disability services, to help people get into the workplace and to do things for them, interviewed on *Stateline* by Quentin Dempster, and I want to report it here today. I turned on the Friday news, and the Minister for Disability Services in New South Wales, a young man with fine motivations, sat there in front of Quentin Dempster, a seasoned ABC veteran, and said to him that he was resigning as minister because there was nothing he could achieve in government for people with disabilities in New South Wales.

Quentin Dempster stopped for about a minute. I stopped for a minute. Quentin asked him again, and he said, ‘Yes, Quentin, I don’t believe I can achieve anything through government

for people with disabilities in New South Wales.' That is a stunning indictment, a damning indictment, of all government in Australia and New South Wales today. As Quentin pointed out to the minister, if the New South Wales minister with the legislative and bureaucratic power and with the money at his disposal cannot achieve anything or make a difference, then what hope do we have? He was resigning of course to head up a third-party advocacy group for people with disabilities. But he could not achieve anything as the minister. That was something that made me pause and reflect on why we are all here and what we do in government today.

There is no doubt that in this motion there are several very important components of what we do need to do and focus on as a government. Federally the government seems to be engaged in a whole range of activities which may have desirable goals and outcomes, including telecommunications companies and pink batts, but we will be judged and measured by how we treat our weakest citizens. The member for Pearce made a great case just before about the disability support pension and the welfare mechanism and how they relate to getting people back into work, where they can have dignity and self-worth and where they can pursue social and other goals through their employment. The disability support pension has become a disincentive. There is a component and an attitude in it where people cannot achieve the work they desire, and that is of course an undesirable outcome. It is something that needs reform.

I want to quote the example of the Endeavour Foundation, which has taken over Cumberland Industries' Pak-It-Rite and Sew-It-Rite in my electorate of Mitchell. With the member for Wentworth, I had the opportunity to tour many of the fine manufacturing and other facilities that they run. They employ some 200 people with disabilities in my electorate. It is a fantastic experience to go into those facilities, meet with the employees and listen to their individual stories of achieving dignity through their workplace. I welcome the remarks of the member for Shortland, but I want to differ from her slightly on one point. I do not see this from a collectivist point of view. Each of those individuals had an individual and different story, a unique story about how work had benefited them, their family, their household and their ability to do something positive for themselves. It is really enlightening to go there and see how that works and how it operates.

The federal government supports that. The Hon. Bill Shorten, who was the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, visited my electorate and did a very fine job of speaking with all of the employment providers, and I want to thank him and the government for sustaining Cumberland Industries through a very difficult period, ensuring that not one job placement was lost through the company's difficulties. That was a good thing that the government did, and every one of those employees and their families is grateful.

I also want to note the government's \$6.8 million pilot program trialling incentives to provide jobs for people with a disability, which started on 1 March last year. This kind of thing has a lot of merit. The wage subsidies of up to \$3,000 for jobs which are in place for 26 weeks do make a big difference. That is the kind of scheme and innovation that we should be pursuing, and I think there is scope for us to do a lot more.

The *Shut out* report notes several areas of concern, and I think there is a lot of merit in it. I particularly want to jump to transport for a moment. Access to transport, participation in critical activities, employment, education and health care is difficult, if not impossible. In north-western Sydney transport is a major barrier for all of us but for people with disabilities in par-

ticular. That is why the New South Wales Liberal Party is so committed to building the north-west rail line and funding better rail infrastructure. This barrier disadvantages our most vulnerable group more than any other group in our society.

I also want to note that the New South Wales government changed bus routes across Sydney recently, in the last year. There is a most compelling argument against that, when the bus is the only form of alternative transport in north-west Sydney to the car. When that service was cancelled, a young girl who had worked for a number of years and caught the bus had no way to access her place of employment and, in spite of all our efforts, it was very difficult to keep her in employment. This is the kind of real impact that people in government do not really think about when changes come. So there is plenty of merit in the call for access to transport in this motion before us.

I think there are also many widespread misconceptions and stereotypes influencing the attitudes and behaviour of employers, recruiters and government. I think the member for Pearce made a very eloquent pitch—that government is perhaps most mystifying in its intransigence in employing people with disabilities. The government has ‘led’ the way in terms of maternity leave and other areas, we have bloated bureaucracies all across the states and territories, yet we are not best-practice employers at a governmental level in terms of people with disabilities. I think it is a challenge to every member here, it is a challenge to every level of government in this country and it is something that we ought to be very concerned about when we think about what we want our governments to do in general.

I do think this is a worthwhile motion. Calling on the government to provide leadership in improving participation rates in the workforce of people with a disability is, I think, something that we should put at the centre of our focus as a nation. This is not a political or partisan motion, but it does have many different components that need our attention. We need to really look at where the problems are and what is happening in a non-partisan way. That is why I think the former parliamentary secretary for disabilities, Bill Shorten, the member for Maribyrnong, was a good advocate in that role. When he came to my electorate and toured our Castle Hill facility, he was well received. He lifted the profile of this vital portfolio area. Those kinds of ministers, who have a proactive approach to this portfolio, are very welcome. By contrast, we witnessed with dismay the resignation of Graham West, the state minister. He could not make a difference in disability services, and that is the other side of that coin.

I do not think we should allow such a situation to emerge in our society today at any level of government, state or federal, and that means a renewed commitment from this House and from its members to seek the best for the weakest in our society, including people with disabilities, to ensure they have the dignity of work and the ability to participate in our workforce.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (11.32 am)—First of all, I thank the member for Pearce for bringing this motion before the House. I will add my comments to those of others here that it is encouraging to see the level of interest and competition to speak on the member’s motion, and it reflects the fact that there are many of us in this House who are well aware of the importance of this issue. I should also acknowledge that the member for Pearce was the minister for this area for a period in the late nineties, and I acknowledge her contribution on this important issue during that time as well.

Not surprisingly, I do not entirely agree with the member's characterisation of this government's approach to the area. I think it has been given an unprecedented level of significance and priority both by the current government and in our previous term from 2007. In particular, I think that it is important to recognise that there is the National Disability Strategy in place from 2010 to 2020. I just want to take a few moments to put some of the significance of that strategy on the record before I take the opportunity to talk about some important local initiatives in my area around this.

I should indicate that the National Disability Strategy is intended to establish a high-level policy framework, and the idea of that is to give coherence and guidance to government activity across both mainstream and disability-specific areas of public policy. I think some of the issues that have been raised by other members in their contributions around issues such as transport indicate why it is important that such a national strategy crosses not only the disability-specific areas of public policy but, more broadly, all areas. It is also designed to drive improved performance in those mainstream services in delivering outcomes for people with a disability.

For me, the reason I particularly welcome that is that I have dealt with a number of people who have what you would call periodic or episodic types of illnesses that create the disability—for example, schizophrenia. They are high-functioning, university-qualified professionals but, when they have an episode, hit the wall and need some time out, the system does not cope very well with those sorts of circumstances. In particular, mainstream services such as Centrelink and so forth really struggle to deal with people who do not fit what might be termed the classic interpretations of having a disability. So I think it is important that we give that focus not only to the disability-specific services but also to services across the board in the way that they interact with people with a disability.

There are strategies also designed to give visibility to the issues, and I think that is important—that we never think that the job is done and we can stop talking about this, because that is when we all know that progress slides back into stagnation. We need to constantly be talking about these issues, and that is why I think the motion before the House today is so important. In particular, the other important aspect of the National Disability Strategy is the fact that it acknowledges that not all people with a disability are alike. There are a wide variety of both forms of disability and degrees of disability, and the 'one size fits all model' is probably the least useful one. So this strategy looks at a social model of disability. It recognises that attitudes, practices and structures are disabling and can prevent people from enjoying economic participation, social inclusion and equality. That is not an inevitable result of the individual's impairment; it is a result of the disability of the systems with which they come into contact. Those are really important principles to drive the National Disability Strategy.

I want to take the second half of my time to talk about two areas where I am quite optimistic that, if they are well utilised, we can have a good impact on some of the issues confronting people with a disability in entering the workforce and participating in our community. One is the National Broadband Network. I notice my colleague the member for Gilmore, who is a great sceptic, I think it would be fair to say—

Mrs Gash—Absolutely.

Ms BIRD—about the National Broadband Network. She would not be surprised to hear I am exactly the opposite. I think that in 20 years time people will be sitting here reading the

member for Gilmore's speeches and saying: 'What on earth was she thinking about? She was so out of date.' They will look at my speeches and say, 'What great foresight and understanding of where the future was heading.'

The reason I think the National Broadband Network and fibre to the home are so important can be encapsulated in some of the major projects that have been rolled out in the UK. I would encourage members to have a look at some of the projects that have been directed towards social housing in the UK with fibre-to-the-home services. In particular, there have been a few aimed at people in facilities for the aged and also people in economically and socially disadvantaged areas, with a couple of them particularly targeting people with a disability. The programs did not just provide the infrastructure and the technology to connect people in their homes; they also provided education and social connection services so that people were able to then utilise the technology. That is an important thing for us in this country to take out of their lessons.

What they were able to do, for example, is significantly increase the workforce participation. If you do have somebody who has a social disability, either through a mental illness or a physical disability that makes them less keen to be out there—as the former member said, spending \$400 on taxi fares and so forth—the capacity for some of those people to run either home-based businesses or consulting work with good-quality technology infrastructure in the home was a really significant outcome for many of them.

I would draw to the attention of members the fact that the current inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications, which I chair, into the National Broadband Network has a reference in it to social and community access and equality. I do not want the voices of people who are aged, infirm or disabled—and who could utilise this if we do it right and get the supports in place—not to be heard because there are whole lot of other very technical and specialist and high-profile advocates in the area. I do want to hear those voices. Indeed, we have already had some good evidence from aged-care providers about the capacity.

There are some great programs out there. For example, one of my aged-care providers was telling me about an exercise program. The technology is sort of like Google Street where you can walk around and look at a street. They get footage of the hometowns of NESB people. They encourage them to interact with them. You can walk your old hometown street and have a look at what is there in modern times. There are some activities and programs that really encourage people to get active and are also good for brain function. So I encourage those sorts of ideas being brought forward. I also know from many local people who have talked to me who have issues with mental health that the capacity to do more work from home is a really significant opportunity for them.

The other area is in social enterprise. I want to highlight that, through the job program that the previous minister spoke about in his own electorate, there were two programs funded in my electorate for people with disabilities to gain employment. They have been tremendously successful. One is Renewable Recyclers, which is a new business of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Australia. I went to their opening the other day. They take e-waste, which is a major problem for all of us—they take computers in particular—recycle them and onsell the products. They had a group of people working there who could not get bigger smiles on their faces. They were just so thrilled to have the opportunity to get into work and to be doing something

constructive in their community. It was a great, win-win match between an environmental issue and a work access issue for people with a disability. The other one that was funded I had previously visited: the Mission Australia Soft Landing project, which is a mattress recycling program. It targets people with a disability. There was a gentleman there who is profoundly deaf and had never had the opportunity to work at all. He was really thrilled to have that opportunity. It is another great social enterprise.

I think these models are so good because they are sustainable. They do not have to keep coming back to government for money; they are real businesses. I want to acknowledge two long-term ones in my area—Greenacres and the Flagstaff Group—who have been doing this sort of work for decades with great success. I always enjoy the opportunity to visit and acknowledge the work that, as the member for Gilmore would know, they do so effectively in our community. I commend them.

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (11.42 am)—I rise to support the comments of my colleague the member for Pearce and some of the comments from the member for Cunningham encouraging the need for innovations to improve the participation rate of people with a disability. Regardless of what has been delivered by successive governments in previous years, there is no denying that there remain significant obstacles to the employment of a person with disabilities. My admiration goes to all those working in the field who have to deal with the frustrations of battling mistruth, prejudice and ignorance when advocating the cause of people with disabilities. Their effort is made more difficult as they first have to negate those perceptions before they can move into meaningful negotiations for encouraging the placement of persons in the workforce.

My colleague the member for Pearce has succinctly described the circumstances under which this is occurring, the effect of which has resulted in a decrease in the uptake of people with a disability into the workforce. While there has been an increase in the participation rate of able-bodied persons of something like 80 per cent since 1993, the participation rate of those with a disability has only increased by 53 per cent. This is a glaring gap that needs to be addressed urgently, and it is the government's role to show leadership and to give direction on the issue.

My colleague has itemised the ways this can be done. In the context of addressing the issue of increasing the rates of workforce participation, the Business Council of Australia, in its 2011-12 budget submission, argues:

Improving incentives for participation through the reduction of high effective marginal tax rates for the worst-impacted groups must also be a fundamental feature of strategies to boost participation. In addition, the ongoing growth of transfers such as the Disability Support Pension (which represents the government's fifth largest spending program) has been widely acknowledged as unsustainable both fiscally and in terms of its impact on the incentives for workforce participation.

In the context of arguing for the establishment of an independent agency responsible for evaluating government programs with a view to better value for money, the submission suggests the disability support pension is an obvious target as a cost offset. While I am sure their intentions were misinterpreted, such imprudent comments do send out the wrong signals by stigmatising those with disabilities. But, at least in principle, the submission of the Business Council of Australia backs the thrust of this motion and the benchmarks my colleague has suggested are worthy of serious consideration.

People with a disability are doing it tough—socially, economically and emotionally. They need our support and suggesting that they are somehow unworthy of such support by cutting income and other services is oppressive and inhumane. This is not how I perceive our society to be. Certainly have a go at those who rot the system and, if it is proved, take away their benefits—but do not condemn the genuine cases on the basis of a few bad apples. The fact is that something can be done and should be done but the government must lead the way. Each individual has something to contribute and allowing them to participate on a level playing field adds to their sense of worth and wellbeing. The results in adopting a proactive regime will bring tangible benefits both to the individual and to the society within which they reside.

Clearly, this is a subject that is complex in approach but the aim of the motion is to encourage government to take the lead. We do not want to encourage a level of second class citizenship. Neither do we want to encourage welfare dependency. We want to encourage dignity and pride, with inclusion and the satisfaction of having contributed as part of the team. To this end the findings of the National Disability Strategy Consultation Report titled *Shut out* is illuminating. A case has been put that more needs to be done in the workplace by engendering tolerance towards those with disabilities, with specific policies to improve access. We need to view things differently to the way we have in the past and we need to approach this challenge with greater flexibility and a preparedness to entertain new concepts with an open mind.

I would also like to acknowledge the work in the Gilmore electorate of Flagstaff, Essential Personnel, Northcott, the Spastic Centre, Interchange Shoalhaven, Life without Barriers, Independence Ulladulla, CareSouth, House with No Steps, Mullala Nursery, Slice of Life, Community Options and myriad other associated entities helping the disabled.

To all those involved in disability services and especially their caring and dedicated staff, I salute you. I would just like to see their work made a little easier by a government prepared to introduce new initiatives like those outlined in the motion. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (11.46 am)—I thank the member for Pearce for introducing this motion on disability employment participation and acknowledge the other speakers who have shown their support for something I know the member for Pearce has been committed to for many years, and that is improving the lives of people with disabilities.

Perhaps one of the only times you can really make a difference in this area is in the good times. Prior to the global financial crisis we had 20 years of substantial boom, and it appears that we may be entering a boom period again, when workers will be short and growth will be high and the amount of money flowing through the economy will be quite reasonable. This is the time when you have a short window to mainstream the very ideas and the very position of people with disabilities in our society and in our workforce. If we do not do that in the good times, and if we do not work on this as a mainstream issue, we risk a situation, when things slow down again and the workforce starts to soften, that people with disabilities will be last in, first out. That would be a great tragedy.

I have employed over a number of years people with disabilities—people who had incredible difficulty getting into the workforce. I know firsthand how many changes you sometimes have to make in your workplace to make this work, but I also know absolutely that these people have been some of the best workers I have ever had. They have contributed in extraordinary ways to my office. They can change the very character of an office. I would recommend

to any business that they seriously look at how they can provide opportunity for some people who are absolutely desperate to work and have the skills to work and want to contribute greatly if they have the chance.

We are doing things in government for people with disabilities; in fact, we have made quite a few changes in the last few years. There is of course the National Disability Strategy, which is the 10-year plan, beginning in 2010 and going through to 2020, which aims to put support for people with disability into the centre of the agenda for workforce participation, housing and all mainstream services. This is a very good start, and I would expect there to be genuine bipartisan support for this work over the next 10 years.

We are very much at the beginning of this. There are people who in other fields you would call low-hanging fruit, people who are absolutely ready, willing and able to work now. One would hope that when we get through this 10-year period those people will be in the mainstream, but we will still have further to go. We will always have further to go on this. It is not something that is ever going to finish; there will always be another range of people who for various reasons are excluded from mainstream participation in society.

We have also introduced the National Disability Agreement which provides more than \$6 billion over 5.5 years—it has effectively doubled federal funding to states and territories for disability services—but I should say that the report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that the number of people receiving disability services has also doubled in five years. So the money might be doubled but so has the number of people accessing the services. The compassionate reasons—that a person should live a life with dignity—should be enough. But I am going to raise some of the economic arguments for people who are not persuaded by that argument. Having said that, I know that everyone in this room today is persuaded by the compassion and dignity arguments.

The number of people with severe or profound disability is predicted to increase over the next 40 years from 1.4 million to 2.9 million Australians. The projected growth rate in the population with severe or profound disability will outstrip the general population growth rate by two to three times over the next 70 years. At the same time, the ratio of formal carers will decrease by more than half over the next 50 years. We should all recognise that wherever there is a person with a disability there is quite often a family that surrounds them who also, unless we can do much better than we are doing, will carry an overly large burden in many ways. Families and other carers play a significant role in supporting people with disability. In 2003, there were approximately 2.5 million people providing informal care to people with disability or old age. This is a phenomenal number. I commend the motion to the House.

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.

Humanitarian Issues During the War in Sri Lanka

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mr Laurie Ferguson**:

That this House notes that:

- (1) the Sri Lankan Government declared an end to the war in Sri Lanka in May 2009;

- (2) on 22 June 2010 the United Nations Secretary-General appointed a panel of experts to advise him on accountability concerning any alleged violations of international human rights and humanitarian law during the final stages of the conflict in Sri Lanka;
- (3) the panel:
 - (a) officially began its work on 16 September 2010; and
 - (b) is looking into the modalities, applicable international standards and comparative experience with regard to accountability processes, taking into account the nature and scope of any essential foundation for durable peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka;
- (4) through the panel, the Secretary-General expects to enable the United Nations to make a constructive contribution in this regard;
- (5) on 18 October 2010 the panel invited individuals and organisations to make submissions in respect of its work, and will accept submissions until 15 December 2010;
- (6) in light of the panel's review, Australia's close ties with Sri Lanka and continuing reports by several reputable human rights organisations, such as the International Crisis Group, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Elders, as well as governments including in Britain, there has been a call for an international independent investigation into war crimes committed by all parties during the final stages of the war in Sri Lanka; and
- (7) Australia, as a respected and responsible member of the international community and Asian neighbourhood, can help accomplish better outcomes in Sri Lanka in the return towards a civil society, particularly for the Tamil minority, and that such actions:
 - (a) would further assist with the creation of durable solutions to what has been a humanitarian crisis on Australia's doorstep in Sri Lanka; and
 - (b) could also help partially alleviate the flow of asylum seekers from Sri Lanka.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa—Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services) (11.52 am)—Last week I had approaches from the Sri Lankan acting high commissioner and from a number of people in my electorate. I will be meeting a delegation of Sinhalese tomorrow. I want to say at the outset that—if there is any need to make this clear—I am not an apologist for the Tamil Tigers. As the US Department of State noted:

The LTTE continued to control large sections of the north and east and engaged in politically motivated killings; ... disappearances; torture; arbitrary arrest and detention.

During that period they also forcibly enlisted young males predominantly—that was one of the reasons for the fallout within their group between the north and the east—and engaged in a number of murders that nobody would condone. This is all apart from the realities of the 1983 massacres of 3,000 Tamils, which precipitated part of this reaction. Some people defending the Sri Lankan regime say that anyone who is critical and questioning is an apologist, a stooge or a flunky for the Tamil Tigers. That is a superficial analysis and a simplistic position.

I believe there is a need for international oversight of the concluding period of the civil war in Sri Lanka. When I look at the phalanx of people around the world who see a need for this—and I do not agree with the Sri Lankan government or the more chauvinistic Sinhalese elements—I do not think we can say that David Cameron is a fool or that he has not examined the issue when he talks about the need for an inquiry. I do not think we can accuse the European community of that either, when they have basically taken away Sri Lanka's trade advantages on the issue of human rights.

I do not think that the United States Department of State's ambassador, Patricia Butenis, quoted in WikiLeaks exposes, is necessarily a simpleton. She noted that there is no historical precedent for a government looking at the actions of its own troops and went on to say that the difficulty in Sri Lanka was exacerbated—this is her view; I am not necessarily her mouthpiece but I will just quote her view in WikiLeaks—by the involvement of President Rajapakse and the elite in Sri Lanka in the conclusion of the civil war, which made it even more difficult to avoid the need for outside oversight. Desmond Tutu talked of:

... a determined effort for accountability for past crimes by all parties to the conflict.

As we have seen, there has been a refusal by, amongst others, the International Crisis Group, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to participate in the government's own LLRC inquiry.

I say that this is not just an approach by a Tamil diaspora. I have always had the view that it is a lot easier for diasporas around the world to be very radical about events back in their homeland because they are not going to get a bullet in the head, but this is obviously not a campaign totally controlled or manipulated by the diaspora around the world. People have examined the issues and they have come to a conclusion that there is a need to look at abuses on both sides of this conflict.

I have also taken the opportunity to look at the government of Sri Lanka's response to the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights. I have to say that their own words are disconcerting and worrying and only add to the case as far as I am concerned. They go into an attack upon NGOs, saying simply that any NGOs are basically out there to 'perpetually keep themselves in business'. This is the Sri Lankan government's approach to NGOs that are critical of what is happening in the country. They also make the point that the expenditure is spent on overheads. If you are going to denigrate NGOs that are trying to help people, it really says something about your own case. When they look at the European Community, the Sri Lankan government's official response at Brussels talked about an attempt to 'achieve partisan political objectives'. They are saying that the European Community is motivated by those kinds of sentiments. They say that all of these groups that have refused to participate should come to Sri Lanka, come forward and give evidence to this committee. This is a committee which was appointed by the government and which gave thanks to the President for his 'directions', in their own words. That gives rise to real questioning of the degree of independence of the internal inquiry.

I note that there is talk there in criticism of the 18th amendment to the constitution, an amendment which centralises power in the government. There is talk about democracy and about how the President will have to recontest. There is this guarantee that, despite the concerns of people about centralisation of power and appointments in Sri Lanka, all is well because there is democracy. We know that the alternative candidate, General Fonseka, did not have a very nice outcome after that very disputed election. We know—this might be Tamil propaganda, but I think it is very close to the mark—that 27 members of the Rajapakse family have leading positions in the current regime.

I have to say that I also have read the submission of one group that went before this inquiry, the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Mannar. They have a very worrying list of concerns that they conveyed. They spoke of a lack of success in halting extrajudicial disappearances. They talked about continuing detention upon suspicion. I am not for a moment disput-

ing that a significant number of the leadership of the Tigers should basically be brought before courts and tried for their activities, but equally we believe the international community should have the right to examine the actions of military authorities during the conflict. But should these people be held for this period of time, isolated from families and—realistically—from the international community? That church submission talked about the need for permanent housing, the occupation of large parts of the area by the military, the militarisation of the administration in the north and east and the interference in regard to memorial services.

A Sinhalese constituent spoke to me yesterday and I understand that his sentiments are genuine. He sees a need for intermarriage. He sees a need for communities to be together and live in the same areas. He feels that the language law that was passed by the predominantly Sinhala administration was wrong. He does not support the current government. I understand why he believes that it is not necessarily bad for there to be a degree of Sinhala migration to the north and east. I think his sentiments are genuine. However, whether it is transmigration in Irian Jaya or the movement of populations around the world, where you have a defeated minority, there can be problems. I know people will say that, technically, the Tamils were not defeated but the Tigers were defeated, but many Tamils, genuine people like my Sinhala friend, believe that the current migration of people, the renaming of streets in the north with Sinhala names and the creation of Buddhist temples in places where there is not a significant Buddhist population—all these things—are a threat to their identity.

We have to be sensitive in any country, not just Sri Lanka. Where there is a minority and, historically, there have been rather extreme ethnic differences, to see what seems to be a government instigated movement of people to an area must cause alarm. I hear what the Sri Lankan government says about there being building opportunities there and people are going there for employment and Tamils live in Colombo. Maybe there is some truth in all of those things, but there has to be great sensitivity shown when people who have to establish their rights to language and a degree of say in their society face this kind of pressure.

I believe that the evidence is there that the Sri Lankan regime, unfortunately, cannot be trusted to engage in a genuine process of examination of military action that resulted in the killing of innocent civilians in the final period of the war. The report of this internal inquiry gives only two options: they were partisans of the Tigers or people trying to escape from them. This, again, is a judgment in advance; it is not an examination. Obviously some totally innocent civilians were murdered in those last few days. There needs to be an examination of these matters. (*Time expired*)

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (12.02 pm)—I am pleased to speak on this motion on humanitarian issues during the war in Sri Lanka. At the outset, I congratulate the member for Werriwa on bringing this motion to the parliament and for the measured way that he addressed it. I have always had high regard for the member for Werriwa's interest in human rights issues and migration issues. On this occasion he is quite passionate about his views as the issue stands now.

I come to this debate from a number of perspectives. One of them is the fact that I am the deputy chair of the Sri Lanka friendship group in this parliament and I have a keen interest in the issues. Like the member for Werriwa and others, I have had contact and lobbying from both sides of the Sri Lankan debate. This debate has been generated because for more than the past 26 years there has been a civil war in Sri Lanka. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam,

or LTTE, fought a strong war under their leader, Prabhakaran, to have a separate state in the north of Sri Lanka for the largely Tamil population. It was a brutal war with many atrocities—by both sides, might I say. The collateral damage of any war is the civilians. I do not for one moment absolve anyone on either side of blame. As I said, in a brutal war like this there will be casualties.

In Sri Lanka, my best friend is a Tamil gentleman. Not every Tamil is a LTTE sympathiser and not every Tamil is a supporter of a free state, as the member opposite pointed out. I will expand on that. The largest population of Tamils anywhere Sri Lanka is in Colombo. This demonstrates that there is free movement for the Tamil population throughout Sri Lanka. The LTTE has been proscribed in many parts of the world and was re-proscribed in the European Union just recently. This is an outlawed group. People come to see me and say, ‘Are you concerned about this and that?’ I say, ‘I am very concerned about the human rights and the issues with people in Sri Lanka, but if you are a supporter of the LTTE please do not try to raise that issue with me, because I think that when you come to Australia you’ve got to leave that behind. You come to Australia for a better life for you and your family, and we don’t want any ethnic wars in Australia or continued hostilities. People from the Balkans—the Serbs, the Croatians, et cetera—come to Australia and, yes, there are passionate issues. But you move on and start a new life, and please don’t have your children that you bring to Australia or that are born in Australia continue these hostilities from now to eternity. We are one of the most successful migration destinations in the world.’

The Sri Lankan Civil War finished in May 2009, when finally the remnants of the LTTE were cornered in the jungle and Prabhakaran and his remaining lieutenants were killed. Once that happened, something like 280,000 innocent civilians, who had been held captive largely because they were in the area under LTTE control, were liberated. Many of them were taken to camps. I sat in parliament here and listened to a number of speakers from the Tamil organisations who described these camps as concentration camps. That is in dispute; the fact is that most of these people—some 263,000 of those 280,000 people—have now been returned to their home areas. One of the reasons that some have not done so is that much of their land is still heavily mined. With the help of international groups, including some from Australia, they are gradually clearing the mines from the fields and the villages in those areas. When I went to Sri Lanka sometime ago, we went to the elephant orphanage, where there was an elephant which had had its leg blown off because it had trod on one of the mines. So the place is infested with mines still.

There is an argument that persecution has been a push factor for migration to Australia. An article in the Canadian newspaper the *Toronto Sun* by Brian Lilley from the parliamentary press bureau says:

To become a refugee, a claimant must prove they are in danger of torture, there is a risk to their life or meet other criteria showing they will face persecution in their home country.

That is the definition of a refugee. Migration by Tamils fleeing Sri Lanka ceased more than 12 months ago. The Australian ambassador to Sri Lanka, Kathy Klugman, congratulated the Sri Lankan navy for its success in stopping any further departures. But they continue to monitor this, because the latest successful apprehension was as recently as 19 February this year—the odd boat is still trying to leave. It is interesting that an article from the *Australian*, similar to the one I referred to before from the *Toronto Sun*, says that something like 70 per cent of those

who came to this country, once they got their protection visa—surprise, surprise!—returned Sri Lanka within 12 months. That says to me that there is quite an issue here. I have a letter sent to the Department of Foreign Affairs on 2 February this year. In it are the names of Mr Libasudeen Ibralebbe, who was after a renewal visa, Mrs Sivaanujah Sivaharan, who wanted a new passport, and Mrs Rageswary Somasundaram, who wanted a renewal of her passport. The letter also says, ‘These people, who have received protection visas, want to return to Sri Lanka.’ So much for their fleeing from persecution in fear for their lives!

This is where we have a problem in this country: we have to be very careful because there is evidence of people being arrested for trying to collect money here on behalf of the LTTE diaspora. Even though they have been defeated on their own shores, they continue offshore with this program of an independent homeland. Australia must not be allowed to support it. This is also happening in Canada and Europe. There was a request that the contents of the letter that I have here be made available to the foreign minister, the Hon. Kevin Rudd, and to the immigration minister, Chris Bowen. I hope it has been made available, because at the next estimates there will certainly be questions about their response to these people who claimed protection visas and who then, quite clearly within 12 months of receiving a protection visa, sought to renew their Sri Lankan passports to go home. That says to me that there could be a bit of a rort going on here.

Putting it again into context, the member opposite said that we need the UN involved. The UN is involved. Professor GL Peris has been at the United Nations over the last few weeks, seeking meetings with Ban Ki Moon on this issue. He has been explaining the government’s involvement in seeking the truth on this matter. In fact, in May 2010 the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission was established in Sri Lanka, and it has already had over 200 sittings. If Desmond Tutu is asking for this to happen—and it is no different from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission held in South Africa after the apartheid regime—all I can say to him is that he is correct: this should happen and it is happening. But we cannot in some patronising way say, ‘Well, you’d better send in the UN to take over the monitoring.’ That would be like us agreeing to the UN to come here to monitor our issues with Aborigines following international criticism. If Mr Tutu is so passionate about that, why isn’t he insisting that Mr Mugabe in Zimbabwe has the same treatment? Do not go for the easy targets. This is a democratically elected country. They had a recent election where Mr Rajapaksa was re-elected. I had some issues, like the member for Werriwa, with the fact that General Fonseka ended up on a sticky wicket after the elections. But a bad democracy is better than any other choice. It is about time that we moved on. Australia is a great friend of Sri Lanka, and we want to see Sri Lanka re-establish itself in the world from a human rights and also an economic point of view because they have the opportunity to do so.

I seek leave to table my documents.

Leave granted.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (12.12 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the motion. The long-running civil war in Sri Lanka, which has its roots in the colonial subjugation of that country by the British Empire, has been ongoing and has consumed the country for over 26 years. Estimates vary on the number of people killed during that war but the United Nations says that up to 100,000 people may have lost their lives. That is an incredible figure and represents

only the worst end of the terrible misery and suffering that has been experienced by the people of this island nation.

While the Sri Lankan government declared an end to the civil war in May 2009 and the LTTE, or Tamil Tigers, acceded defeat, this conflict cannot be said to be over yet. In fact, it is a reasonable prediction that some form of conflict will continue until the legitimate aspirations of the Tamil people to self-determination are addressed in some form or another. Self-determination is an inalienable right recognised in the UN charter and elaborated in article 1 of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Article 1 states:

All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

While we Greens support the work of the United Nations panel which, as this motion outlines, was established on 22 June 2010 by the United Nations Secretary-General, it is clear that there still needs to be an independent international investigation into the human rights abuses and war crimes, in particular in the final stages of the war. According to reports, the final months and years of this war were the most bloody and involved terrible human rights abuses. Such abuses must be properly investigated and a process towards justice must be achieved. The member for Werriwa in moving this motion made a very important point, and that is that independent observers, whether from the United Nations or elsewhere, must be granted full access to Sri Lanka to be able to investigate all alleged crimes and abuses fully.

According to Amnesty International's most recent written statement to the 16th session of the UN Human Rights Council released just last week:

Impunity persists for past violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law, and new and serious violations of human rights continue to be reported. In the two years since fighting ended in Sri Lanka evidence of serious violations and abuses by parties to the conflict has continued to mount, but the Sri Lankan Government has refused to acknowledge credible allegations of war crimes and other crimes under international law by its armed forces in the course of the conflict that ended in May 2009. It continues to subject people to enforced disappearances and torture and other ill-treatment. Thousands of people suspected of ties with the ... (LTTE) remain in detention without charge.

... ..

Some officials still claim publicly that there were no civilian casualties at all.

Australia must take some responsibility for this situation in Sri Lanka, one of our nearest neighbours, because we have failed to put any substantial pressure on Sri Lanka, either directly or in international forums. The Australian government's failure so far to reject the former head of Sri Lanka's navy, Thisara Samarasinghe, as a possible new ambassador to Australia is symptomatic of the weak way in which our country has historically responded to the Sri Lankan government's violation of human rights. Thisara Samarasinghe was in charge of the Sri Lankan navy when their ships were reported to have shelled civilian areas. Surely this makes him unfit to be ambassador. Australia needs to do more to stand up to the Sri Lankan government and protect the human rights of all peoples living in Sri Lanka, including the Tamil people. There needs to be a real independent war crimes investigation with teeth and Australia needs to get behind it.

In conclusion, it has been my privilege to have dealt with people who identify as Tamils living in Australia, in Victoria, from a variety of political and other perspectives, including the

Australian Tamil Congress. One thing that certainly does unite the approach they take now that they are living here in this country is their desire to see a peaceful Sri Lanka. Certainly the sense that I get is that they feel that for many years they have been seeking to draw attention, perhaps unsuccessfully, to what has been happening in their country. At the very least, we owe them now a full and independent investigation into the allegations. (*Time expired*)

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (12.18 pm)—The people of Sri Lanka have endured the pain and suffering of conflict for over 26 years, with estimates that more than 70,000 people have been killed and nearly half a million people have been displaced. The world breathed a collective sigh of relief when the fighting finally concluded in May 2009. As with all conflict, it is only when the shelling ceases and the bullets stop raining down from the rooftops and across the tea fields that accusations of inappropriate conduct during war can be analysed. However, there are dangers in such a process. The victims deserve to have their memories protected. The victors are often victims themselves. In an island as small as Sri Lanka, every member of the population will have friends and relatives who are civilian casualties of war. All will carry scars of the conflict, whether they are physical or emotional. All will embrace the virtue of justice but will understand the need for reconciliation—for bringing a divided people back together to embrace common goals, to live together in peace and security, to reach their full potential as individuals and as a united community, and to have the will of the majority represented and the needs of the minority protected.

It is with this backdrop that we have been witness over the past 20 months to claim and counterclaim of human rights abuses. United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, has established a panel of experts to investigate accountability processes with a view towards a durable peace and reconciliation. The Secretary-General is on record during the final stages of the conflict condemning the:

... reckless disrespect shown by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for the safety of civilians. As we have seen in ethnic based conflicts around the world from Rwanda to Spain to Kosovo, the only positive end result is a strong peace. The coalition agrees with the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, who said through a spokesman that a durable and lasting peace will only be achieved through a political solution that addresses the legitimate aspirations of all of Sri Lankan communities.

The Sri Lankan government is a democratically elected institution that deserves our diplomatic cooperation and respect. The Sri Lankan government must engage with those Tamils who do not promote violence or terrorism to further their agenda. It is important that discussions on legitimate power-sharing arrangements and the strengthening of the workability of the 13th amendment are pursued in the hope of achieving a lasting peace and reconciliation.

A political solution is essential for long-term peace to be developed in this long-suffering nation. And whilst serious allegations of human rights abuse anywhere in the world deserve to be aired and investigated, Sri Lanka is at a point in their development where they need the support of the international community to forge a real political solution to continue their process of reconciliation and rehabilitation. As strong local representatives of that international community, we must ensure that opportunities for further turmoil and conflict within Sri Lanka are not given oxygen. A sustainable peace, with all major parties achieving a seat at the table, must be the first priority during this delicate time in this nation's history.

Sri Lanka is a country of immense natural beauty, with a unique wealth of cultural history that beckons to be explored and enjoyed again. As a member of this parliament I express the sincere hope that all the people of Sri Lanka can be given the opportunity to fulfil their potential, to live in peace and to share the wonders of their nation with the rest of us.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas)—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.

Loss of the Malu Sara

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mr Entsch**:

That this House:

- (1) notes:
 - (a) the judgment of the Federal Court of Australia in *Comcare v The Commonwealth* (FCA 1331), and the report of the Queensland Coroner, *Inquest into the loss of the Malu Sara*, and in particular that:
 - (i) the Court found that the respondent admitted liability;
 - (ii) the Coroner found significant aspects of the investigation into the incident were severely flawed; and
 - (iii) a number of agencies of both the Queensland Government and the Commonwealth Government were strongly criticised for their involvement in events leading up to and during the incident; and
 - (b) that the Court fined the respondent \$242 000, the maximum penalty;
- (2) in light of both the judgment and the Coroner's report, calls on the Government to:
 - (a) legislate to establish a Trust for the benefit of the families of the victims to commemorate the tragic loss;
 - (b) transfer the fine imposed by the Court to the Trust, as well as allocate additional funds to provide continuing financial support to the victims' families and provide a lasting legacy to the community;
 - (c) fully examine the Court's judgment, including the contractors and others named in the report of the Queensland Coroner into the same incident; and
 - (d) construct appropriate memorials on Badu Island and Thursday Island to properly commemorate this tragic event and provide respectful places for the families of the victims to pay their respects and remember their loved ones;
- (3) strongly encourages the Government to ensure that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's contract and tendering procedures are fully reviewed to ensure that lapses such as this do not occur again; and
- (4) expresses its deep sympathy to the victims of this tragedy.

Mr ENTSCHE (Leichhardt) (12.23 pm)—At noon on 14 October 2005, the *Malu Sara* left Sabai Island in the Torres Strait for a four-hour journey to Badu Island. I think it is fair to say that the people on board had no idea of the fate that lay before them. However, I know that there were serious concerns—particularly expressed by the skipper—prior to leaving. In fact, he requested that he be able to stay back until the following day because of weather conditions. Unfortunately, his superior officer on Thursday Island insisted that he leave immedi-

ately on that journey; 16 hours later that boat had disappeared completely and the five people on board had drowned. Sadly, only one body has ever been found. It was rightly reported that there was a lot of pressure on him to go at that stage and his knowledge of the area was ignored. In forcing him to do so, there were some serious concerns about the seaworthiness of the vessel and concerns about the certification for its use in open seas.

The Queensland State Coroner, Michael Barnes, stated that the circumstances of the *Malu Sara* were some of the most wretched he had ever been exposed to. The ship had been commissioned without a GPS, a two-way radio or appropriate maps. A marine supplier who was involved asked why the boat that would be used by an Indigenous crew was not fitted with up-to-date equipment, and he was told by a departmental officer, 'They won't be needing that. These guys are two generations behind and they won't be able to use it.' Comments like this quite frankly make you sick in the stomach.

An experienced boatbuilder who tendered to build the *Malu Sara* and its five sister ships said that the project was certainly not properly funded. He reported that the project was so underfunded from the word go that they could not possibly have vessels that would do the job safely for the price that was allowed by the department of immigration at the time. Ultimately, the watertight compartments built into the craft by another firm were not properly sealed, and there is evidence that it was so unseaworthy that it was completely unsuitable for the purpose, and it was always going to sink. It was only a matter of when.

The tragedy is that these people could have been saved. Right from the beginning, when they first got into trouble at about four o'clock in the afternoon and calls were made to the manager on Thursday Island, they were initially told by the manager to continue on the journey. He then went off to a social engagement and remained there for the greater part of the rest of the evening. Calls were then made to the police station and, instead of going to look for this fellow, the police sergeant at the time decided to defer to the manager. After many calls on the mobile phone, eventually he found the manager late in the evening and the manager basically said, 'Oh, it's all right. We always get these sorts of calls.' He did not even bother to initiate calls until he went into the office at nine o'clock the next morning. By that stage these people were well and truly dead.

You can understand that recently when there was a court hearing on this it was determined that the department was grossly negligent and was subsequently fined the maximum penalty of \$240,000. For five years the families have had to fight to try to get some sort of closure and some sort of compensation. Unfortunately, they have had to go through the legal system, and the value of the lives of these people has been judged on their income from social welfare, from CDEP. Subsequently the payments have been less than adequate. The department, in an effort to, if you like, show their remorse, has named two offices down here in Canberra after the two immigration officers who lost their lives in this tragedy. I have got to tell you that there are no family members in the Torres Strait who are ever going to come to Canberra to have a look at those offices. It is most inappropriate that such a thing has occurred.

We need to start to show that there is genuine remorse. I am proposing that we set up a *Malu Sara* trust fund. We can start by putting in that \$240,000 fine so that it does not just go from one government agency to another. This will be a good start, and it will start to recognise that these lives have not been lost in vain. I have been working with the families of some of those members who, sadly, lost their lives. The community itself has been incredibly gener-

ous. Unfortunately, I have to say that government agencies have not followed at the same level. Wilfred Baira; Ted Harry; Flora Enosa and her younger sister, Ethena; and Valorie Saub, the daughter of John and Henrietta Saub from Badu Island, are the victims of this dreadful tragedy. Valorie left behind four children who were aged between three and 11 years old at the time. D-Dow is now 16, Henrietta is 13, Boston is 11 and Do-Fa, who has learning disabilities, is eight. They desperately need support. If you go to their house and have a look, you will see they have been living in a very difficult situation. Henrietta, the grandmother, has one leg and suffers from diabetes, so it is a great struggle trying to keep these kids on a pension.

The community has been absolutely outstanding. At this stage I would like to make reference to Mark Bousen and his family, who have been providing funding to assist this family to buy food for the kids. Every month he has been putting money into an account in the IGA so that these kids can get a decent feed. It is just overwhelming. We have had others out there. Local businesses have been supplying furniture and bedding and what have you, which again is incredibly generous. A young lawyer there, Jason Briggs, has been giving an amazing amount of his time in helping to try and bring some sort of closure and support for these families. But I think we have an obligation in this place to make this happen. I would like to see this trust fund established and I would like to build on the \$240,000—if we can have that as the start—so that we can have a perpetual fund we can draw on to have something that can possibly support kids, particularly kids in Badu with disabilities, on an ongoing basis so that these lives have not been lost in vain.

On top of that we need to build a memorial on Badu and another one on Thursday Island where these families can go to grieve. It is absolutely critical that we do that. I would like to also make sure that the individuals that were directly responsible for the deaths of these five innocent victims are held accountable. At this stage they have not faced a court of law. So I am also calling on the government to re-evaluate these situations and give these families the opportunity to have at least a day in court with those responsible so that they can have that level of closure. When you think about it, it is a very small ask for these families, but it does give them a chance to have some level of closure. Today we have an opportunity to put politics aside to give the families of these victims the respect and the closure that they deserve.

I am asking the government to seriously consider this motion, which has the full support of the Torres Strait Islander community, and to respond with compassion and with decent heart. These families have suffered now for over five years. It is very much part of their culture that they need somewhere they can go to grieve. They will never be able to go to tombstones because those families are lost forever. They need a place where they can grieve and we owe it to the families first of all to give the orphans of those victims an opportunity to get their best chance in education and afterwards to provide some way of showing remorse. We can be offering support to victims, for the young children of the Badu community. (*Time expired*)

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (12.33 pm)—I thank the member for Leichhardt for bringing the motion before the House. In the language of the western Torres Strait, 'Malu Sara' is the name given to the seagull. It is a name familiar to many in this place. It is a name that will be linked forever with the tragic events of October 2005, when five people, travelling across the Torres Strait on a Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs vessel, were lost at sea. The name of the boat was the Malu Sara. The names of those who were lost include: Wilfred Baira, a movement-monitoring officer for the department of immigration and

the skipper of the *Malu Sara*; Ted Harry, also a movement-monitoring officer and a deckhand on the boat; and three passengers—Valerie Saub, Flora Enosa and Flora's five-year-old daughter, Ethena Enosa.

On 14 October 2005 the *Malu Sara* was returning from Saibai Island in the Torres Strait to its home community on Badu Island following an annual workshop run by the department of immigration. By mid-afternoon that day, the skipper had reported that he was lost in fog. Early on the morning of 15 October, Wilfred Baira contacted the local office of the department and reported that the *Malu Sara* was sinking. Rescue operations were undertaken by various authorities over a period of six days, but the boat and the people on board were not located. Only one body was subsequently found by an Indonesian fisherman some 80 kilometres west of where the boat was thought to have sunk. That was the body of Flora Enosa.

In his report on the tragedy, the Queensland Coroner found that the *Malu Sara* had sunk at 4 am on the morning of 15 October 2010. The tragic fate of the *Malu Sara* must never be forgotten. We must remember the families, kith and kin of those lost as a result of the terrible tragedy. For the small, tight-knit community of the Torres Strait, the impact of these events is still causing enormous grief. There is a feeling that there is still some way to go before a measure of justice is attained. While respecting the opinion of the community in this regard, it is also useful that, here in this place, we reflect on what has been done in the past five years to address the issues raised by the sinking of this vessel.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship has received two claims for civil compensation, as the honourable member for Leichhardt has pointed out. One claim was resolved at mediation on 27 May 2010 and another claim was resolved at mediation on 12 October 2010. The terms of settlement are confidential for the benefit of all, especially the children. Financial compensation, for the reasons spelled out by the member for Leichhardt, can never truly compensate the families left behind after such a terrible event. I am sure the department recognises—and I know the government does—the hurt and pain that this tragedy has caused the families of those who lost their lives when the *Malu Sara* sank. The department was committed to resolving the families' claims in a fair and timely manner, with appropriate compensation.

On 2 December last year, the Federal Court, presided over by Justice Collier, delivered its judgment in a Comcare prosecution. The court found that the Commonwealth had breached the relevant provisions of the occupational health and safety legislation and imposed the maximum penalty of \$242,000 on the respondent—the Commonwealth. At all stages during the legal action, the department sought to facilitate an expeditious resolution of Comcare's civil prosecution of the department by minimising the issues in dispute between the parties, including by formally admitting breaches of the occupational health and safety legislation and filing an agreed statement of facts. The court, in its judgment, acknowledged the positive actions post facto that had been taken by the department in the wake of the tragedy. Notwithstanding this, due to the gravity of the consequences of the department's own breaches, a maximum penalty was imposed.

I am advised that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship accept the recommendations of the independent investigations undertaken by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, Comcare and the Queensland coronial inquiry. I am also advised that the department has implemented significant changes to its operations to ensure such a tragedy can never occur

again. Indeed, in their judgment, the Federal Court observed that the department has implemented new procurement and contractual procedures, including specific further steps in relation to operations in the Torres Strait.

In addition to their prosecutions of the Commonwealth, Comcare have initiated civil proceedings against the builder of the boat, Subsee Explorer Pty Ltd. As this legal action is ongoing, it would be inappropriate to comment specifically on the tendering arrangements regarding the procurement of the vessels that included the *Malu Sara*. However, the department and the government have indicated a willingness to learn from this tragedy and undertake the necessary reforms to ensure it could never happen again.

In my former life I was the National Secretary of the Community and Public Sector Union, the industrial organisation that represents the industrial interests of employees of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. It was with great sadness that we learned that one of the employees on board the boat was indeed a member of our union. This is a matter I have had ongoing interest in. I acknowledge the genuine concern of the member for Leichhardt for the welfare of the victims' families, but at this stage the government does not believe the most appropriate way to proceed with this matter is for the legislation of a trust.

That said, I make it plain that I wish to work with the member for Leichhardt to ensure that the proposals included in this motion before the House can be progressed, because I think there is much that can be done. For instance, I think the proposition within the motion that an appropriate memorial be established on Thursday Island and on Badu is appropriate. It beggars belief that any of the residents or the families of those lost in this incident would ever travel to Canberra to visit buildings that had been named after them. Also from my former life as a lawyer I am aware that it is not unusual for a fine of this sort to be paid to the benefit of families, so I would like to work with honourable members opposite to ensure that occurs for the benefit of the communities that have been affected. I would also take an ongoing interest in ensuring that the breaches and shortfalls in policy and procedures that were evidenced in this case do not occur again and that we can learn everything possible from the findings of the coronial inquiry and the Federal Court matters that have thus far been included.

In conclusion, the government and the department have accepted responsibility for the tragic events of the *Malu Sara* by cooperating with legal action, both current and pending. Compensation for the families of victims has occurred, and we are changing internal processes such as tendering and procurement. Nothing can bring the lost ones home but we must remember, learn and change to ensure that their deaths, while terribly sad and tragic, were not in vain. I repeat again that if there is anything I can do as an individual member, I am prepared to help. Torres Strait is a long way from the electorate of Throsby. I have spent too long as an official for the Community and Public Sector Union not to want to continue to prosecute the cause of health and safety for those who put their lives at risk in the service of their country, such as those charged with the terribly important duty of protecting our borders in the northern parts of Australia.

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (12.43 pm)—Wilfred Baira, Immigration officer; Ted Harry, Immigration Officer; Valorie Faub; Flora Enosa and her daughter Ethena. Rest in peace

I rise to support the Member for Leichhardt's motion seeking government support for the victims of the loss of the *Malu Sara*. I cannot remove the politics from this, because I believe the government has a role here. It must act, on behalf of the government in charge at the time

and the government now. I shudder to think what would have happened if this accident had occurred in Sydney Harbour or on Port Phillip Bay, and what the level of compensation and the amount of transparency would have been then. I cannot help but feel that those of us who live northern Australia are quite often subject to another set of rules.

The *Malu Sara* set out on a journey from Saibai Island to Badu Island on 14 October 2005. It never made it. These people were not on a fishing trip in a beat-up tinnie; they were on patrol for the department of immigration. They did not have useless or failed safety equipment. The government did not give them any of the latest safety equipment. They also sent them out in atrocious conditions. I do not propose to take shots at the government officials who sent these people out with inferior equipment saying that they were two generations behind and would not be able to use more modern equipment. The coroner has done his job and I just pray that we never have to speak about these sorts of totally avoidable tragedies ever again.

If you have spent any time in the Torres Strait you would know that these people are instinctive and natural sailors, but this is a hostile environment and one where everyone should take the greatest of care. It may not look like it when you are standing on the dock at Thursday Island watching these guys going past in their big tinnies with huge outboards on the back doing a million miles an hour, seemingly without a care in the world, but the rips and tides are huge in the strait and trouble is never very far away for the unwary.

The coroner has dealt a fine of \$242,000 to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, and recommended disciplinary measures to the individuals concerned. But we must say to all the people of Australia that they are equal and they are valued. We must say to all the people of Australia that if the government does something wrong it must be prepared to assist with the recovery. I propose that we do the right thing by these people. What we have here is a breach of faith by all governments and there is a lack of respect for those who have fallen. What we have to do is fix it.

To fine a government department \$242,000 is one thing—and I recognise that that is the maximum penalty available—but to have the money go back to the government is a complete waste of time. They may as well not do the transaction at all, for all it will achieve. The member for Leichhardt rightly suggests that the money be given to the families of the deceased in the form of a trust for the children of the deceased. They are being cared for by grandparents and their community. Let no-one here suggest that money can take the place of a loving parent, but they are deserving of support. They will have needs for education and social inclusion, which will always cost money. We must do what we can to ease the burden of those who are left to take the place of a parent lost due to government error.

The \$242,000 would be a good start. It will do them a damn sight more good than it will by going back into consolidated revenue. Governments must also be prepared to assist in the future should that need arise. We must also warn others that all governments may not always have their best interests at heart. If the government tried to launch this boat as it was on the Swan River, in Sydney Harbour or in Port Phillip Bay they would have been laughed off the dock. It simply would not have happened. But in the Torres Strait the department deemed it okay to send them out into one of the most dangerous stretches of water in the world with inadequate equipment and in atrocious conditions.

The government has named two rooms in Parliament House in their honour. As prestigious as that may be, it will have absolutely no impact on those in the Torres Strait. The member for

Leichhardt has rightly suggested twin memorials in appropriate places on Badu and Thursday Islands. If you stand on tiptoes on the Russian fort at Thursday Island you can just see the mainland. It is one of the most beautiful places in the world, but you are as close as close can be to Papua New Guinea.

The immigration officials and the guys operating these cruises are making sure that people are doing the right thing, but the traffic between Papua New Guinea and Torres Strait is huge. There are five beds in the Thursday Island hospital that are continually filled by those from Papua New Guinea with drug-resistant tuberculosis, dengue fever, Japanese encephalitis and the like. It is a very dangerous place and they are very mobile, so the role these people play is vital.

There are island communities in the electorate of Herbert. The people on Magnetic and Palm Islands also extend their sympathies and condolences to the five deceased and their families. I need to speak out on this because Palm Island is populated by our first people. A tragedy like this could happen nearer to Townsville. I swore to all the people I represent in the seat of Herbert that no-one will be left behind.

I firmly believe that this government is all talk and no action when it comes to our first Australians. You only have to look at Palm Island to see the level of housing being developed and to see the absolute waste and contempt in which the government holds these people. We are building houses on Palm Island which are two feet below the line of the sewerage. I cannot say in this House what you can push uphill, but it is very difficult.

We recently saw the government table the *Closing the gap Prime Minister's report 2010*. I challenge the government's commitment to this when you look at the treatment of these poor souls sent to their deaths and detention on Palm Island. If the government is serious about closing the gap and being upfront and honest with our first Australians, they have to act swiftly. To delay is to say that they are indeed second-class citizens and do not deserve to be treated as equals. I now challenge the government and ministers Bowen and Macklin to attend these islands and tell the people that they would not have received better equipment in other parts of Australia. I challenge the government and ministers Bowen and Macklin to front these people and tell them that a room in Parliament House is a huge honour and they should be happy with that. I challenge the government and ministers Bowen and Macklin to front these people and be fair dinkum.

I do not excuse the Howard government for their role here, but I want this fixed, and we, this parliament and this government are the ones who can and should facilitate this. It is time to act and time to be upfront. You cannot just do it in the Murray-Darling Basin, in places in Sydney or in the inner suburbs of Melbourne; we have to do it in northern Australia. I commend the member's motion to this House.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (12.51 pm)—Thank you very much, Deputy Speaker Entsch. You, like me, are very familiar with the region where the boat was lost. We have both visited Saibai Island and have seen just how close Saibai Island is to Papua New Guinea. But before I get to the substance of my debate I have to say I was pretty disappointed with that last contribution to this debate. It is about playing politics with this issue, calling on Minister Bowen and Minister Macklin when this is something that happened under the previous government. I was not even going to refer to that in my contribution to this debate until the member for Herbert decided to politicise an issue that I congratulate the member for Leichhardt on bringing to this

House. I know that he is a member who is totally committed to his electorate and the people he represents in this House—unlike, I am sorry to say, the member for Herbert, who wanted to play politics with a motion that was brought to the House with such goodwill. I have to put on record my disappointment with the member for Herbert for trying to play politics with something as significant as this.

As I said at the commencement of my contribution to this debate, you only have to stand on the shores of Saibai Island or Thursday Island and look out into the Torres Strait to know just how this is such a busy seaway and to know that people take risks there every day. The particular disaster occurred on 14 October 2005, when the *Malu Sara* was returning from Saibai Island to the Torres Strait and its home in the community of Badu Island when it disappeared. On board were five people. There was a skipper, someone from immigration and three passengers, including a four-year-old girl. It is very sad that a four-year-old girl, with so much to look forward to in life, would lose her life in this way.

The skipper contacted the department office and reported that they were sinking. Rescue operations were undertaken by various authorities over a period of six days. After that it was abandoned. There was only one survivor subsequently found, and that survivor was found by an Indonesian fisherman. It was a very sad event with a great loss to the family and also to all of the communities in the Torres Strait. I know it would have been devastating for those communities because I know how close they are and how important each and every family member is. This disaster would have reverberated throughout the Torres Strait, and I am sure its effects are still being felt.

I note the findings of the coroner's inquiry. He first published his findings in February 2009. There have been some very scathing comments made about this whole incident, particularly the fact, as I think we can quite honestly say in this place, that things did not happen in the way we would expect them to happen in a number of cases. I noted the member for Throsby saying that he was happy to work with the member for Leichhardt to see if he could do something to help those memorials to be built. I give that same undertaking to the member for Leichhardt as I am happy to work with him on this. As for the result of what happened, Comcare are still instigating an inquiry and they are still involved with a civil court proceeding against Subsee Explorer Pty Ltd, the company that was engaged to supply the department with five vessels, for breach of federal work, health and safety laws. The matter is still before the Federal Court, so I really cannot comment on that. I have been told that what happened has led to changes, and I think that there always need to be more changes taking place after a tragedy like this.

I turn to look a little bit more at the motion. There is the fact that the respondent, the department, admitted liability, which is a positive because they did not try to hide the fact that they were in the wrong. I think governments should—as should individuals—always admit it if the wrong thing happens. As the member for Leichhardt rightly points out in his motion, the process was so flawed. The court fined the respondent—the department—\$242,000. This is where we probably get into a bit of trouble, with legislating to establish a trust for the benefit of the families. I would like to suggest to the member for Leichhardt that he put together some sort of a budget submission for funds to be set aside for the trust, as opposed to putting it in the motion, because I do not think that much will come out of this because it does have a financial implication as to the memorials. What the member for Leichhardt would like to do is

to take it to another level and to do that I think he needs to look at a way to actually do that. As for the fine, from a legal perspective it is really difficult to take that \$242,000 and put it into a trust. A lot of work has to happen along the way as it is not an automatic thing that you can transfer a fine to a trust. I think what he can do is put together some sort of a submission that argues for that to take place so it all ends up being something that will really deliver to the people that the member for Leichhardt would like to see this delivered to. It is really important that we all learn from what happened up in the Torres Strait back in 2005.

It is also important to note that there have been two claims for compensation that have been paid. One was mediated on and resolved on 27 May 2010. Rightly, the terms of settlement are being regarded as confidential. I think that that has absolutely no bearing on what the member for Leichhardt is trying to achieve here; it is not one or the other. There was a second settlement that was agreed to later last year, which once again was mediated on and agreed to; it provided the family with some recompense for the losses that they incurred. But, no matter what financial compensation is paid, those families have lost their loved ones. At the commencement of my contribution to this debate, I emphasised the importance of family to people that live in the Torres Strait, and that is where even a memorial might be a more lasting way to preserve the memories of those people that were lost. But, before that can happen, I would like to suggest again to the member for Leichhardt that maybe he could put together a budget submission and look at seeking funding through the appropriate channels. So I congratulate him on bringing this motion to the House. It is an important motion that deals with safety in the Torres Strait. (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas)—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.

Organ Donation

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mr Hayes**:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) Sunday 20 February to Sunday 27 February 2011 is Donate Life Week, Australia's national awareness week to promote organ and tissue donation; and
 - (b) organ donation is giving the gift of life, yet is a gift that most people do not know how to give;
- (2) acknowledges that:
 - (a) one third of Australians do not know that family consent is needed for organs to be donated when someone dies;
 - (b) there are more than 1000 people on organ donation waiting lists and there were only 279 donations in 2009-10, despite that year being our highest annual donation rate in a decade; and
 - (c) on average, every deceased organ donor in Australia may contribute to between three and ten transplants;
- (3) encourages all Australian men and women to:
 - (a) set some time aside during the week to talk about organ and tissue donations with people closest to them; and
 - (b) consider organ donations and sign up for the Australian Organ Donor Register; and
- (4) pays tribute to organ donors who have kindly given the gift of life.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (1.02 pm)—Last year 309 organ donors gave 931 Australians a new chance in life. Despite these being the highest numbers for a decade, regrettably this still leaves 1,700 people on the Australian organ donation transplant list. These individuals are often on the list for anywhere between six months and four years. If you are very desperate for a donation, four years is obviously a very, very long time to wait, and this can be very detrimental for those that are in urgent need.

Despite having one of the highest rates of success for transplant operations in the world, Australia has one of the lowest donation rates in the developed world. Considering the well-known Australian spirit that we will always lend a hand and help out, it is safe to think that the reason why there is a lack of donation is really a lack of awareness and of the discussion that leads to donation. It is well known that the majority of Australians support organ donation.

The government's national reform package that has recently been introduced with the agreement of the states is truly a significant step forward in raising awareness of the issue of organ donation. It is a much-needed effort to significantly increase the number of people who are willing to—and, more importantly, are aware of how to—give the gift of life. The \$151 million for the organ and tissue donation national reform package is a crucial step towards increasing awareness of this highly significant issue and informing members of the public.

As a part of this reform, the government has funded 150 dedicated doctors and nurses and 60 ancillary staff in 76 hospitals. This is for work specifically on organ and tissue donation as part of the DonateLife network. We often put ourselves in the hands of our doctors and obviously we put our trust in their judgment. The trust that the public has in our medical staff should also be treated as a great resource in assisting in driving up the rate for organ donation.

In approaching this issue, it is crucial to understand that one in three Australians do not know that their family member has consented to organ donation. Clearly, once someone tragically dies and there is a bereavement, organ donation is not the first thing that comes to the minds of the bereaved. Organ donation is the gift of life, yet so many people do not know how to give the gift. Despite an individual deciding to become an organ donor, their family still has to be asked to give consent to donation if the situation arises, so when you make the decision to give somebody the gift of life it is absolutely critical to talk to family members so they are comfortable and confident in your decision. The discussion will make saying yes much easier for family members and will minimise the sense of doubt and, possibly, regret. It is much easier for your family to have the discussion now rather than at the time of a tragic loss.

That discussion is particularly significant if we keep in mind that 93 per cent of Australians say that they would uphold the donation wishes of their loved one if they were aware of them. It would be extremely sad if an individual missed out on a chance for a fresh start in life simply because the family of a possible organ donor was not aware of their loved one's wishes. In urgent circumstances, the 40 per cent of Australians who do not know the views on organ donation of their loved ones can make a difference to someone living or dying. That is why it is important to have Donate Life Week and all its events. The week is for us to raise awareness and to encourage people to have discussions and consider their choices.

On average every organ donor in Australia contributes between three and 10 transplants. It is important for individuals to be aware of the potentially tremendous contribution they can make to others. Also, it may be difficult, but it is important for everyone to imagine the situa-

tion from the reverse perspective, the situation of someone giving life, hopefully, to one of their own family. I think that probably adds to the judgment call in becoming an organ donor. Each one of us could give another family the opportunity to experience a feeling of hope and gratefulness in a difficult situation. I call on all Australians to have a family get-together to discuss the issue of organ donation and to at least become aware of the options available to loved ones.

I have mentioned before the family of Debbie Roberts, who is a friend of mine. Her daughter Rebecca died in 2002 at 20 years of age. Before her death, Rebecca, a very forthright young woman, spoke up and made her intentions about organ donation very clear to her mum. Thankfully, Debbie, who is the Chief Executive Officer of Youth Solutions, respected her daughter's wishes. As a result of Rebecca's donation four people were given a remarkable gift. Two received a kidney and another two received Rebecca's corneas. Debbie has graciously shared with me correspondence that she has received from the four recipients of Rebecca's organs. It is very touching correspondence and it is very touching to see the effect that her organ donation has had on families. The letters show how profoundly people's lives have been affected and enriched and how life has been given through Rebecca's selfless decision to donate organs should she die. We owe Rebecca and many like her an enormous debt of gratitude for their decisions to donate their organs. I know Debbie well. Knowing and understanding her daughter's wishes in respect of organ donation clearly made it a lot easier for her to consent to organ removal at the time of Rebecca's death, a time of very great sadness for Debbie.

Debbie Roberts's experience demonstrates, quite frankly, the hard reality of not only going through the pain of loss—in this case, that of her daughter Rebecca—but also having the pride and contentment of knowing that, through Rebecca's selfless attitude to life in that giving of life itself, her daughter has left a legacy that is now living on today through other people. All Australian men and women should consider organ donation and sign on the Australian Organ Donor Register, as one Australian's choice today can mean the difference between life and death for another Australian tomorrow.

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (1.10 pm)—The progress of human civilisation has been marked with extraordinary breakthroughs in medical science. From the first transfusion of human blood, to the use of insulin to treat diabetes, to the Salk vaccine that rid the world of polio, we have seen vast improvements in our length and quality of life.

Organ transplantation was a similarly groundbreaking achievement. In 1954, the American surgeon Joseph Murray performed the first kidney transplant between identical twins. In 1967 the South African heart surgeon Christiaan Barnard performed the first successful human-to-human heart transplant. Both of these events were defining moments in medical history and gave hope and new life to patients around the world. After years of unsuccessful attempts, the ability to transplant human organs was considered nothing short of a miracle, especially for those who could now rely on transplants to survive otherwise incurable diseases.

Today, organ and tissue transplants are common procedures, and improvements in technology and technique has meant that the success rate for even complicated surgical procedures such as heart transplants have improved. The transplantation of human organs and tissue has saved the lives of thousands of Australians. Since 1965, more than 30,000 Australians have received transplants. With improved survival rates, recipients of organ transplants can enjoy

significantly prolonged lives. For people with serious or life-threatening illnesses, organ and tissue transplantation means a second chance at life.

It is a testament to the achievements of our world's medical scientists that we are now in a position to mark organ donation week—a week that encourages Australians to sign up as organ donors. An organ donor can potentially save and extend multiple lives. In 2010, 309 organ donors gave 931 Australians a new chance in life. Unfortunately, around 1,700 people are, at any one time, on the Australian organ transplant waiting list. On average, people on the transplant list must wait between six months and four years.

The potential to save lives is huge if as many Australians as possible register. With the increasing success and popularity of organ transplants, the shortfall in donors relative to the requirement for organs is growing. We all have the power to save lives and prevent debilitating illnesses and it does not cost us anything. But cultural impediments and a lack of knowledge often prevent us from taking action. For many of us, organ donation is not something that we often think about. Many people, understandably, do not like to think about their own death. And so, although they may consider organ donation to be a noble idea, they do not think about it enough to take action.

Organ donation week is about generating awareness and bringing the issues to the forefront of people's minds. It is about making organ donation a common practice in our society, rather than something that is too morbid to discuss with friends and family. It is about making people feel comfortable with the idea of becoming an organ donor. It is also about giving people an opportunity to take action and register.

Last week, I, along with a number of other members of this place, including the member for Canberra, Gai Brodtmann—she was here a moment ago—and also the member for Fowler, took part in the Donate Life walk around Lake Burley Griffin. What was inspiring about this walk was the fact that we were joined by so many hundreds of people from the local community.

Organ donation week will encourage Australians to have a discussion about organ donation with their friends and family. It is important to talk about it with those close to you because registering as an organ donor, like I have, is not enough. Family consent is always sought, so it is important to discuss your wishes with family members to ensure your wishes are fulfilled.

There are many Australians who would like to be organ donors but who simply have not been prompted to become one or have put it off for whatever reason. Yet we need to factor the discussion about organ donation into our life just as we would make time for a significant family birthday, a health check-up, making a will or, worse still, doing our tax.

In many cases, people may assume that their consent is not required for their organs to be used after death. It is remarkable to think that one-third of Australians do not know that family consent is needed for their organs to be donated when they pass away. Many people may assume that there is an adequate supply of organs available for those who need them or that a past illness rules them out. It is always worth checking with a doctor to determine whether you are eligible to become a donor. You should not assume that you are ineligible.

A common perception is that if you lived in the United Kingdom during the mad cow outbreak you are unable to become a donor. The fact is you are still able to donate organs and some tissue, and you should discuss these options with your doctor.

According to DonateLife, 98 per cent of Australians believe that organ donation has the potential to save and improve lives. Yet some people might be concerned about certain organs that they would not be willing to donate. This is not an obstacle. When you register, you can choose which organs you would like to donate. Donations can involve organs such as kidneys, heart, lungs, liver and pancreas. It can also involve tissue, including heart valves, bone tissue, skin and eye tissue.

The value of organ transplantation is made most clear when you look at organisations like the Lions Eye Donation Service, a joint venture between the Lions clubs of Victoria and southern New South Wales, the Centre for Eye Research Australia, the University of Melbourne and the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital. They receive eye tissue donations from thousands of generous donors.

Human donor corneas are needed in order to alleviate corneal blindness. A cornea transplant is the surgical procedure which replaces a disc shaped segment of an impaired cornea with a similarly shaped piece of a healthy donor cornea. It is important that organisations such as the Lions Eye Donation Service and the many donors who have taken the initiative to register for organ donation are recognised and celebrated this week.

As we know, the shortfall in organ donations is very significant. There are more than 1,000 people on organ donation waiting lists but only 279 donations were made in 2009-10. One organ and tissue donor can save up to ten lives. Indeed, as I said, before 2010, 309 organ donors gave 931 Australian a new chance in life.

I would like to place on record on behalf of the coalition my strong appreciation for those doctors and medical staff who ensure that we have the medical capability to save lives through organ donation as well as those Australians who have made the commitment to register as organ donors. If we can raise awareness and new donors, we will be raising hope for so many families whose lives will be transformed.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (1.18 pm)—It is a great pleasure today to speak on this private member's business. I have been involved in the organ and tissue donation sector for the last five years and, prior to becoming the member for Canberra, I was a volunteer director on the Gift of Life board for three years.

It was great to have celebrated last week the first national DonateLife Week and even greater not to be involved in endless weekends walking around tables stuffing show bags—that is one thing I do not miss. It has also been great to be in this new position to speak to a range of people, including this chamber as well as other parliamentarians, to promote the need to increase our organ and tissue donation rates. Last week, DonateLife Week, throughout Australia was about promoting the message that any day is a good day to talk about organ and tissue donation.

DonateLife Week is part of the Australian government's national DonateLife awareness campaign to increase family discussion about personal donation wishes. Across the country, state and territory governments and their health departments join with the medical community, the not-for-profit sector and the many individuals and families affected by organ donation to lift Australia's organ and tissue donation rate. The most important thing is that families need to know the wishes of their loved ones who have just passed on. That is what DonateLife Week is all about.

The DonateLife awareness campaign, launched in May 2010, produced a very positive increase in family discussion about donation wishes. The focus of this year's campaign was to increase that level of discussion even further. In 2008 the government committed to a \$151 million national reform program for organ and tissue donation. I commend and applaud the former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd for being one of the major drivers of this initiative. Last year was the first full year of implementing this world's best practice national approach to organ and tissue donation. We have achieved the highest rate of donations ever in this country, which goes to show that when we all pull together we can achieve great results.

In 2010 a record 309 deceased Australians donated their organs and tissue for transplant—saving or improving the lives of 931 Australians. Here in the ACT the number of organ donors has been increasing every year from four multi-organ donors in 2006 to 10 in 2010—again the best number ever. The 10 multi-organ donors last year transformed about 30 lives and restored sight to about 40 people. As a result of the government's initiatives, the DonateLife Network now consists of more than 242 professionals in 76 hospitals and eight DonateLife agencies in each state and territory, specialising in organ and tissue donation.

Two weeks ago the Minister for Health, Nicola Roxon, at the Australian Health Minister's Council announced that in January there were 30 deceased organ donors, resulting in life-saving and life-changing transplants for 89 Australians—the highest outcome for January in Australia's history. The challenge now is to sustain the increase and to build on it, because we still need to do much better. We need to normalise the subject of organ and tissue donation. Every Australian can be part of this national initiative by taking time to talk about being a donor, discover the facts, register their decision on the Australian Organ Donor Register and, most importantly, discuss their decision with their next of kin.

Public awareness is the crucial first step to raising Australia's organ donation rates. I was pleased last Friday to attend the ACT Chief Minister's Awards ceremony, where Jon Stanhope presented awards to five individuals and one community organisation for their contributions to organ donor awareness in the ACT. I would like to pay tribute to Genevieve Jacobs from 666 ABC Local Radio, who received an award for media support; Anne Cahill-Lambert, a tireless worker for this cause, who herself is awaiting a lung transplant, who received a special award for outstanding contribution; Karen Oliver, who received the Ben Wiseman award for health care; Steve Williams, who received the Mathew Reynolds award for community service; and the Lions Club of Canberra Belconnen who received the Jenny Deck award for community support. And I was humbled and honoured to also receive an award, the Annette Taylor award for community service. These individuals and the organisation are to be applauded. I encourage all Australians to talk to their families about organ and tissue donation.

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (1.23 pm)—I also rise to talk about organ donation. My colleagues and I have become very familiar with the work of DonateLife. 'Discover, discuss and decide' are three very critical elements, but, having worked in the health sector, I have seen that it is not so much the statistics—of 98 per cent of Australians having an awareness or of the number of recipients of organs and tissues—but the real, live issues around what families experience. There are challenging situations that occur when a member of the family makes a decision to donate their organs but has not discussed it with their family; a discussion occurs in the corridors of a hospital hallway where a family is hesitant to agree to the donation sought by the deceased.

That then causes angst in the decisions of doctors who, having based their understanding on having 10 recipients for the various organs and tissues, must then inform those families that what was a possibility has turned out to be unavailable. What I do like is the notion that we are pulling together as a community and as a society to develop awareness, to get people to commit and to get families to understand that the gift of life through organ and tissue donation has far-reaching consequences for the quality of life that an individual may experience.

I was taken aback by a man in Darwin—he came from one of the islands to the north—whom I heard talk at a conference about organ donation. He had been told that he had a kidney disease and that he would need treatment in Darwin hospital. He came to Darwin assuming that, under the broad heading of ‘a donor organ’ he would go into the hospital, have his operation, be given medication and be allowed out. He did not understand that that was not the process. He said: ‘My knowledge was limited and I would have liked there to be a comprehensive awareness program so that I knew what I was facing when I went in. I didn’t think that I would walk into a hospital and then for the rest of my life be married to a machine.’ He said, ‘I was married to my wife and my machine became my life-saving device.’

There are many Australians who live in the hope of tissue or organs becoming available in order to prolong not only their family life and their future within their community but also, more importantly, their capacity to contribute to the workplaces of Australia. I hope that, as DonateLife and many of us in this House continue to work towards the promotion of an organ and tissue donation mindset, many of those people who have waited for lengthy periods will have those periods reduced. Whilst we talk about 98 per cent of Australians having an understanding and an awareness, it is a matter of translating that into action that saves the lives of many and enhances quality of life.

I acknowledge the medical profession and the support people who dedicate so much time to providing services for people who are waiting on the organ recipient list as well as, certainly, those whose research has made transplants safer and patient recovery much speedier than it was in the past. I must admit that when I worked in both NSW Health and WA Health I was often moved when I walked through children’s wards to see children who were waiting for organs and parents who were living on hope. One parent said to me: ‘I live on the hope of somebody’s death. I don’t mean that in a morbid sense but in terms of prolonging the life of my child.’ That is a conundrum that many Australians face in this context.

So I pay credit to DonateLife. I think that the process they have commenced is to be highly commended. I am committed to donating both tissue and organs when I am deceased and I hope that that decision will enrich the quality of life of another 10 Australians. The consequence of our decision to be donors is far-reaching and enriches the lives of many. I compliment DonateLife on the work that they have embarked on and will continue over the next two decades and I hope to see the number of donors increase exponentially.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas)—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

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 3) 2010-2011

Cognate bill:

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 4) 2010-2011**Second Reading**Debate resumed from 24 February, on motion by **Mr Gray**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (4.00 pm)—I rise to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2010-2011 and the cognate bill. The Gillard government has confirmed it will accept New Zealand apple imports, signalling more proof that it has no regard for Australian farmers or Australian produce. It is not enough that Australian apple growers have to contend with Chinese imported apples; now they have to compete against New Zealand ones as well. It is just another blow to Australian farmers, who really must feel as though they cannot take a trick. In her address to the New Zealand parliament recently, the Prime Minister confirmed that Australia will soon begin importing apples from New Zealand.

Foreign apples should never have been allowed into our country in the first place. Our apple industry is free of fire blight and is self-sustaining. All this has done is undermine and potentially cripple what was a vibrant Australian industry, one which has meant so much to the economic prosperity of Batlow and Tumut districts, which are in my Riverina electorate, as well as many other regional areas. We have already seen what pests and diseases such as greening disease and the Asian honey bee can do to countries with horticulture and citrus. The Labor government wiped its hands of apple growers last July when it did nothing after Biosecurity Australia decided to permit Chinese apples to be imported, and now we have to contend with New Zealand apples.

When it comes to appropriations, one project which should be at the top of any health spending is Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. If ever a hospital deserved, required or was desperate for—call it what you like—government funding assistance, it is Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. This is the major referral hospital for the Riverina and, as such, it services upwards of one-quarter of a million people. The hospital has suffered from 16 years of state Labor neglect, but, to be fair, both sides have made promises and then not fulfilled them since a new hospital was first pledged way back in 1980. That is 30 long years ago—30 years of false hope, let-down expectations and unrealised dreams. The public of Wagga Wagga and surrounds deserve much better. They are patient people, but they are growing tired of excuses, empty promises, rhetoric and downright lies. They want action. They want a new hospital.

On Sunday, 8 August last year, as many as 4,000 people turned out in Wagga Wagga's main street, Baylis Street, to rally in support of a new hospital. They did not just come from the city and its suburbs; they came from right across the region—from Temora, West Wyalong and the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, which faces so much ongoing frustration of its own with the current water debate, thanks to this Labor government. The mayor of Tumut, Trina Thomson, spoke passionately about the need for a new Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. The previous time such a rally was held, in 2007, it attracted 2,000 people. Twice the number came out to continue the campaign. Members of the crowd carried placards and posters with a clear message: they want a new hospital for the region, not a patch-up job.

A recount of the hospital's sorry history by cardiologist Dr Gerard Carroll dredged up every broken promise for a new facility dating back to the 1980s. Registered nurse Tanya Gleeson spoke of the horrors of treating patients in what she described as 'a substandard, dysfunctional, decrepit building, which in places has asbestos, inefficient heating and cooling, broken facilities, mould, leaking ceilings and infection control issues'. Medical ward nursing unit manager Sharon Townsend compared the facility to Noah's Ark. The chairman of the hospital's medical staff council, Dr Richard Harrison, was the last to speak, and his words were certainly not lost on the crowd when he called for a new Wagga Wagga Base Hospital 'now, not way into the future'.

Ninety million dollars has, thankfully, been promised by the state Labor government. The New South Wales coalition, through its leader, Barry O'Farrell, has stated that the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital is the No. 1 regional infrastructure project in what will hopefully, surely, be the Liberal-Nationals' first term in office after the 26 March poll. That election day cannot come soon enough.

New South Wales infrastructure made a submission to the federal government's regional round for the Health and Hospitals Fund which closed on 3 December 2010. As I said, the coalition in New South Wales promised \$125 million; this regional and rural health fund has \$1.8 billion for regional communities. Wagga Wagga Base Hospital should be first and foremost in priority for the fund. I call on the federal government to do the right thing and give Wagga Wagga and the Riverina a base hospital with facilities at least equal to most other communities in Australia. The locals in that part of Australia deserve nothing less.

Mr BYRNE (Holt) (4.05 pm)—I rise in the debate about the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2010-2011 and cognate bill to talk in particular about residents in my constituency of Holt. I note that there is an appropriation with respect to flooding. I would like to talk about my experiences with recent flooding and the incredible resilience of the community that I represent. The community that I represent gets some pretty interesting press. There was a young fellow, Corey, who ran a house party and got a bit of attention; there is a television series that basically has a couple of characters at Fountain Lakes, but it is in fact the Fountain Gate shopping centre. If you surveyed my constituents about how they felt about being portrayed in that sort of light I think you would find a very interesting response. Let's say, I do not think you would be selling many copies at the Fountain Gate JB Hi-Fi or Fountain Gate Dick Smith shop. But, as I said, I want to talk about the resilience of my community, not in the way in which it is conveniently portrayed in the national media but in focusing on their courage and tenacity when they come together and show the enormous community spirit which epitomises my area, particularly with respect to the flooding that has occurred substantially in my electorate.

On Friday, 4 February and Saturday, 5 February several suburbs in my electorate of Holt—Narre Warren, Narre Warren South, Lyndhurst, portions of Berwick, Hampton Park and Cranbourne North—were amongst Melbourne's worst affected by a rare storm event caused by the tail of Cyclone Yasi. At Lyndhurst in my electorate more than 180 millimetres of rain fell within a 24-hour period. The deluge was such an extraordinary and extreme event that, according to a preliminary assessment by Melbourne Water, it was described as a one-in-500-years event rather than a one-in-100-years event. There is no doubt that this summer has been defined by natural disasters and national tragedy. It is very difficult to forget the images of

cars flying down the streets of Toowoomba and hearing the incredible heart-rending stories of those who were lost and those who were saved.

In terms of the flooding that occurred, I want to talk about the incredible community spirit that was displayed when local volunteers and residents helped those in need when the severe storms hit our community. It has not been written about much, but the floods caused enormous damage to our community. However, it was amazing to see the community spirit of the people in the flood affected areas, like Narre Warren and Hampton Park—seeing neighbours helping others in need, even when they had been flooded themselves. The floods were not of the scale of those in Queensland but they affected 545 households, 10 aged-care facilities and senior citizens facilities and 364 businesses. It impacted on local schools, local sporting facilities, parks, roads and community facilities. Some homes in Holt still remain uninhabitable or unsafe to live in. Many roads, footpaths and fences are damaged. The terrifying nature and the rapidity of events that occurred resulted in some of my constituents being trapped in cars or homes, not knowing when the rain was going to stop. That was an incredibly dramatic experience for everybody. I will talk about how that was relayed by the social media a little bit later in my speech.

I am most proud of the volunteers and the residents in my community. As I said, without question they came to the aid of others in need even when they had been flooded themselves. For example, one of my constituents, Joan Crilly from Hampton Park, was particularly affected by a stormwater drain at the front of her house. She had been called and told that there was flooding in her street, so she drove down to her street. She could not get terribly far because a lot of it was underwater. She waded through the water to get into her house and the water was flooding through her property. The amazing thing that occurred was that people, even in the midst of this fairly treacherous situation, could see that there was a stormwater drain that was blocked. These people materialised out of nowhere, even though their own homes had been flooded, and tried to rip the tops off the stormwater drains so that the water could get through. It just epitomised the spirit of the people of Hampton Park.

You could read on Facebook, for example, that people whose homes had been flooded were walking into their neighbours' homes to help clear out the flooding and assess the level of flooding damage. As I said, it is a very rare community spirit and something that I think epitomises the quality of the people who live in Hampton Park.

I cannot go without talking about the efforts of the Narre Warren SES unit, which was one of the busiest in the state on the weekend the storm hit. They received 684 calls for assistance just in that weekend alone. With the help of local CFA branches, the Narre Warren SES unit rescued dozens of people from flooded cars and assisted with the evacuation of an entire retirement centre. The SES has always been active in handing out information about what to do in emergency situations and this certainly came in handy both before and afterwards.

In particular, the efforts of Narre Warren unit coordinator, Tim Howell, and his dedicated team of volunteers were incredible. I know that many of these volunteers worked throughout the night responding to dozens of calls for assistance from residents, private nursing homes and many other businesses. As I said, we as a community are incredibly indebted to them for assisting those who were affected.

Madam Deputy Speaker Vamvakinou, being on Facebook yourself, I am sure you would have seen that Facebook is a pretty valuable tool for communication—never more so than

when your community is being flooded. I live in Endeavour Hills, which is not far away from where a lot of the severe flooding occurred. One of the most extraordinary things I found was that when I was going home I was instantaneously getting updates about how severe the flooding was in suburbs like Hampton Park, in bits of Cranbourne and Narre Warren. It is an amazing medium, particularly when it is used like that. As I said, it brings the community together in almost a global village.

It was fantastic as a local federal member of parliament to see people who I was connected to via Facebook communicating what was occurring there. Some of that information was being accessed by emergency services as well. It was amazing to see the Youtube clips of the Hampton Park shopping centre where the rivers were running through the shopping centre towards the roads. It is an incredibly valuable tool that is being used. We have seen the value of Twitter and Facebook overseas, but they are also incredibly useful in situations like the floods that occurred in the region around Hampton Park. There is one particular person I wanted to acknowledge, Michele Halsall, who is an established and valued member of the Hampton Park community. She created the Casey floods Facebook page. It allowed people to instantaneously hook on, whether they were Facebook friends or not, so that they could communicate and see what was occurring.

What also occurred, and what I think is quite extraordinary, is that following the scenes of devastation we saw in Queensland, a local Casey Cares flood benefit concert was organised for 12 February. The organising committee of the flood benefit concert was led by Casey Deputy Mayor, Wayne Smith, who is a councillor for the ward and someone who is deeply committed to his community. He formed a committee. This group of people symbolised the charitable and generous nature of the residents of Holt. Inspired by the heart-wrenching scenes of the devastation in Queensland and in northern Victoria, they set about raising much-needed funds by organising a special benefit concert. Ironically, the committee had no idea that our community would be affected by flooding and the venue that was chosen to stage the fundraising event was itself flooded.

This did not dampen the spirits of the committee and the 100 performers who volunteered to participate in the concert. The concert was moved to the Cranbourne Community Theatre. I am proud of the fact that not even a flooded venue could stop our local community from banding together in support of flood victims across the country. To be in attendance at the concert, which was run on the evening of 12 February, was a great honour. I was also extremely proud that more than \$7,000 was raised at this sold-out venue. This included the \$1,000 donation presented to the mayor on the night of the concert by the Hampton Park Progress Association.

In addition, \$12,000 was also donated to support the victims of the Victorian and Queensland floods by the city of Casey, and I wish to acknowledge the council for this contribution. I am also—as I was, particularly, during that evening—in awe of Holt's home-grown talent. Performers like Madison Pritchett, Andrew Swift, the Casey Choir and many others were truly amazing, and showed that the arts are alive and well in Holt. The solo number delivered by Chelsea Wall deserves particular mention. Her home was badly damaged by knee-deep floodwater; nevertheless, she continued to go to rehearsals and participate. To have such a high standard of artistic talent and professional dedication on show again made me particularly proud to be the local federal member.

In speaking about that, I want to turn my attention to recognising two important events that occurred within the Holt electorate. The Community Spirit and Leadership Awards were held on 8 December. Forty-one students from schools across the area were recognised at an awards ceremony held at the Casey council chamber. This awards ceremony was attended by over 250 people, including parents, teachers and supporters. The awards recognised the outstanding contribution made by the students, and the difference that their contribution, hard work and dedication have made in their schools and our local community. The testimonials from the schools nominating the students were truly outstanding and tell of the great work done by our kids and the strong sense of community spirit that they have.

One of the award recipients helped plan and organise a fundraiser for a fellow student with a disability which raised \$13,000 towards essential walking equipment. Another recipient had helped rescue a four-year-old boy who had fallen into a public swimming pool, even though she herself was not a very good swimmer. She went to the bottom of the pool and pulled the boy to safety. There were many other similarly impressive testimonials, ranging from organising fundraisers for a less fortunate family whose house had burnt down to collecting food each day for school breakfasts.

Importantly, this awards ceremony gave me the chance to say thanks to these students on behalf of the community and to let them know how proud we are of them. I am going to read through their names because I think they deserve to be acknowledged. So I would like to acknowledge these very impressive young Holt constituents: Moesha Attard, Lexie Harris, Carissa Nettleton, Dharna Nicholson-Bux, Nyamboum Ruei, Daniel Cooper, Shoana Davenport-Stilo, Joel Shaw, Dean Kemp, Jean-Pierre Hanna, Renesha Siemeniak, Nathan Usher, Zoe Flight, Natalie Wickens, Joshua Strachan, Molisi Tu Inauvai, Phoebe Grothaus, Oleg Glazunov, Stacey Beach, Daniel Ando, Sophie Wieckmann, Shona Morrison, Madeline Nelson, Nevena Djuric, Zoe Stopher, Jessica Schuyler, Jamie Rundle, Samantha Herholdt, Sam Crotty, Jesse Caminiti, Molly McLean, Mitchell Dunne, Isabella Zygouras, Emma Seal, Daniel Marquison, Karena McNeely, Douglas Dias, Timothy Riley, Daniel Martin, Olivier Permal, Sitarah Mohammadi, Bridget Bugeja, Dylan Cavalot and Joshua Dodgson. There are a lot of names there, but they deserve to be acknowledged because of the contribution they have made to our community. As I said at the start of my presentation, on a national level the community does get some pretty bad PR. But it would be pretty good if the national media sometimes paid attention to the quality of the young people we actually have in our community.

The Holt Australia Day awards at Hampton Park on Australia Day were amazing, as they were in Doveton. There were a couple of young people that I particularly wanted to mention from amongst the large number of people who received awards—it is ironic that we held the Hampton Park Community Spirit awards in the Hampton Park Reserve, given that the reserve was effectively underwater a few days later on 4 and 5 February as a consequence of the flooding. One of those young people was a young man called Anthony Bickham, who bravely rushed into a burning house to help a woman and her daughter. He rescued them and brought them to safety.

As I said to you, Holt is a growth area. A lot of young families come here to create and live the Australian dream. They bring their families out here. They are trying to create prosperity not just for their family but for their children and their children's children. It is a great honour

to represent this constituency. When you hear the stories of the courage, the commitment, the resilience and the contribution made by the people of Holt, you realise that Holt is the best electorate in Australia.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (4.20 pm)—I rise today to speak on the appropriations bills, particularly Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2010-2011, because I want to revisit the subject of the youth allowance changes the government has made over the last 12 months. I will just give the House a potted history. The House would remember that the government introduced changes, which the opposition opposed, to the independent youth allowance some time ago. We held out against those changes for a good 12 months and then, finally, struck an agreement with the government to ensure that money flowed to students in rural and regional areas who might otherwise not have been able to access tertiary education because of their financial circumstances. We said at the time that we believed that the government had not gone far enough, particularly in including inner regional students in the new criteria—in fact, the old criteria which became the new criteria we had agreed with the government. We said at that time that we would be revisiting the subject and, in fact, Senator Nash put forward a motion in the Senate to highlight the plight of inner regional students.

If you then fast forward to more recent history, the Senate passed the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010, sponsored by Fiona Nash, which would have allowed inner regional students access to the old criteria for youth allowance, which in turn would have meant that money would have been able to flow to thousands of students who would not otherwise have been able to access tertiary education. That bill was transferred to the lower house and members might remember that, last Monday in the House of Representatives, we had a debate about that very bill. The opposition's view was that we could consider and pass the bill and that it would then be up to the government to present it to the Governor-General.

The government, under the great pressure that the opposition were applying, struck a deal with the Independents. That deal, from what we could gather, was to agree to a review of the independent rate of the youth allowance, that review to commence on 1 July with new guidelines to apply from 1 January 2012. The very strong impression that the Independents had was that they had struck a deal with the government that would include inner regional students, allowing funds to flow to those students. There were tumultuous scenes in the House of Representatives when the government realised that the opposition had the votes to carry, or at least to achieve consideration of, the opposition's youth allowance bill in the House of Representatives. At that point, the Leader of the House inveigled the member for Lyne to leave the chamber to go into the Chief Government Whip's office to meet with the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. He emerged only to vote against an amendment that he had already seconded and spoken in favour of in the debate in the previous two hours.

Clearly, as far as the member for Lyne was concerned, he had a deal with the government that satisfied him that inner regional students would be catered for. In fact, the Independents went out of the House—one of the Independents is in the House today—and indicated that they had had a breakthrough win. They indicated that they had a deal with the government that meant they did not have to vote to consider the opposition bill and did not have to vote to pass that bill because the government had heard their concerns and inner regional students were to be taken care of.

So you can imagine the shock in the opposition when the minister for tertiary education, Senator Evans, said in estimates on Thursday:

The answer isn't as some people seem to think ... from the 1 January next year inner regional students will get the same conditions as outer regional students and they will be the same ones as the ones that exist currently ...

This quote makes it absolutely clear that what really happened last Monday was that the Independents—present company excepted—were duped into believing that they had a deal that would cover the concerns of inner regional students and the Independents voted in the House of Representatives—almost all of them—with the government to ensure that the government did not have to consider the Senate bill and therefore not vote on it. They did so on a false premise.

Mr Chester—They were conned.

Mr PYNE—They were conned, as the member for Gippsland says, into believing something which, as Senator Evans confirmed on Thursday, was nothing more than another government ruse to avoid defeat on the floor of the House of Representatives. The deal that they had struck on Monday did not even last through to Thursday. Hopefully, they will not be humiliated, because they will reverse their previous position if they get the chance to do so—and I intend to give them that chance. I now move to Appropriation Bill (No.3) 2010-11 the following amendment:

That all words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

“whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House call on the Government to bring forward its timetable for resolving the inequity it has created in independent youth allowance payments for inner regional students, and in particular ensure that:

- (1) the review is completed by 1 July 2011;
- (2) the current eligibility criteria for independent youth allowance for persons whose homes are located in Outer Regional Australia, Remote Australia and Very Remote Australia according to the Remoteness Structure defined in subsection 1067A(10F) of the *Social Security Act 1991* also apply to those with homes in Inner Regional Australia from 1 July 2011;
- (3) all students who had a gap year in 2010 (ie, 2009 year 12 school-leavers) and who meet the relevant criteria qualify for the payment; and
- (4) this bill be appropriated with the necessary funds to pay for this measure.

This amendment ensures that the government cannot wriggle out of an agreement they made with the Independents that caused the Independents to vote a certain way in the House of Representatives last Monday. This amendment ensures that inner regional students can access the independent rate of youth allowance based on the same criteria as those for students in outer regional and remote and very remote areas. It puts to proof the government's claim that they have fixed the problem to the satisfaction of the Independents. We will make sure this amendment is voted on in the House of Representatives this week to ensure that the Independents have a second opportunity over a nebulous deal on a shake of a hand with the government and actually force the government to abide by the will of the parliament. If we do not do this and if the House does not pass this amendment, that will mean that students who graduated from year 12 in 2009 will be in a cohort all of their own and will be in a bubble all of their own. Students before 2009 can access the old criteria and students from 2011 will be able to access the new criteria—from 1 January next year—but students who finished year 12

in 2009 will still be facing the prospect of not being able to access the independent rate of youth allowance despite the fact that they would have qualified under the new rules from 1 January 2012. We want to make sure that the promised review of youth allowance reports by the end of this financial year. If the review reports by 30 June—that is, before 1 July—it will give the government all the time it needs to ensure that the new guidelines for the independent rate of youth allowance will not leave out any particular kind of student.

I will give you one example of the kind of student I am talking about. The member for Paterson has provided me with a letter from a constituent whose daughter is in just this position. It reads:

Thanks for agreeing to take my case to attempt some fair and equitable treatment of our application for youth allowance for my daughter. She is a youth who has been seriously affected by the change of the goalposts mid year by the Labor government. Our daughter completed year 12 in 2009 and decided to take a gap year to enable her to earn over the cut off amount at the time which was \$19532 in the next 18 months, and thereby qualify for youth allowance when she commenced her Arts/Law degree this year 2011. She worked as many hours as she could at her casual job at officeworks at Newcastle and all payslips and other information was kept by us to prove that she had earned this amount. She recommenced worked as soon as the HSC was over in October 2009. After the return to school rush at officeworks passed, my daughter's powers were cut back, however, she was still optimistic about earning the \$19532 in the 18 month period.

Then the government changed the goalposts half way through last year and the new rules say that she has had to work an average of 30 hours per week in that 18 mth period. This changing of the goalposts halfway through the year has meant that my daughter, despite earning over \$19532 will not now qualify for the youth allowance.

This is not an esoteric debate about criteria, and it is not about the opposition winning or the government losing or the Independents striking a deal. The government's changes have materially affected not only this constituent's family but also the families of thousands like her who graduated in 2009 from year 12. There are thousands of students who, through the fault of nothing but the government's intransigence, will miss out on the financial support they need to go on to tertiary education. As the government has admitted, these students have been materially affected, and that is why they have brought forward the review and why they say new rules will start from 1 January 2012. In spite of the admissions of the government and the Independents that this was the case, the government has said that it will not allow those students in 2009 to qualify under the new rules. Senator Evans confirmed that in estimates last Thursday, when he wanted to back-pedal and backslide out of the agreement that he had made with the Independents.

I am saying to the House—and we will have a vote on it this week—that if it actually wants to put inner regional students in the same position as all the other regional and rural students it should vote for this amendment. Any other arrangement with the government is not worth the paper that it was not written on. The only way the government will be forced to effect a change giving students who graduated in 2009 the same access to the youth allowance as every other rural and regional student is if this amendment is passed. I have moved the amendment, and I absolutely commend it to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Vamvakinou)—Is the amendment seconded?

Ms Marino—I second the amendment and reserve my right to speak.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Sturt has moved an amendment that all words after ‘That’ be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The question now is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (4.33 pm)—In this debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2010-2011 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2010-2011, I will focus on population, migration and foreign policy—including the proposal of the opposition to cut out Australian Indonesian education partnership—as well as a number of other areas. In the coming decades, the proportion of Australia’s population aged 65 and over is expected to more than double. As a result, our pension and health care costs will rise massively while the working age population shrinks. Australia’s hitherto bipartisan skilled migration policy plays a significantly positive role in addressing this. Last year, Access Economics modelling done on behalf of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship—and it is on my website so people can have a look at the figures—showed that in 2008-09, for instance, immigration intakes had a net benefit to the Commonwealth budget of \$380 million in the first year. That includes all the humanitarian and family reunion programs—people who were initially a cost to the budget bottom line—but overall, even in the first year, because of the overwhelmingly skilled nature of our immigration intake there was a net benefit of \$380 million.

On these figures, in 20 years time the budget will enjoy a positive impact from this same year of immigrants of \$1,770 million. So over the 20-year period, from that year of migration alone the Australian people have gained simply, if one looks at it in terms of economic benefit, \$20 billion in net tax from that one year’s intake of immigration.

Last year the coalition sought to conflate the population issue in immigration with asylum seekers. I have spoken on this topic before but I feel that it deserves our attention again. In 2008-09 there were 171,318 permanent migrants—not, as the member for Cook suggested, over 300,000. He did not understand—or he deliberately did not understand—or he tried to exaggerate the numbers so people would be afraid of 300,000. During the global financial crisis, many Australian passport holders whom even the member for Cook cannot keep out of Australia returned to Australia because the economic prospects in this country were much better than they were in London, Boston, New York or wherever they were. Of course New Zealanders also have a different arrangement by which they come to Australia. This made up the scare figure of 300,000.

In 2007-08, it was 158,000; the previous year—the last full year of the Howard government—148,000. In 2005-06, it was 143,000. The increase has been driven by demand for skilled migrants. Throughout all that time, two-thirds of the permanent arrivals came here under the skilled migration category. The remainder came under family migration and a small proportion, 13½ thousand, under the special humanitarian program. The 300,000 figure he has got by counting temporary migrants such as temporary skilled migrants, overseas students and Australians returning home and then minusing temporary migrants and Australians who are leaving.

Access Economics estimated that in 2007-08 Australia’s international education industry was worth over \$14 billion and provided 122,000 full-time equivalent jobs. Additionally, an Access Economics study of our immigration program showed that in 2008-09 the migration program had a net benefit to the federal budget of \$830 million in the first year. In 20 years

time the federal budget will be \$1,760 million better off thanks to these immigrants who arrived in 2008-09.

In the 40 years between 1945 and 1985, Australia's population grew from 7.4 million to 15.8 million—a 113 per cent increase. If the current rate of migration continues in the 40 years from now until 2050, Australia's population will grow from 22 million to 36 million, only a 63 per cent increase. These figures put the population debate in perspective.

We should not forget that Australia is a sparsely populated country by world standards even if we consider the most closely settled areas. Victoria is the most densely populated state. Its population density is 23.87 per square kilometre. Australia as a whole has a population density of 2.8 people per square kilometre. To put that in context, the US has a population density of 32.11; Malaysia, 85.8; Germany, 229.3; and the Netherlands, 399.9 people per square kilometre.

In relation to the population debate, it is not the growth and urban population that is causing water problems but the waste of water in agriculture and the fact that we need to farm water in our cities and around our cities much more efficiently. The key policy is to buy back water rates from uneconomic irrigators. Obviously, that is not such an urgent issue now with the big floods we have had and the revival of the Murray-Darling Basin but it is an important economic and environmental issue in the future.

Australia now has some of the most water-efficient cities in the world, particularly Melbourne, thanks to the former minister for environment, John Thwaites, who was the member for Albert Park, one of the state seats in my electorate.

In 1934, Melburnians used an average of 277 litres of water per day. Over the next 50 years that rose so that in 1981 the average Melburnian used 500 litres of water per day; however, recent decades have seen restrictions and, more importantly, cultural change in the way we use water.

In 2007, the rate of water usage had sunk back to 277 litres per person—the same rate it was in 1934. On a dry continent like Australia, the way people use massive amounts of water in metropolitan cities like Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane or even here in Canberra is surely very important. However, in my view our problems regarding water usage are political, not demographic, in origin. On 25 July 2010, an article on coalition population policy by the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*. He claimed in the article that if population grew through immigration it should be immigration that makes us stronger, not weaker. He said:

Boat people are only a small percentage of our immigration but they powerfully reinforce perceptions that immigration is out of control because they are chosen by people smugglers, not by the Australian government.

Here we see the coalition confusing those seeking refuge with migration. The two are simply not related. He went on to say:

By stopping the boats, the Howard government could increase immigration ...

This is the policy that they took to the last election. We have seen over the last week that some in the Liberal Party are not afraid to use concerns in the electorate regarding migration for political point-scoring. This is very much against the national interest, in my view. The non-partisan support we have had for our migration policy is something that is a massive benefit to

us all around the country. We can see, literally in front of our eyes, how skilled migrants contribute. After the recent floods, the Queensland government and Queensland businesses said that they need skilled immigrants to help with some of the flood recovery up there. We know that in the mining areas in Western Australia and Queensland there is an insatiable demand for skilled migrants. They feed straight into the system. They are not educated in Australia so you do not have the costs of providing for them; therefore, we are great beneficiaries of their immigration to Australia—particularly since there are so many young and educated people amongst them.

Could I briefly turn to another area of concern of mine, and that is Australia's foreign representation. I believe that consecutive governments of all stripes have underfunded the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. There are now about 20 per cent fewer DFAT employees in overseas posts than there were 20 years ago. In my view, this is really affecting the representation of a growing, important and confident country like Australia. I am thinking in particular of two areas of the world that I am very familiar with. The first is the area of the former Soviet Union south of Russia; that is, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan. They are represented by Australia from Moscow. The impossibility of adequately representing those important countries that have some antagonism with the government in Moscow is very manifest if you are there. Ukraine, for instance, is a country of over 50 million people. It is full of mining engineers—exactly the kinds of people who ought to be suitable for certain economic projects in Australia under skilled migration. They have to apply for a visa to get to Moscow before they can apply for a visa to get to Australia. So our representation in that part of the world could certainly be lifted.

The second area is the Arab Maghreb. The 100 million people who live in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco are very poorly represented by having just a trade office in Libya. Of course, that has been abandoned. We are represented in Morocco from Paris, of all places, and in many of those other places from Cairo. It is simply inadequate, and it is embarrassing that both Ukraine and Morocco have embassies here and there is no equivalent representation in their country. It is important as Australia grows that political leadership stands up to that sort of Hansonite element in Australia—or even that element in the Australian press which is constantly questioning the expenditure of federal governments—and says, 'Yes, we do need serious representation overseas because we are a serious country.'

I turn to the Indonesian education project in my last few minutes. The Indonesian education partnership is a program that I am very familiar with. With an Australian parliamentary delegation I went to Aceh after the tsunami and saw that you could build a new school for 400 kids in Indonesia for \$250,000. I cannot tell you the expressions of the teachers and the parents and what a great impression it made on all of us to see how Australian public money had been used in exactly the right way. Of course we need to spend money on pensioners, poor people, education and flood relief—all the kinds of worthy projects that we have in Australia—but this was the cutting edge of Australia's national interest. If you were there and saw the alternatives that the Indonesians were faced with, you would understand why this is in the Australian national interest.

The prospect of cutting this program is so against Australia's foreign policy interests and, indeed, national security interests. I want to elaborate. In places like Java and Aceh the alternative is a school perhaps funded by Saudi Arabia where there is rote learning of the Koran by

poor Indonesian kids. When this is presented to them, what do the Australian people think is a better alternative: doing that and going on to be the graduates of Abu Bakar Bashir's infamous madrasahs or learning computing science; English; their own language, Bahasa; and emerging with some economic hope for the future? Fortunately, the past Australian governments, including the Howard government, and this current Australian government have had a massive program of building schools. We have built 330,000 new school places and 2,000 junior secondary schools between 2005 and 2007. It is a program we can be very proud of and which under no circumstances should be cut.

There is probably no-one in this parliament who is more concerned with the effects of international terrorism than me. I defer to no-one on that issue. But this is an issue where the mutual benefit of the two countries is very clear. I think it is embarrassing that the idea of cutting the Indonesian program was made just after the Queensland flood, when the Foreign Minister of Indonesia, Marty Natalegawa, came to Brisbane pledging \$1 million from the poor people of Indonesia towards the Queensland Premier's flood relief program. What kind of image of Australia does that send to the hundreds of millions of Indonesians?

Two weeks ago police in Indonesia arrested six teenagers, four of them enrolled at one of these extremist schools. If these teenagers had been enrolled at a school built by Australia where they had the opportunity to learn English, Bahasa and perhaps computing science, perhaps they would have had a different view of the world. I urge the opposition to rethink this kind of policy and have a broader vision of the Australian national interest.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (4.48 pm)—Having seconded the amendment moved by the member for Sturt on bringing forward some results as to youth allowance, I rise to speak in support of it. What I am speaking to support is a fair go for young people in my electorate and many thousands of others around Australia. I heard the previous speaker use the word 'embarrassment'. In my view it is an embarrassment to this government that these students were not considered part of the youth allowance offering to grant equity of opportunity to these young people.

As this House is well aware, the Labor Party's changes to youth allowance slashed the tertiary education opportunities for regional and rural students right across this nation, and the young people in my electorate were some of the worst hit. This government and the Independents have the opportunity to fix this for the year-2009-10 cohort, and what could be fairer than what we are proposing? Two houses of parliament have supported the changes that we are proposing to independent youth allowance. I encourage all members to support this particular amendment put by the member for Sturt.

We have seen arbitrary lines drawn on a map in relation to the youth allowance. It is a truly dreadful indictment of the government to draw arbitrary lines on a map to differentiate between great young people who are seeking higher education or training, often in the same school, in the same area and in the same town but who are unable to qualify. Unfortunately, this has made an absolute mockery of the government's education revolution slogan. And unfortunately for the students in my part of the world and perhaps for 20,000 others, it is almost an education devolution because many of them will not be able to access their higher education or training as a result; and, if they do, it will come at great personal cost to their families. Both this House and the Senate have sent a clear message to the government that rural and

regional students and their families should be given a fair go. This is all about a fair go for the great young people of this nation; it is a fair go for regional and rural students.

What students in inner regional areas such as those in my electorate of Forrest need is immediate action to give them certainty. Those young people who have done their gap year are at the cusp; they need immediate action. They need certainty. They need youth allowance to be available to them so that they can go on with their higher education dreams and whatever else they want to achieve, particularly, as I said, the year 2009-10 gap-year students. If, for some reason, the discrimination inflicted on regional and rural students through Labor's legislation was an unintended consequence then Labor have had adequate time to fix it themselves. They have chosen not to, and that really disturbs me. That moves it from being an unintended consequence to one that was calculated, and our young people are the ones who are suffering as a result. The government have blocked every move made by the coalition to prevent this inequity, and that is why we have proposed an amendment. Our amendment aims to end the Labor government's discrimination for these year 12 students of year 2009-10 and to allow them access to youth allowance at this time. They need access to youth allowance, and they need it now.

I want to briefly touch on the constitutional question that the government used erroneously to avoid ending the discrimination. The government claimed that the coalition bill was an appropriation bill, despite advice from the Clerk of the Senate that it was not. The bill before the House, though, is clearly an appropriation bill. At this moment, there can be absolutely no doubt that this legislation gives the government the opportunity to appropriate the funds for this purpose. It is in the title of the bill. In debate last week, both the Attorney-General and the Leader of the House referred to section 53 of the Constitution, which identifies that appropriation bills must originate in this House—and this bill did. Of course, Labor's constitutional understanding did not reach the intent of the framers of its legislation to eliminate discrimination in Australia based on location. Members should note that section 51 of the Constitution talks about the Commonwealth having the power to make laws with regard to taxation, but part (ii) states:

... but so as not to discriminate between States or parts of States;

The coalition and I want to encourage and support the great young people who completed year 12 in 2009-10 when they need to move away to undertake their higher education or training. I receive stories about their situation on a daily basis. We heard the member for Sturt quote one of the emails he had received about this. I receive them on a daily basis. I also meet these people when I am out in the community. These great young people and their great families are being affected by this legislation. I receive emails and phone calls from them, and they are quite desperate. This is an opportunity to fix the legislation for this group. The inequity is a result of Labor policy and this is the opportunity for them to fix it, to address the equity for these young students. Rural and regional students deserve a fair go. This is what this amendment is about: it is about a fair go. At this moment, it is right to resolve this inequity for inner regional students, which is why I have seconded and strongly support the amendment moved by the member for Sturt.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Human Services and Minister for Social Inclusion) (4.54 pm)—It is a pleasure to be able to make a short contribution to the debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2010-2011 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2010-2011. The bills pro-

vide additional funding of \$29 million to the Human Services portfolio for the 2010-11 financial year. The new funding is important because it allows my portfolio to implement a range of important commitments that the government took to the election last year.

The first of those relates to the childcare rebate. In total, Centrelink will receive \$15.2 million extra this financial year to implement changes that the government is making to the operation of the childcare rebate. The changes mean that for the first time families will be able to choose to have the childcare rebate paid at the time their childcare service submits their attendance data to the government. For some families that means a fortnightly payment, but for other families it can mean weekly payments. That is because, while childcare centres are required by the government to submit their attendance data fortnightly, many services choose to submit their data weekly. Families whose services submit their data weekly will be able to receive their rebate weekly. For those services that submit their data fortnightly, parents will be able to receive their rebate fortnightly. Families will also be able to choose to have their childcare rebate paid directly to their childcare service and receive an immediate reduction in their bills or to continue to receive that payment as a rebate. This will allow families to choose the payment arrangements that work best for them. The option of more regular childcare rebate payments will reduce the up-front costs of care and make it easier for parents to manage the family budget.

It is worth remembering that, in contrast, under the previous government families had to wait almost two years to see the childcare tax rebate, as it was then. In those days, families could claim only 30 per cent of out-of-pocket expenses to a maximum of around \$4,300 per annum. Under the Labor government, those families can now claim half of their out-of-pocket expenses up to a maximum of \$7½ thousand a year. That is a 75 per cent increase on the maximum amount payable, a terrific demonstration of Labor's commitment to supporting working families with their childcare costs. Of course, Centrelink has an important role in delivering those payments.

I will turn now to paid parental leave, because these bills also provide additional resources to Centrelink to implement changes to paid parental leave that the Prime Minister announced prior to the election. The election commitment will provide financial support not just for mothers but for fathers and for other partners to spend time at home with their newborn or adopted child. The successful implementation of paid parental leave on 1 January this year was, of course, a major win for working families, who have been waiting decades for this very important change. The extension of the scheme to eligible fathers or other carers is a further win for young families with children. Also during last year's election campaign, the government announced it would increase the rate of family tax benefit part A payable for children aged between 16 and 18 years who were studying. The change aligns the maximum rate payable for 16- to 18-year-olds with the rate payable for 13- to 15-year-olds. The bills provide Centrelink with \$1.442 million in 2010-11 to implement this important change. Again it is worth pointing out that Centrelink has a role to play in a change that will make a big difference to families with children.

At the moment, parents with a child aged 15 who are eligible for the maximum rate of family tax benefit part A receive about \$208.46 each fortnight, yet when that child turns 16 that payment drops by 75 per cent to \$51.24 per fortnight, as though, magically, the cost of supporting a 17-year-old or a 16-year-old is lower. Madam Deputy Speaker Vamvakinou is mak-

ing a face because she knows what it is like when you have teenagers! Their costs certainly do not decrease as they grow into their later teens. The government recognises that the cost of supporting families with children does not drop by three-quarters overnight and so, from 1 January 2012, the 16- to 18-year-old rate will align with the 13- to 15-year-old rate for young people while they continue to study. It is not just a very important measure for helping families with the family budget; it is also a very important measure to keep young people in school, TAFE or further education, because we know that encouraging kids to stay in school longer or to get post-school qualifications absolutely helps them with their employment prospects in later years.

I want to talk briefly today about the age pension work bonus. These appropriation bills provide additional funding to Centrelink to implement changes to the age pension work bonus that were announced during last year's election campaign. The program amends the work bonus to improve the incentive for age pensioners to participate in the workforce from 1 July 2011. Under the new rules, age pensioners will be able to earn up to \$250 a fortnight without it being assessed as income under the income test. The government expects that these changes will benefit up to 30,000 pensioners each year. Allowing people to do a bit of casual or part-time work does not just help older Australians remain active and engaged; it also allows them to have a bit of extra spending money to improve their quality of life.

I also take the opportunity in this debate to make some comments about the work underway in my portfolio to transform the way the government delivers services to the Australian community. The service delivery reform initiative was introduced by the government in December 2009. The service delivery reform agenda continues a broader program of change that commenced in 2004 when the previous government created the Department of Human Services to place greater emphasis on the way government delivers services to Australians. In 2007 the department's role was expanded to reflect responsibility for the development, delivery and coordination of government services and the development of service delivery policy. The continued reform of service delivery will create a better experience for the community and contribute to improved policy outcomes for government, particularly in areas such as economic and social participation, education, child care and health. These outcomes are in line with greater integration and cross-agency service provision initiatives within government.

Service delivery reform will significantly improve the way services are delivered by the Human Services portfolio. The progressive rollout of co-located offices, for example, will extend the portfolio's reach by providing one-stop shops in many more places. Co-location allows people to do their face-to-face Medicare, Centrelink and Child Support Agency business under the one roof and will significantly improve the way those services are delivered in communities. For instance, the co-location program will double the number of shopfronts where Medicare services are available from 240 today to around 500. This is a big change for regional communities in particular. Many of them have never had a dedicated Medicare office in their town.

Increased self-service options will allow people to manage their own affairs, including through expanded online services from their home or workplace at a time that suits them. If you can book a plane ticket at 3 am from your lounge room, why can't you update your address with Medicare, check your entitlement to childcare benefit or even apply for the age pension in the same way? The portfolio will use fewer resources servicing people who would

rather do their business online. This will allow those resources to be redirected to helping those people who genuinely need face-to-face contact and prefer that face-to-face help and support. People facing significant disadvantage or multiple or complex challenges will be offered more intensive support through coordinated assistance with a case coordinator. That means better service for our clients who are homeless or long-term unemployed, clients who have a disability or literacy difficulties, or clients with, for example, drug or alcohol issues.

Effective and accessible service delivery is also an important element of the government's efforts to build a more inclusive society. Service delivery reform will simplify people's dealings with the government and provide better support to those most in need. A key element of the reform is the integration of the portfolio into a single department of state. Bringing together back office functions will drive efficiency, reduce the cost of service delivery for government and free up staff for more front-line customer service delivery.

This is important work. Service delivery reform will transform the delivery of services by the Human Services portfolio and will provide better outcomes for generations of Australians. It will put people first in the design and delivery of services and will ensure services are delivered more effectively and efficiently, especially to people who need more intensive support and to those with complex needs. By redirecting our effort, and expenditure, away from the back office and from servicing customers who do not really want our face-to-face help we can provide more assistance to those who really need it.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (5.04 pm)—I rise in the Committee today to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2010-2011 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2010-2011. While I am deeply concerned with a number of elements in the government's program, sadly, time limits prevent me from outlining them all. However, firstly I would like to raise the issue of the government reducing by 25 per cent the funds available to the Export Market Development Grants scheme—a scheme designed to assist small and medium size businesses with their export development. This is being reduced from \$200 million down to just \$150 million—a \$50 million reduction.

Outside our mining industry, our small and medium size exporters are struggling. We have a dollar which is now above parity with the US dollar, and many of our major export markets are in meltdown. Further, our small and medium size businesses face a government whose policies have had the effect of making small business smaller, with over 300,000 small business job losses since they came to government. Now is the time that we should be assisting our small and medium size business, but instead this government are doing the opposite, by cutting the funding from this important scheme.

The government like to talk about certainty, but how can we have certainty when the government continually change the rules to the Export Market Development Grants scheme? This year, when exporters are applying for a grant, they will receive an upfront payment but further payments under the scheme will only be paid at a rate of somewhere between 45 to 65cents in the dollar. I call on the government to reverse the cutbacks to the Export Market Development Grants scheme and to give our small and medium size exporters the certainty they need, especially when they are venturing out into difficult international markets.

Secondly, I would like to take this opportunity to focus on the issue of trust. On 16 August 2010, just days out from the last federal election, the Prime Minister stated—and I quote those infamous 11 words for which this Prime Minister will forever be remembered:

There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.

And let us not forget the Treasurer's hand in this deception, with his equally infamous statement before the last election where he said: 'What we reject is this hysterical allegation that somehow we are moving towards a carbon tax.'

Following the government's shameless backflip on the carbon tax, last Friday the email in my office went into meltdown, with constituents claiming to have been hoodwinked and deceived by the Prime Minister and the Treasurer. People were saying that they had been conned and that they could no longer believe a word that comes out of the Prime Minister's mouth. I would like to read out a letter that came from one constituent, and I quote:

Dear Mr Kelly,

I am sure you are being flooded by emails in relation to Ju-liar's carbon tax. I would like to add my voice. I am appalled by her backflip, although not surprised. I am a single mother of two, one child with autism. This tax will simply add to the stress load of our household. This is a tax Australia cannot afford. The carers within our community are just holding their heads above water in coping with all the financial drains on their meagre allowances. This tax will add to their financial burden through increasing electricity prices, and many are already doing without heating and cooling just to cope. And the increase in petrol will definitely impact on their ability to take their son, daughter, husband or wife, mother or father to the many essential doctors' appointments.

Ju-liar and her cohorts need to be held to account. The government must understand how this decision will impact on the average Aussie. The so-called rebate will not assist in any way, other than to put the country further into debt. To take from one hand and give a portion back with the other makes absolutely no sense whatsoever.

People have asked me: 'Why can't some action be taken against the Prime Minister and the Treasurer against such misleading and deceptive conduct? Isn't there a law against such a scam?' We do have section 52 of the Trade Practices Act—now renamed in an act of window dressing to the Competition and Consumer Act. This act provides a prohibition against conduct that is misleading or deceptive or is likely to mislead or deceive, but only if the conduct is first found to be in trade or commerce.

While it is arguable that the Prime Minister and the Treasurer are guilty of having engaged in conduct that is misleading or deceptive by tricking the public over the carbon tax, they do have a defence that the deception was not made in trade or commerce because it is clear that the Prime Minister and the Treasurer simply have not got a clue about what trade or commerce are.

Some of my constituents are being a bit harsh on the Prime Minister by calling her 'Ju-liar'. Let us have a close look at these infamous 11 words to see if we can come up with a defence for our Prime Minister:

There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.

People could be mistaken for focusing on the first six words, 'There will be no carbon tax' but they should consider this statement in full:

There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.

I emphasis the words, 'under the government I lead.' Personally, I am aware of no government that this Prime Minister has ever led. Before this election this government was not led by the Prime Minister; it was led by a cabal of faceless men working hand-in-hand with the Sussex Street death squad. Then after the election, this government is also not led by the

Prime Minister; it is led by the Greens. Senator Milne let the cat out of the bag only last week when she said of the carbon tax:

... it's because of Greens in the balance of power that we've got it.

The inmates have taken over the asylum. The Greens are only just warming up. Only last week the New South Wales Greens through their candidate for the state seat of Marrickville, someone who in less than one month is likely to be sitting in the New South Wales state parliament, announced yet another stupid and dangerous plan that would damage the economy. This time it was a trade boycott of China—our No.1 export market.

This is how members of the other side should defend the indefensible. When members of the public remind them of the Prime Minister's statement—'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead'—they can simply say there is no deception. The Prime Minister does not lead this government; this government is led by the Greens and the faceless men acting in concert.

However, we need to look at other statements by the Prime Minister and the Treasurer. No matter how they seek to spin it and no matter how they try to disguise one lie with another, it is crystal clear that they promised before the election that they would not introduce a carbon tax during this term. Irrespective of the merits of a carbon tax, this backflip raises a serious question about our democracy. If we have a Prime Minister and a Treasurer making a solemn promise before the election that they will not introduce a new tax and then even before the ink has dried on the election results they announce that this new tax will go ahead, that is nothing other than election fraud that undermines our democratic process.

If the Prime Minister and Treasurer now wish to introduce a carbon tax they must call a fresh election and put their arguments to the voters for them to decide. By failing to do so, they destroy not only their own credibility but also the credibility of the entire parliament. This parliament cannot continue when the public can no longer trust a single word that comes out of the Prime Minister's or the Treasurer's mouth. In short, we have a situation where if the Prime Minister or the Treasurer told you it was raining you would want to go outside to check for yourself.

As for the carbon tax now being peddled by the Green and Labor alliance, let us first hope that they can be honest enough to call it what it is. The use of the words 'carbon pollution' subconsciously creates a false image of grit and black soot. What the carbon tax is really about is carbon dioxide—that clear and odourless gas that makes plants grow and makes up less than 0.0004 of one per cent of the volume of our atmosphere. Of that small amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere, only 2.75 per cent is of man-made origin. At least 97 per cent comes from other natural sources.

Like you, Mr Deputy Speaker Murphy, I believe in climate change. History shows us that climate change has been occurring for millions of years and it continues today. Even if we went back to living in mud huts and if we gave away everything we have in our modern society, there would still be climate change tomorrow. The rationale for this tax is to do something—to do something about climate change. It is based on the theory that increases in CO₂ emissions cause dangerous global warming. If we accept this theory as truth, and if the government is going to introduce this new tax, a new tax on carbon dioxide, the government must clearly explain, firstly, what reduction in global temperature will be produced by Australia

cutting its carbon dioxide emissions by 2050; and, secondly, what extra costs—such as increased electricity prices, increased transport costs and increased food prices—will be incurred annually by a typical Australian family of four.

In answering the first question, the scientists have done the calculations to determine what reduction in global temperature would be produced by Australia cutting its carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent by 2050. A 20 per cent cut by 2050 is an average cut of 10 per cent between now and then. It is estimated that carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere by 2050 will increase to 506 parts per million by volume. From that, we deduct today's concentration of 390 parts. So humankind might add, in the next 40 years, 116 parts per million, for which Australia's contribution would be 1.5 per cent. So the CO₂ concentration increase fore-stalled by 40 years would be 10 per cent of 1.5 per cent of that 116 parts per million, which would be 0.174 parts per million. That is how much this carbon tax would save. The scientists have calculated—even being charitable and taking in the high end of the UN's estimates of the dangers of global warming—that in 40 years time, by the year 2050, this carbon tax would have the effect of avoiding global warming of 0.001 degrees.

Now we need to look at the costs to get this minute saving in warming—which is probably too small even for our instruments to measure. This planned carbon tax is deliberately intended to hurt every Australian. It is a direct assault on the living standards of every Australian. The New South Wales government—the government for now, anyway—has admitted that a carbon tax will result in a 25 per cent increase in electricity prices. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal backs this admission, explaining that a carbon price will increase the cost of living by 26 per cent above the expected increase over the next three years. In the first year alone, the Labor-Greens carbon tax will add at least \$300 to electricity bills across our communities. It will feed into the price of everything, forever, and it will go up every year. Not even fresh food or medical or hospital services will be exempt.

The other big lie about the carbon tax is that, unless we introduce it, Australia is at risk of falling behind the rest of the world. But, knowing that China, India and the USA are not going to implement a carbon tax, it is simply a destructive absurdity for Australia to introduce it. If we penalise ourselves with this absurd tax when it is not implemented in the other major economies around the world, it will simply burden our industries with higher costs, it will increase the costs of moving goods around the nation, and it will put us at a competitive disadvantage. In fact, we will be putting ourselves far behind the rest of the world. It will come at a great cost to the economy and a great cost to Australian jobs. The highly respected economist Terry McCrann has described this carbon tax as 'a national suicide pledge'.

The Australian business community—indeed, the Australian people—need certainty about this carbon tax. They need to hear that the government will not introduce it. This destructive and utterly pointless tax should be abandoned as it has been elsewhere in the world. The Australian business community and the Australian people in general will have certainty only when this deceptive and misleading government is removed from office.

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (5.19 pm)—Having listened to the contribution made by the previous speaker, it certainly reminded me a lot of the type of language that One Nation often used. I wonder if a lot of his speech notes were indeed prepared by One Nation or perhaps the Tea Party from the Republican Party in the United States. It was quite a contribution that was not based on science but on the need for a good scare campaign.

Today I rise to make my contribution to Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2010-2011. I want to particularly focus my contribution on the whole issue of education, schools and preschool funding, which is critically important to not only my electorate but many other electorates across the nation. This is about funding for the future of our country. It is about providing opportunities for our future citizens and providing a skills base for our economy.

I want to talk particularly about an area in my electorate that has gone through tremendous growth, and that is the Surf Coast. The Surf Coast is typical of many electorates throughout Australia in that rapid population growth has been taking place over the last decade or so. We need all levels of government to come together to provide funding and policy development to ensure that we get the outcomes right not only in managing the growth but in providing those educational opportunities for all citizens within that area.

I have particular pleasure in acknowledging a group of parents within my electorate, the Save Our Schools group, which has been campaigning for the need for investment in Torquay, Jan Juc and Bellbrae to ensure that we provide educational opportunities for our young ones who are the future of our nation.

It has become apparent to those communities, particularly those parents, that the school sites within Torquay, Jan Juc and Bellbrae are at capacity or will reach capacity next year. Over the next three or four years, without further investment in education for those students in Jan Juc, Torquay and Bellbrae, we will have a situation where perhaps 500 families will need to travel into Geelong, some 30 kilometres away, to place their kids in primary education. This is particularly worrying. The Save Our Schools committee with assistance from my office has looked at the ABS statistics, and those 500 families can be identified by the growth projections within those statistics. We are particularly concerned by that.

Through the Building the Education Revolution, the Commonwealth made a very substantial investment into those schools. The capacity of those schools to take additional students was dramatically increased through the provision of new learning areas, new libraries and the like to cater for that growth. With such rapid population growth taking place on the Surf Coast, more funding will be required.

The current capacity of the Torquay College, Bellbrae and St Therese Catholic School, is 1,566 students. That is what those schools are designed to cater for. I believe the Torquay College is at absolute capacity at 480 students. Bellbrae has a maximum capacity of 350 and State Therese has a maximum capacity of 450. If you add those figures together, it is obvious that investment will be required in those schools.

As I said earlier, the ABS statistics on this are very enlightening. They predict the annual growth rate of primary age kids to be about 5.9 per cent—that is, 5.9 per cent growth this year, 5.9 per cent growth on top of that next year, and so on. You can very quickly see the challenge that our community needs to respond to.

The equation becomes more complex when you look at long day care and kindergarten. The reality is that those kindergartens and long day centres are also at or very close to capacity, and again that is very worrying for many parents. Many parents now have to travel into Geelong to access those kindergarten educational opportunities for their three-year-olds. It is

clear that again we need the three levels of government to come to the table and address these very substantial growth challenges.

Over the last few years the Gillard government has been pumping an additional \$210 million into improving kindergarten services as a part of what is close to a billion-dollar COAG reform agenda. That \$210 million should be matched by the Victorian state government to ensure that we do give young people the opportunities they need, particularly in areas of substantial population growth like we have seen on the Surf Coast. In some instances that might require \$200,000 or \$300,000 to build an additional room onto the kindergarten to cater to that growth. That might be about the extent of the funding that is required. But in other areas where there has been substantial population growth over a significant period—and that population growth is going to continue into the foreseeable future—we need to work in an innovative way to ensure that we do develop a children's services hub type of model where we bring together kindergartens, long day care, maternal health nurses and the like. Perhaps also the private sector could be brought onto that one site. Such sites would provide an integrated service for our communities.

I know many here have contributed to the whole debate on growth corridors. As a federal member who has been engaged in these issues in my community for the last four years, I know it is true to say that we do need in those instances to come together, to bring the three levels of government together and to ensure that we do drive good outcomes for our kids. Growth corridors and areas like the Surf Coast very much need the three levels of government working together. We have put \$210 million on the table as a part of our COAG reform of kindergartens, we have put hundreds of millions of dollars into each and every electorate across this nation through the Building the Education Revolution—building new classrooms, new libraries, new learning spaces—and we need the Victorian government now to match that investment to ensure that we do provide in these growth corridors every opportunity for our young Australians.

As I mentioned earlier, the Torquay College community have come together and formed a community group called the Save Our School group. They are a group of women, predominantly, who have the best interests of their kids at heart. What they want to see is educational infrastructure capacity in Torquay dramatically increased over the next two or three years to ensure that kids are not going to school and being jammed in like sardines, which is very much where things are at the moment. They want certainty. They want the Victorian government to put on the table, in very clear and practical ways, what its plans are to deliver that certainty. They want a new primary school to service that growth corridor. They want a new children's services hub to ensure that three- and four-year-olds can access kindergarten services and long day services. These are critical issues to the Torquay Surf Coast community.

Further to that, I would also like to commend the work of the City of Greater Geelong, who have undertaken a very innovative piece of work to look at their kindergarten services across their municipality. They have prioritised, as one, two or three, every service. They have done so to determine what needs to take place to meet growth within the zero to four age group, the kindergarten age group, within that community. What they have said is that there are some areas where a lot of investment will be required. They have been very clear about that. They have said that, in other areas, they will be able to meet demand through being flexible and creative and doing things such as perhaps providing kindergarten services on Saturdays. The

nature of work has changed quite dramatically over the last 20 or 30 years and many parents now enjoy their weekends on a Monday and Tuesday. Perhaps the provision of kindergarten on a Saturday might be a flexible way to suit their lifestyles. There are areas where those sorts of things will be required and there are areas where the provision of \$200,000 or \$300,000 to build an additional space and engage an additional teacher will meet that demand.

I commit to working with the Save Our Schools community group. I commit to working for all parents across the Surf Coast to ensure that we do provide adequate infrastructure for kindergarten and for schools. I think these issues are very important and I look forward to working, over the years to come, to ensure that investment goes into that very substantial growth corridor.

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (5.32 pm)—I take this opportunity to make my contribution to the debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2010-2011. It has been with great interest that I have listened to the various government speakers, including the contribution from the member for Corangamite, to try and justify the incompetence of their financial management over the past 3½ years. Since this government was elected in 2007, the budget position has spiralled out of control and down the drain. One of the consequences of this is that it is estimated that the government will spend approximately \$45 billion on interest payments alone over the next four years because of the accumulated government debt. This government has wasted billions on ill-fated, poorly managed and poorly thought out green programs to deal with the great global warming swindle. This absurdity is now being compounded with the Prime Minister's announcement last week of the introduction of a carbon tax from 1 July 2012. The announcement of the introduction of a carbon tax is a direct contradiction of the Prime Minister's statement during the election campaign, in which she clearly said:

There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.

The argument utilised to support this new tax is that it will allow us to keep pace with the rest of the world. The reality is that it will make us uncompetitive with the rest of the world because the rest of the world is not doing anything about introducing a carbon tax. We need look no further than the United States. Recently they decided, in their House of Representatives, to cease providing any funding to the IPCC.

In Europe, there is a more practical, painful example of the folly of pursuing this course of action. In Spain they have discovered, to their great detriment, that, on average, for every green job they created they lost a little over two jobs in the normal economy. In addition, each green job created required approximately \$174,000 in various subsidies, leading to suffocating national debt and a double-digit unemployment rate.

Over the weekend I received an e-mail from a concerned local businessperson about this very issue. He explained that in the wood panel industry, in which he works, they have estimated that, as a result of the introduction of a carbon tax, industry costs will increase by approximately seven per cent. That might not sound like a huge increase, but the problem is that, in order to compete in the current market with Chinese suppliers, their profit margin is only four per cent. In other words, the introduction of a carbon tax has the potential to wipe out an entire industry, and for what—dealing with a problem that this tax will never resolve?

Some facts are probably appropriate at this point. Australia is responsible for approximately 1.2 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions. A price on carbon is intended to reduce Australia's emissions by approximately 15 per cent. Global emissions are increasing at a rate of about three per cent per annum, mostly driven by China and India. Australia's unilateral reduction in carbon emissions brought about by a price on carbon would be wiped out by the increases, from China and India predominantly, in the emissions of the rest of the world in a period of only 22 days. The question then becomes: what would Australian families and businesses get for those 22 days, other than the feel-good factor? They would get an increase in the price of electricity of at least \$300 per annum, on top of other proposed increases. They would get an increase in the cost of petrol, if the Greens have their way. They would get an estimated \$10 billion in direct cost to business—and guess what? These costs are passed on to the consumer—that is, you and me. Bob Brown needs a lesson in economics if he says that business will not pass that on. They also get increases in other costs of living and, potentially, up to 300,000 Australian manufacturing jobs exported to countries without a price on carbon.

This latest episode with the carbon tax is just another example of a record in government replete with examples of waste and mismanagement of the taxes that Australians are currently paying. The government seems to think that imposing taxes will get them out of their financial problems. It is not the job of the people of Australia to pay for government's mismanagement of the funds that they first entrusted to it.

Take for example the pink batts scheme, which turned out to be a monumental waste of time and money. Not only was there enormous financial loss to all concerned, but there are still risks of fire and fraud and issues with safety and the quality of insulation. All of these were identified before the program began, yet no steps were taken to ensure compliance. The government spent \$2.45 billion on the pink batts scheme which is likely to cost taxpayers in excess of half a billion dollars to fix. In addition to that, numerous small to medium businesses suffered significant losses and have, in some cases, gone out of business. These businesses are now stuck with pink batts they cannot use and cannot sell and no income to cover their debts to banks to save their mortgaged houses or to provide for their families—and that is just the business owners, let alone the staff. The number of jobs created was fewer than promised and the ones created did not last as long as they were promised to. A review in 2010 found that a third of the 14,000 properties surveyed appeared to have had faulty or dangerous installations, resulting in the loss of any potential environmental benefits. The Auditor-General found that for the \$2.45 billion of taxpayers' money spent, there were 4,000 potential cases of fraud and 207 home fires—not to forget the lives that were lost. The environmental benefits were not even evident, because much of the installation was faulty.

The National Broadband Network is proposed by the government to spend at least \$36 billion. This project will take years to roll out and, given government's project management failures over the past 3½ years, will certainly cost more than has been proposed. The plan of the government is to make this a Commonwealth owned monopoly telecommunications provider and provide fixed communications to every home and business in Australia. The coalition, like all Australians, is committed to the universal availability of fast broadband at an affordable price. However, the difference between the coalition and the government is that our concern is to ensure that the most cost-effective option is undertaken.

When Kevin Rudd was Prime Minister, he and his Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Mr Tanner, stated that no major infrastructure project would be undertaken or funded by the government without the benefit of a rigorous cost-benefit analysis. The government refuses to have a cost-benefit analysis undertaken and, as a consequence, you need to wonder what it is seeking to hide.

Another example of waste and mismanagement is the Building the Education Revolution program, which has seen cost blow-outs, inappropriate or poorly designed buildings and a lack of consultation. It is important to understand that the coalition is not against spending on school infrastructure. However, the spend should be reasonable and of good value. Similar to the Howard government's Investing in Our Schools Program, we would like to see the money spent through the school communities rather than state bureaucracies.

Another example of how this government is wasting money in these appropriation bills is the seeking of an extra \$290 million to be spent on asylum seeker management—an amount that eclipsed the total cost of the Howard government's Pacific solution, which ran for almost six years. The Nauru and Manus Island centres cost \$289 million to continue to run between September 2001 and June 2007.

The biggest issue for the constituents of the Forde electorate is cost of living. The current government's spending both in its first term and on an ongoing basis continues to contribute to this. This constant borrowing by the government increases inflationary pressures and puts upward pressure on interest rates, which in turn are hurting family budgets. We have a government that is willing to further increase people's cost of living by introducing a carbon tax. There also have to be questions about its management of the Murray-Darling Basin issue and the consequent security of our food production capacity.

The budget review document just released states that the proposed carbon emissions tax is underway. According to Treasury, the plans are to bring this tax in the 2012 budget. The government has grossly underestimated its new mining tax revenues, with reports that \$100 billion will be spent over the next decade as opposed to previous reports of a \$60 billion revenue shortfall under the revised MRRT. These original tax calculations show the dishonesty and incompetence of the government using a cheap trick to gain votes at the last election. The Prime Minister broke her promise to the people of Australia with the new carbon tax. We should not be surprised, as Labor consistently mismanages and wastes taxpayers' money. With electricity prices rising, the Prime Minister's carbon tax will only make Australians' lives more difficult.

Small business is a core employer in my electorate and is finding it costly and difficult to access new capital to grow and expand or just get through present difficult trading conditions. This is reflected in part in the higher-than-average unemployment and underemployment rates in my electorate as employers seek to retain staff but reduce working hours. These issues are all directly related to the fact that capital is not available in the markets.

This results in a fall in national productivity, an issue which this government apparently wishes to improve. This is where the initial and subsequent stimulus packages were misdirected and show a lack of understanding by the government about the cause of recessions in Australia. Phil Ruthven from Access Economics noted in a presentation last year that the primary driver of recessions in Australia is not a fall in consumer spending but a direct result of the fact that businesses lost access to capital to continue to grow and develop. These issues

arise out of the fact that the government continues to borrow at a rate of \$100 million per day, which means there is \$100 million per day less in the capital markets available for business. This capital would be far better allocated and utilised by business, as it will seek to utilise the capital productively to employ staff, manufacture goods and make a profit.

Australia's labour force is lying untouched by the current government. For example, on the apprenticeship system, the 2011 expert panel report showed that the completion rate for apprenticeships was around 48 per cent. This means that the government has been paying out a lot of wage subsidies and other apprenticeship incentives but people are not even completing their training. This report also highlights that a lot of money is being spent on traineeships for companies such as McDonald's, KFC and Woolworths, which begs the question of whether this offers real value for the money outlaid. The system is confusing for employers to navigate and makes it difficult for small business to take on apprentices.

This government must stop its reckless spending now to avoid putting further financial pressure on Australian families. It is time the government stopped turning a blind eye to the Reserve Bank's leading economists and the opposition's warnings and take the necessary steps to rein in the budget. The government's refusal to cut back on its spending is putting pressure on interest rates, which will inevitably continue to rise. This rise in interest rates will put a further strain upon Australia as a direct result of the failure of the government to deliver on its promise to lower costs of living for working families.

Ms O'NEILL (Robertson) (5.47 pm)—I am delighted to be able to rise today in this House to speak to Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2010-2011 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2010-2011, the combined funding for which comes to almost \$2.4 billion. Both appropriations contain a wide range of important projects, which I will touch on in general terms. One of the first line items to catch my eye in these bills was the \$120.7 million in funding for the Attorney General's Department for flood relief. When we reflect on the events of this summer and the hardship that disasters have wrought across the country and on the other side of the Tasman, the cut and thrust that goes on here in our little bubble in Canberra pales into insignificance. While words fail in times like these, our actions as a government have been far from insignificant. The support we have marshalled has given sustained support to many in need.

When I checked the figures last week, we had paid out more than \$442 million for 376,000 Australian government disaster recovery payments for those who had been affected by the Queensland floods and Cyclone Yasi. More than 50,000 claims were granted to the value of \$22.5 million for the disaster income recovery subsidy. There is also a wide range of assistance available under the natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements, which are in place in 62 local government areas. These arrangements offer a wide range of grants as well as facilities such as concessional interest rate loans to those trying to get back on their feet. Australians expect us to do this kind of work in government to support our fellow Australians in need.

Over the weekend, the government's response continued with the Treasurer and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry announcing a \$315 million Queensland local council package to be jointly funded by the Commonwealth and Queensland governments. The aim of this package is to ensure that disaster affected communities have the basics—water and sewage facilities, transport infrastructure and employment support—because people need to get back on their feet as quickly as possible and people need to be able to get back into work.

I am enormously proud to belong to a government and a party that is rising to the challenge of the natural disasters over the past two months. I am especially proud to represent a region—the Central Coast of New South Wales and particularly the seat of Robertson—that continues to dig deep to help our fellow Australians in need. I have already expressed my deep disappointment in the House, and I am afraid to say that I believe it is a moral failure, for the Leader of the Opposition not to accord bipartisan support for the Tax Laws Amendment (Temporary Flood Reconstruction Levy) Bill 2011. That bill is before the House, and I understand the Senate wants to take a closer look, as is its prerogative.

I think the government's package is very well balanced, and I understand that in Queensland it has been particularly well received. We have made cuts to the budget where we could, but the levy is needed to rebuild flood affected regions. We believe this package is the right package. Sixty per cent of taxpayers will pay less than \$1 per week. We are asking someone on \$80,000 to sacrifice \$2.88 per week, less than the cost of a cup of coffee and 10 times less than the tax cuts they have received over the last three years.

I think the opposition's failure to support the levy rankles with me even more because the people from the Central Coast have themselves put in such a great effort to help with the flood recovery. My office has been in touch again today with the Central Coast Caravan of Angels, whose team of about 30 volunteers is on its way back from its second trip to Ipswich, where it has spent the last three days carrying out repairs on 20 houses. They are a great bunch of people, and they express the spirit of Australians. What they have given in cash and kind generously and without request as Australians is a phenomenal indicator of the support of Australians for one another.

Australians have given \$200 million in donations. What a great accomplishment. But the work that lies ahead in recovering our infrastructure so that people can get on with their small businesses and get to their jobs and we can move those great resources that we have around our country requires 60 times the amount that has already been voluntarily committed by Australians out of their pockets and out of their businesses. We cannot go back to Australians 60 times and ask them for that amount, but we can responsibly levy those who are most capable of paying, and that is what these two appropriation bills will enable. These fundamental Labor values set us apart from the individualists and the opportunists in the Australian political sphere on show here in this parliament.

As I join the dots between the line items in these appropriation bills, I see Labor values implicit in them. For me, that is the golden thread that runs through these bills. A fundamental Labor value is opportunity for all. How will these appropriation bills allow that fundamental Labor value of opportunity for all to be played out? It comes out in programs such as the RLCIP, the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. Under the RLCIP, more than \$1 billion has been distributed to 565 local governments across Australia. This is in stark contrast to the pork-barrelling that went under the former Howard government in the guise of regional development. In those days, residents in Labor held seats could expect no quarter from a Liberal government in Canberra. But we in the Labor Party have broad shoulders and, thankfully, a broader mindset that encompasses all Australians right across the country. The RLCIP is a bona fide funding program for important local community projects. You do not have to be a Latin scholar to know that bona fide means 'in good faith'. The RLCIP is about

investing now in our local communities to provide jobs, infrastructure and elements that will enhance the opportunities of those communities in a wide range of ways.

The RLCIP projects that are funded are chosen by the councils themselves. The funds are used to build and modernise community facilities such as town halls, libraries, community centres, sports grounds and environmental infrastructure. The purpose of the RLCIP funding was to strengthen vulnerable communities and protect them from the global financial crisis through providing economic recovery and supporting local jobs. On top of the stimulus aspect, the RLCIP projects have added bonuses to communities so that they can enjoy the benefits of renewed local infrastructure for the long term—and, from personal experience, ‘enjoy’ is the operative word.

On 11 December last year I joined several hundred people at the gala opening of the Peninsula Recreation Precinct at Umina. I find it hard to imagine a happier civic occasion. When you see young families playing happily on community infrastructure that your government has funded, I do not think a job can get much better than that. That happiness is even greater when you consider that 220 construction jobs and 10 ongoing jobs were created through the project. Umina is not exactly a privileged area of the Central Coast. It is an area that has in the past had its fair share of law and order problems, but through the RLCIP, and more broadly through Labor’s commitment to regional Australia, we have given the people of Umina a recreation precinct that they can well be proud of.

I come back to the fundamental Labor values of fairness and equity. Just because you live on the Woy Woy Peninsula does not mean you should expect less than your counterparts who live in Sydney or Newcastle. Labor’s fundamental belief is that your postcode should not determine your destiny, and our commitment to regional Australia is real and abiding. Under the latest round of RLCIP, Gosford City Council has received \$577,000 in funding. That is going to go to five local projects that will change and enhance the lives of Australians as well as supporting local businesses that have been engaged in the delivery of these projects.

At Frost Reserve I met the Kincumber Roos football club leaders. That is where the Kincumber football club do their training and sadly, with such a large commuter population, a lot of that training has to happen later in the evening. With incapacity to light parts of the field, lots of young people and older people who just want to stay fit were unable to train under lights. That situation will be rectified. It will be of massive benefit to the local health and wellbeing of our community. Woy Woy tennis courts are also going to get an upgrade, and the RLCIP will provide a new viewing platform at Rumbalara reserve. We live in such a uniquely beautiful part of the country, and a viewing platform will be a great enhancement not just for locals but also for the key tourism industry and people who come to experience our beautiful horizons across the sea. This is also the site of a fantastic walking track in East Gosford and gives people a tremendous view over the Brisbane Water.

Labor’s commitment to regional communities continues. As a matter of fact, these appropriations include \$5.9 million for the Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government to strengthen local engagement and improve whole-of-government coordination of policy.

I move to the project mentioned amongst these appropriations that has the potential to transform the lives of people in regional Australia for the better in a radical way. I am talking, of course, of the National Broadband Network. Part of the allocation in these bills is for fund-

ing to develop and implement arrangements for the establishment of a new agency to manage the universal service obligation. As a teacher for over three decades, I am thrilled at the educational prospects that the NBN will offer future generations. For regional areas it holds the potential to be a game-changing technology. Reliable superfast broadband has the potential to improve our lives on the Central Coast in so many ways by allowing our local businesspeople to compete on a global stage. Reducing the need for a commute from Sydney or to Newcastle for work, for education, or for health reasons, the NBN has the potential to open up a suite of previously unimagined e-health opportunities and solutions. I look forward to talking more about the crucial importance of the NBN to the Central Coast as key legislation is debated in the House over the coming days.

There is much else in these appropriation bills that speaks to Labor's enduring values. There is \$10.1 million for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to introduce the fair entitlements guarantee to protect employee entitlements when an employer enters liquidation—again, a reflection of the Labor value of looking after Australians who hit adversity. Twenty-one point six million dollars will go to the Australian Sports Commission. This is to continue the Active After-school Communities program until December 2011. I know that all the young people who participate in those Active After-school programs will be delighted that the things they currently enjoy will continue because of this commitment by Labor. There is \$10.7 million for Centrelink to provide families with the additional option of receiving childcare rebate payments directly to their bank account on a fortnightly basis from 1 July. Anyone who is bringing up kids knows the pressures on a family budget. It will be fantastic to anticipate that every two weeks you will be able to access this benefit.

Labor's commitment to being a good regional citizen is also apparent in these appropriation bills. The government proposes to provide AusAID with the following amounts: \$202.6 million to maintain Australia's share in the International Development Association, \$10 million for the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program, \$10 million for the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan Trust Fund and \$12.2 million for the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines.

What I have spoken about today reflects the connection between our values and our work here in the parliament for Australians at home and in our role as international citizens attending to the reality that people out there in the world need our support in a range of financial and in-kind ways. I commend the bills to the House.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (6.02 pm)—I want to talk about atrophy and apathy. I draw the House's attention to the atrophy that is happening in the small business community and family enterprises right across Australia and the apathy of this government towards the plight of this engine room of our economy and the men and women who take risks, make great sacrifices, provide great opportunities to communities throughout the country and who deserve a government that supports them, not one that ignores them.

The atrophy is apparent in a number of ways. We saw it recently in the latest ACCI small business survey results, which provide a very revealing insight into what small business men and women are experiencing at the moment. It talks about the general trading conditions and about confidence continuing to deteriorate. It says that the interest rate hike in November and concerns around the financial crisis are adding to anxiety among consumers and making al-

ready difficult trading conditions even more challenging. It talks about a deterioration in the indicators for small business prosperity—business conditions, sales revenue, employment, selling prices, investment—which were all contractionary over the quarter, and the indicators looking forward are not much more encouraging.

It goes on to identify what is often talked about as a two-speed economy, but I think one needs to go a bit deeper than that. I have called on the Reserve Bank to make small business its business, to understand the experiences in the small business community when it is making decisions about interest rate settings. Others have talked about a patchwork economy in Australia, and again I would say that for many in the small business community their patch is threadbare. They are on very tight margins in difficult trading conditions, and the worrying thing is that the government just does not seem to care. It does not seem to care that the small business community is absorbing the inflationary impact that cost pressures are presenting as margins are squeezed. Day after day we see reports of higher energy and input prices, of wages costs and of the cost of the key consumables that go into providing goods and services—how there is upward pressure in almost every area. Cost of living becomes cost of inputs for the small business community. And a key reason those cost drivers have not translated into enormous cost blowouts and runaway inflation is that the small business community is sucking them up through reduced margins, because their consumers are very cost conscious at this time and are driving hard bargains.

The big end of town have deep pockets. They can go on cavalier discounting exercises that maintain their market share but deteriorate their own profitability over time. You would have heard Gerry Harvey and others in recent weeks describing how their results were not quite as buoyant as they had hoped. Keeping turnover was difficult and margins were under great pressure. If you have deep pockets you can possibly absorb that for a while but in a small business when you are confronted with heavy discounting it places even more pressure on the viability of your business.

So it came as no surprise to me that the most recent Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia and Telstra *Back to business* survey identified distinct dissatisfaction with this government amongst the small business community. It pointed to areas of new taxes being introduced—I will touch on that in a moment—and higher interest rates. They described a relentless red-tape burden that seems to know no end, and how these things are all combining to cause confidence to plummet and the prospects and optimism for the future to take a severe battering. That is the atrophy that the small business community is facing. I give maximum respect to those men and women who persevere regardless of the apathy and indifference of this government.

Extraordinarily, in that recent COSBOA-Telstra survey they were actually calling for action that mirrored the coalition's small business policy that we took to the last election. They are ideas that are already developed, costed, refined, delivered to the Australian public and embraced by a vast majority of small business men and women at the last election. They are already there. They are on the shelf. They have been road-tested and ready to go. But can you find anyone in this government who gives a damn and is interested in the needs of the small business community? There are some who espouse some interest or experience, but when they get up here I do not know whether they are enchanted or seduced by the big end of town

or the talking points they are dished up to parrot in this place, but one thing is certain—there is no decisive action to support the engine room of our economy, the small business sector.

I was not surprised to read observations about big business having access to elected officials through the lobbying that goes on and how decisions that adversely impact on small business are washed away as minor impacts. Minor or major impacts—they are additional impacts on time-scarce and cash-poor businesses struggling to stay afloat in this difficult environment. I say to all members in this House: become familiar with the experience of small business people because it is a glaring area of atrophy and apathy at the hands of an indifferent Labor government here in Canberra.

The interest rate rises supposedly contain inflationary bubbles in some sections of the economy but they hit hardest in the small business community. To a day, Russell Zimmerman continues to toil on behalf of retailers by pointing out what a deteriorating impact interest rate rises have on retail, where there is even greater cost-consciousness and greater sensitivity to the cost of living pressures. These rises put even more pressure on margins and eat into discretionary expenditure, which is an area where many small businesses pursue their enterprises and provide economic and employment opportunities.

Those are the survey accounts and they paint a grim picture. If you look at the hard data you get a sense of how vivid this atrophy is and how the apathy of this government cannot be tolerated. I am sure you would be interested to know, Mr Deputy Speaker, that when the Howard government lost office 53 per cent of all Australians in the private sector were employed in small business. There were a little over five million Australians securing their livelihoods by employment in small business. Just a few years after the Rudd-Gillard Labor government took office that figure of 53 per cent of all people employed in the private sector had been reduced to 48 per cent. That five million plus went down to 4¾ million in the space of three short years. The most current ABS statistics show a decline of 300,000 in employment in small business in the private sector at a time when this government boasts about jobs growth that is occurring overwhelmingly in the big end of town.

They are the hard statistics, and they are real statistics. They represent the livelihoods of 300,000 people who are now no longer secured through small business. These are the small businesses that drive and energise the outer metropolitan, rural and regional economies. They are not all blessed with a major employer. They are not all blessed with a big end of town presence to provide those job opportunities. There are 300,000 fewer people working in small business. The survey talks about things like red tape flooding small business owners. Many describe to me the time they spend working for the government when they would really rather be working in and for their business. Those statistics are stark as well. I highlighted them during the election campaign. Within the first three years of the Rudd-Gillard government—after Labor had promised that for every new or amended regulation there would be one repealed—the stats were compelling. In that first period of Labor, there were 9,997 new or amended regulations. How many were repealed? Fifty-two. Maxwell Smart would say, ‘Missed by that much.’ There were nearly 10,000 new or amended regulations and 52 repealed—and that is a one in, one out basis.

Having highlighted that dismal performance, that breach of faith, another broken promise, I thought I would have a look to see whether things have improved. They have not improved. In 2010 alone, there were 3,437 new or amended regulations. How many were repealed? Four.

It seems as though nothing has been learned, and it is clear why the small business community feel they are overwhelmed with regulatory imposts and compliance burdens when they would really rather be about creating jobs, wealth and opportunities in their communities.

Last week we had an opportunity to do something about relieving employers of a needless, pointless and completely unjustified imposition of the paid partial leave pay clerk burden—one that the Commonwealth wants to handpass away from its Family Assistance Office to employers right across Australia. When it came to that opportunity to do something constructive about compliance and red-tape burdens on small business, my bill went down—69 votes to 70. I wonder just where this supposed commitment is from the Labor government. It is another example of their complete indifference to the plight of small business.

That is a flood of regulation, but even in the most recent floods and natural disasters again this small business blindness emerges with this government. You see the Assistant Treasurer running around saying, 'I'm going to beat up the insurance companies about the definition of floods.' Okay, work needs to be done there, but do you ever hear him talking about business interruption insurance? This insurance can cost tens of thousands of dollars year on year for enterprises who know that, if they are not able to trade, it could have a very substantial and severe impact on their viability and opportunity to keep operating. Do you hear him talk about that? No. I will make sure that he does talk about those insurance companies declining business interruption insurance, which is what Impulse Entertainment in Brisbane is being subjected to. This could be the difference between them staying afloat and going under. I would like to see the Assistant Treasurer talk more about that.

But the latest talk is about a carbon tax. The last time a carbon tax emerged, it was in the form of a CPRS and everybody was out there with their hands out for compensation. Remember that? The big end of town was here, the mining companies were here and energy generators were here. Fantastic. Everyone was around. There was cash flowing around everywhere. It was the biggest merry-go-round, or cash-go-round, you have ever seen from the great big new tax that was proposed then. But do you know who was also keen to be factored into that conversation? Small business. Do you know what they were told? They were told by this Labor government: 'Suck it up, guys and gals—suck it up.' There was no compensation for small businesses. They should simply pass those cost increases on to consumers. Small business had already described the impact of a tight economy and the cost of living pressures on consumer behaviour and the inability to simply pass more costs on. We are back there again. We are back right where we were last time. Last time, you needed to consume twice the amount of electricity of our average small business to even get a look in—hang everybody else. This is even when reports around here were saying that the ability of small businesses to negotiate on their prices of electricity and other key inputs is very minimal and that they have experienced a far greater increase in the cost of their energy over recent years. That is in this AiG report.

Then we see statements about the need for small business to be factored in. Small business believed Julia Gillard when she said there would not be a carbon tax under a government which she led, and recent research has shown that 80 per cent of small businesses therefore have not factored that into their forward plans. The Commonwealth Bank-CCI Survey of Business Expectations revealed that three-quarters of those who responded were not planning for the introduction of a price on carbon—80 per cent had not factored carbon pricing into

their business plans, because they believed the Prime Minister. It is another example of atrophy and apathy.

Small businesses in outer metropolitan and rural and regional areas also have higher network electricity charges, and even in 2008 a KPMG study commissioned by the City of Bendigo showed that the ability to pass on those extra costs is minimal as they compete with metro based locations. Now that point of difference is going to be made even bigger. ACCI Chief Executive Peter Anderson said in his recent assessment of the government's carbon tax plan:

If anything like the 2009 CPRS proposal is repeated in 2011, the carve-outs combined with the failure to compensate SMEs for higher energy costs and their lack of market power in supply chains would make the gap between small and large business conditions even worse.

This is a constant message but there is no-one in this Labor government listening to hear it—no-one. If they wanted to do something about these issues, they could pick up the coalition's small business policy. There are more than a dozen constructive, practical ideas that together represent a microeconomic reform agenda for the engine room of our economy. You do not have to take it from me. You can listen to the small business community, or you can even listen to the government's own department. The blue book for the incoming Abbott government, had we been successful, gave an appraisal of these policies:

During the election campaign, you committed to numerous measures to support entrepreneurial activity and small business. These measures could provide an important boost to productivity.

This is a stunning endorsement from one of the government's own departments. The atrophy in small business must stop in the national interest, and the apathy of this government needs to stop right away.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (6.17 pm)—I am pleased to be able to speak in support of Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2010-2011 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2010-2011. They contain appropriations both for ongoing work and for new measures of this government for the service of the Australian people and the national interest. A number of programs are funded through these bills, and I want to express some views from the electorate of Hindmarsh demonstrating support for these programs.

There are a few issues that have generated immediate, strong and apparently unanimous support within the electorate of Hindmarsh. One such issue is the new agreement between loggers, environmentalists, the Tasmanian government and the Commonwealth, which Deputy Speaker Adams would be in tune with and very aware of. The plight of the Tasmanian wilderness has been in the public's consciousness since at least the mid- to late-1980s, and from that time a substantial portion, it seems, of the Australian public has had a love affair with the pristine wilderness—and rightly so—the temperate rainforest, the old growth pines and the open, scrubby regions of that most beautiful state that the Deputy Speaker comes from. So it is my pleasure to support that agreement on behalf of the many constituents of Hindmarsh who want our beautiful natural heritage preserved. The Commonwealth has committed \$22.4 million to help this collective response to the issues and challenges facing the Tasmanian native forests and the industries that until now have exploited this all too fragile and irreplaceable treasure.

I also appreciate the opportunity to speak in support yet again of the strength of the government's response to the global financial crisis and resulting worldwide recession. One of the

vehicles used to deliver the economic stimulus which fuelled the economy and kept public confidence high was the Building the Education Revolution. There have been thousands of very successful, highly prized and economical building works undertaken in schools in all our electorates right across the nation.

The coalition's irrational opposition to this program has been proved beyond a shadow of a doubt to be hyperinflated and insubstantial. As I go to the openings of different BER projects in and around my electorate—and I am sure all the members on our side who have seen these projects firsthand would agree—I see the work that is being done and the need for wonderful buildings that will equip our students with the tools for better learning. But I also see another side to it: each and every one of these BER projects employs anything from 20 to 100 people. When you multiply those numbers by the thousands of BER projects that are being undertaken across the nation, you can see why our economy is the envy of countries abroad. You can see how easily we created nearly 300,000 jobs from the infrastructure projects that took place around the country. I see it firsthand. I make it a point to talk to the builders, the architects and the people who are working on these sites, and they all tell me that they had to employ extra people and take on apprentices. This, of course, is one of the reasons that today we are in the position that we are in with our economy and why we are the envy of other economies around the world. Yet the coalition opposed these programs and, as I said, their opposition has been proved beyond a shadow of a doubt to be hyperinflated and insubstantial. Even if you totally ignore the very favourable audit reports, speaking with the people in the schools can only confirm that the BER was an inherently good program.

The people in the school communities in my electorate have given me direct feedback, and I am sure that this has also been the case with members in other electorates. This direct feedback consists of nothing but excitement, appreciation and pleasure at the investments of the Commonwealth in their school communities. Let us face it: most schools do not typically get new buildings. Under the previous Howard government, the majority of schools got new flag poles. They are great, but when it came to schools getting the learning tools that their students require to equip them for a better future we did not see too much when the opposition was in government. The previous government limited itself to investing in flag poles and the odd shade sail, and that was hardly enough to improve education outcomes. But we have built brand-new buildings—including brand-new libraries—that are equipped as learning centres of the future. Schools will have those substantial things for ever and a day. This government has built \$2 million libraries, gymnasiums and state-of-the-art classrooms. The BER program was a two-point attack: (1) a better education system for Australia and the future of Australian students and (2) ensuring that we injected money into the economy to keep jobs and the economy going.

The difference between the opposition and the government could not be starker. As I said, the people I speak to—parents and school communities around my electorate—absolutely love the work that is being done, and I have heard nothing but praise for the BER program. While the opposition wants to try to kill off what remains of the BER program in the non-government school sector under the guise of using the BER funds to pay for the flood reconstruction—in other words, take the money away from it and use it for the flood reconstruction—I and this government are absolutely committed to honouring our commitments by pay-

ing for the remaining projects, so ensuring that we keep jobs going and that schools do receive the buildings that they deserve to be able to teach their students.

Within these appropriation bills, there is the provision of almost \$70 million for the payment of non-government school facilities that have been completed earlier than expected. Also, the amount of \$48 million is being brought forward from the last financial year for the payment of trade training centres in non-government schools. This is another suite of projects that is very strongly supported in the community, and this of course raises the ire of the opposition. It is remarkable that the opposition has moved so far to the right that it does not even support funding of private education anymore.

While we on this side ignore the opposition's spite, I say well done to the schools, communities and those involved in the construction of these schools' prized new assets. I am sure they will help give students an even better education for many years to come. For example, in my electorate Ascot Park Primary School had refurbishments of \$125,000. The Building the Education Revolution multipurpose hall for Ascot Park Primary School cost \$1.7 million. Cowandilla Primary School—my old primary school—received \$150,000 for structures, fencing et cetera but also \$630,000 for the Building the Education Revolution new construction of classrooms and \$1.8 million for a multipurpose hall. It was fantastic to go to their Christmas show this year, where we did the official opening of the BER project for this particular hall and saw the Christmas pantomime that they put on.

The list goes on and on: Glenelg Primary School, Grange junior and primary school, Henley Beach Primary School, Lockleys North Primary School, Lockleys South Primary School, Our Lady of Grace Primary School, Immanuel College, St Mary's Memorial School and St Peter's Woodlands Grammar School. Every single school received some form of desperately needed facilities that the former government ignored for many years.

Other funds these bills allocate include \$14.6 million to double the capacity of the Connecting People with Jobs relocation pilot project to 4,000 places, which will help unemployed people to relocate to Queensland in order to take up jobs in flood affected areas where the rebuilding will be taking place. It includes joint projects with the USA to reduce the cost of solar electricity technologies, which is a great area; helping the fight against obesity and other health problems; the continuation of the Active After-School Communities program for this calendar year; and funds towards the global fight against diseases, including AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, in our region and beyond.

There is also additional funding for the ongoing development of the most critical Murray-Darling Basin Plan. There is funding to meet the cost of establishing the National Broadband Network and, importantly, the establishment of new management of what used to be Telstra's universal service obligation. One area that is really important is bringing forward funds from 2013-14 for the purchase of water licences from willing—I stress willing—sellers within the Murray-Darling Basin. This is a huge issue for South Australia. We are at the bottom of the river and we know that the opposition does not want this to happen. We know they oppose more water being sent down our stretch of the Murray River and we know they see their interests with upstream irrigators, not the communities of the Riverland, the Lower Lakes, the Coorong or the Murray mouth. I anticipate them voting against this measure here in this House of Representatives when it comes up. Labor is committed to restoring the health of our

precious river system for the benefit of our economy and for the benefit of our communities and the water dependent environment.

Lastly, I would like to make mention of the appropriation of funds for the introduction of the fair entitlements guarantee to protect employee entitlements when an employer's business enters into liquidation. This is not a problem limited to the old company or employees of John Howard's brother, the man whose bankruptcy was the catalyst behind the current General Employee Entitlement and Redundancy Scheme setup. Constituents in my electorate are still trying to get a fair deal from the GEERS agency. They and workers yet to encounter such circumstances need something better. We need something much better. Companies that spend their employees' legal entitlements, their superannuation and their accrued benefits are nothing but thieves. We cannot tolerate employees having their legal rights ignored and trampled on and their property taken against their will by companies with no conscience.

The Gillard Labor government's protecting workers' entitlements package will provide the strongest protection of employees' entitlements that Australian workers have ever had. It consists of three elements. The fair entitlements guarantee will protect workers' entitlements, including redundancy pay, annual long service leave and up to three months of unpaid wages. Compliance measures will be strengthened to secure the superannuation that should always have been in the bank. Deliberately fleecing fellow Australians of their super of all things really is unforgivable. Strengthening corporate and taxation law will give the Australian Securities and Investment Commission increased powers to hold rogue companies accountable.

In conclusion, friends I have been speaking to who returned from overseas—from England and Europe—in the new year have commented how people in those countries envied the way our economy rode out the global financial crisis as a result of the global recession, which I spoke about earlier. They recognise how incredible our economic management has been. Many people look at us as a model of how we endured that difficult time. This government's stimulus—specifically in the case of these bills, the Building the Education Revolution and other stimulus packages—was an absolute, clear success both for the economy and the schools and schoolchildren who will use their new facilities for decades to come. This is a matter of history.

Our economy is strong and unemployment remains around five per cent. But we need to address the outrageous corporate theft of employee entitlements by companies going into liquidation. We need to ensure as best we can that the prosperity of our time is paid to those who earn it and we need to pay our due share. We will do this through paying for school building works completed ahead of schedule, paying for overdrawn water from our rivers and getting companies to pay the wages, conditions and superannuation they owe their employees by law. Each sector of our society must be encouraged to play its part and pay its share.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—Order! It being approximately 6.30 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 192. 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
Climate Change and Carbon Pricing

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mr Stephen Jones**:

That this House:

- (1) notes that climate change is a serious economic and environmental challenge; and
- (2) acknowledges a carbon price is the cheapest and fairest way to cut pollution and drive investment in clean energy.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (6.32 pm)—The scientific evidence is clear: carbon pollution is contributing to climate change. Every government around the world is attempting to come to grips with the challenge, and no responsible government can afford to ignore it. The time for a head-in-the-sand approach to this challenge expired long ago. As the highest per capita emitter of pollution in the world, Australia has an obligation to act. We cannot leave this challenge to the rest of the world or to future generations and ignore our own responsibility. Australia has to act by cutting pollution and driving investment in clean energy. This is an essential economic reform and it will require nothing less than a restructure of the Australian economy.

At the last federal election Australians voted for action on climate change, and the Gillard government is responding to that. Those opposite are carrying on like this is the biggest surprise of their lives and that they have previously never heard of putting a price on carbon. They are clearly ignorant of the fact that the final report of the Garnaut climate change review of 2008 outlined the options that are available for a responsible government to deal with climate change. They were either a carbon tax or some form of emissions trading scheme or a hybrid scheme of both.

It is time to end the political, petty bickering and to replace it with leadership that is in our long-term national interest, and Prime Minister Gillard is showing the way on this issue. The Prime Minister has outlined a two-stage plan for a carbon price mechanism that will start with a fixed-price period for three to five years before transitioning to an emissions trading scheme.

The Climate Institute's report out today highlights the enormous opportunities that a clean energy future offers us. The report states:

Delays and half measures to tackle pollution and climate change will risk these new job and investment opportunities for Australia's states and regions.

The report also states:

In 2010 global clean energy investments hit record levels at \$243 billion and this is expected to accelerate in coming years.

Importantly, it says:

Australia lags in current investments and will fall further behind without action on pollution to stimulate clean energy uptake.

We agree. This is in line with what the government is saying. We know that a carbon price is the cheapest and fairest way to cut pollution and to build a clean energy economy. We also know that the Leader of the Opposition has had so many different positions on the issue of a carbon price that it is difficult to keep track of them all. Indeed, if a political *Kama Sutra* is

ever published—and I know a lot of Australians do not like to think of these two concepts in the one sentence—it will have a photo of the member for Warringah on the front cover.

This is a remarkable achievement in a short space of time. We know that, like all on the coalition side, he supported the former Prime Minister John Howard's decision to take an emissions trading scheme to the 2007 election. We also know that he supported at various times the passing of the Rudd government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. The member for Warringah is on record as saying that an emissions trading scheme was a sensible policy; he said this as lately as 4 October 2009. We also know that at some stage political opportunism set in and, in order to usurp the leadership of the member for Wentworth, the member for Warringah decided that climate change was, in his famous words, 'complete crap'. At some stage, amongst all of these policy backflips, the Leader of the Opposition is also on record, as lately as 29 July 2009, supporting a carbon tax. Confusing and contradictory? I cannot think of any other way to characterise this, at least not in polite company.

All of this leads us to the current position, where the member for Warringah is once again opposed to a carbon price and, in partnership with his shadow minister for climate change, the member for Flinders, is trying to boot up a scare campaign. What we have heard since the Gillard government's announcement is a scare campaign in full swing. We expect a lot more of it.

You would never believe that there was a time when those opposite believed in market mechanisms. The Liberal Party believed in the market. Indeed, they told us so for long enough, but not in this space. We now have a Liberal Party that has disowned the free market in favour of political opportunism. The coalition's direct action policy is the most costly approach to climate change, and they have not yet answered the key question, which is: where will the funding for their policy come from? Direct action will not be environmentally effective, nor will it achieve the reductions in greenhouse gas emissions that we need. It is inefficient, it has a high cost and it involves government picking winners to try to choose the right projects. It is the coalition's high-cost policy that will cost Australian taxpayers dearly. These subsidies are nothing more than deferred taxes.

On this side of the chamber we know that the best way to stop business polluting and to get them to invest in clean energy is to charge them when they pollute. Only then will the businesses with the highest levels of pollution have a strong incentive to reduce their pollution. The government will then use every cent to assist households and families with their bills, to help businesses make the transition to a clean energy economy and, importantly, to tackle climate change. Putting a price on carbon is not a tax on Australian families, but it is a charge on pollution, and it is that economic reform that is going to be what drives us into a clean energy future.

The Gillard government is very conscious of the cost-of-living pressures facing families. The carbon prices will be paid by businesses that emit large amounts of pollution, and we acknowledge that this will have some price impacts for consumers. But, because we are a Labor government, we will ensure that any price impact is fair, and assistance will be provided to households. While decisions on factors such as the starting price and assistance arrangements have not yet been made, it is far too early to be talking about impacts, and anybody who does is clearly engaging in nothing more than speculation.

The government will propose that the carbon price commences on 1 July 2012, subject to the ability to negotiate agreement with a majority in both houses of parliament and pass legislation this year. The Gillard government is committed to beginning this vital economic transformation because it is in our long-term interests. Important decisions will be considered over the next few months regarding the detailed features of the carbon price mechanism, including the starting price, the length of the fixed price period and the assistance arrangements for households, communities and industry. This is going to be an important debate that we cannot allow to be given over to the scare campaigns being unleashed by those opposite. What is at stake is not only the future of our environment, the way we live in Australia, the future of our economy and whether we are able to drive the sorts of investments and incentives in clean energy futures, green jobs of the future and green industries of the future to transform our economy; it is also whether these important economic reforms can be driven through the current parliament and whether we have an appetite for the sorts of political and economic reforms that are going to transform our future.

The Australian public can be confident that these decisions will reflect Labor's long-term commitment to the national interest and not short-term political interest. We have a will to fight this through to the very end. We will not bow to the scare campaign that is being unleashed by those opposite, because we know that it is in the interests of the country and in the interests of future generations that we take effective and efficient action on climate change. The need is now and the need is urgent. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (6.42 pm)—I rise to speak on the motion before the Committee. As this is a two-part motion, I will address each separately. Firstly, I think it is good that we are debating this motion. Until this time, I have been concerned that the sole focus of the Labor government has been the opportunity to introduce a whopping new tax. I agree with the first part of the motion, which states:

... climate change is a serious economic and environmental challenge ...

One only has to look at our history to appreciate that climate change has been a serious economic and environmental challenge in the past. Even if we went back to living in mud huts, it would still be a serious environmental and economic challenge in the future.

In 986, a fleet of 24 ships started a Viking settlement in Greenland. That settlement grew over the years to more than 5,000 people before Greenland's climate began to change, with the summers growing shorter and progressively cooler, until the climate change made conditions on the island unliveable, forcing the settlement to be abandoned. In the more recent past, for example, on the Georges River in my electorate of Hughes, the largest flooding occurred back in 1873 and two other major floods followed shortly after before the turn of the century. However, the climate has changed and floods of this size have not occurred for more than 100 years. However, this does not mean that the climate will not change again and we will not see floods of this magnitude repeated. So we must be ever vigilant.

The point is that the climate has always been changing and always will, and this change will present serious economic and environmental challenges in the future. This brings me to the second part of the motion, which states:

That this House:

... ..

(2) acknowledges a carbon price is the cheapest and fairest way to cut pollution and drive investment ...

But the motion fails to define what pollution is. The use of the words 'carbon pollution' creates a subconscious image of grit and black soot, but this is not what a carbon tax is all about. A carbon tax is about taxing carbon dioxide—the clear, odourless gas that makes plants grow, a gas which makes up 0.0004 per cent of our atmosphere by volume. Of that CO₂ in the atmosphere, only 2.75 per cent is of man-made origin; of the rest, over 97 per cent comes from natural sources.

I am concerned about pollution. I am concerned about the pollution in Sydney Harbour. The dioxins we have in our harbour have poisoned the fish to such an extent that it is not recommended to eat anything caught west of the bridge. But this tax on pollution will do nothing to fix this problem. I am also deeply concerned about pollution from diesel exhaust emissions that people in south-western Sydney will be inhaling in ever greater volumes if Labor gets its way and dumps two intermodals in the Moorebank and Wattle Grove areas. Studies in the USA have shown that such diesel exhaust pollution causes a variety of serious illnesses. But a tax on carbon dioxide will not do anything to fix those problems. In fact, it is likely to make them worse.

As far as a carbon tax being the fairest solution is concerned, let us consider how fair such a tax would be on the electorate of the honourable member who moved this motion, the member for Throsby. If what the member for Throsby states is true, surely he will have received overwhelming support in his own electorate, located in the Illawarra region of New South Wales. The community newspaper servicing this region, the *Illawarra Mercury*, has canvassed the population, undertaking two surveys in the last week. To the first question—'Do you support the federal government's carbon-pricing plan?'—a meagre 22.7 per cent replied yes while 77.3 per cent replied no. To the second question—'Do you accept the need to put a price on carbon to tackle climate change?'—in the member for Throsby's electorate the vote was only 26 per cent yes and 73 per cent no. No wonder the Prime Minister and the Treasurer told lies about the carbon tax before the election: to deceive the population about this carbon tax. It is simply a dog with fleas.

Surely the honourable member is not that out of touch. Perhaps the people of the Illawarra recognise what their federal member does not, and that is that the Greens-Labor plan is a job killer. The front page of the *Illawarra Mercury* of both the Friday and the weekend edition said as much. As the member for Throsby should know, BlueScope Steel has refused to rule out moving its Illawarra operations to China in a response to the introduction of this government's new carbon tax. On Friday, the CEO of BlueScope Steel, Paul O'Malley, said:

It is not in Australia's interests—economic or environmental—to force domestic industries to shut down or curtail production, only to see that production replaced by higher-emissions overseas production.

Government member interjecting—

Mr CRAIG KELLY—You are going to drive out this investment. The member for Throsby should be aware of this article because, when asked by the newspaper if pricing emissions was a threat to local jobs, the member did not seem concerned, refusing to answer the question.

Let us look at some of the online comments following the article in the *Illawarra Mercury*.

Isn't the local Labor MP, Stephen Jones, meant to represent his community? What a gutless and deflection answer in the article ... Mr Jones, just remember, we voted you in and we can vote you out ...

And another:

well done labor, way to screw us all over again. Another nail in your coffin, problem is we have to wait too long to bury you. Labor are a disgrace, and while our esteemed PM says that she is going to create jobs using this TAX, I wonder how many of the Illawarra workers feel safe now. Time to stand up people and be heard.

The member for Throsby knows well that BlueScope Steel employs 4,900 people directly in his electorate. His failure to stand up for his electorate has now put those jobs at risk. This is in a region suffering serious, overinflated unemployment, with youth unemployment standing at a whopping 39 per cent. You can babble on about certainty all you like, but you need to think about the great uncertainty that you have caused those 4,900 people directly employed in your electorate.

This motion is an embarrassment to the member for Throsby—to talk about fairness when your electorate will perhaps be affected more than any other. You have abandoned your constituents. How are you going to look them in the eye when you have destroyed their jobs? This is going to give you the nickname Stephen 'Job Killer' Jones. This motion should be treated with the contempt that it deserves.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—I remind the member for Hughes, being a new member, that members are expected to address the motions and the bills before the parliament.

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (6.50 pm)—I rise to strongly support the member for Throsby's very important motion about carbon pricing and I applaud the motion. In response to all those issues raised by the member for Hughes, I remind him that if you do not look after the environment you will have no economy. I have long spoken about the need to arrest the damage that excessive carbon emissions are having on our environment and indeed on our economy. I know that many people in my electorate of Reid want to see action to mitigate the effects of climate change so that we can create a sustainable environment for future generations.

Doubtless you will recall from last year how the opposition voted in this House on my motion on climate change. The motion stated that climate change is real and human induced. The motion was passed unanimously. If we all agree on this fact, why are those opposite opposed to addressing the problem in the best interests of our nation in the fairest and cheapest way? I believe part of the problem with the opposition is the fact that there are still sceptics, like the previous speaker, in the Liberal Party who do not really believe in climate change. Indeed, the Leader of the Opposition, as the member for Throsby pointed out in his contribution, is on record as saying that it is 'absolute crap'. Perhaps that is why the opposition—and the Leader of the Opposition in particular—have been very inconsistent on climate change and have still not provided Australians with any viable policy.

Our government, in stark contrast, has always expressed our concerns about the threats posed by climate change and our desire to address the issues for the long-term benefit of all our people and our international neighbours. If you look at the scientific evidence presented to us, there is no denying the need to act now on climate change. The Multi-Party Climate Change Committee also knows that there is now 100 per cent certainty that the earth is warming and 95 per cent certainty that human induced emissions are the main cause of the warming

observed over the last century. This information was presented to them by Professor Will Steffen.

Globally, 2010 was the equal warmest year on record, with 2001 to 2010 being the warmest decade. Some estimates indicate that, if we do not act now, irrigated agriculture in the Murray-Darling Basin will virtually disappear by 2100. Only last week I raised the new research findings about the probability that extreme climatic events, particularly floods and cyclones, are likely to increase in frequency and ferocity and about how this is linked to human activity. In light of the recent floods we have experienced, we can see the costs to the agricultural sector, the mining sector, the tourism sector, infrastructure and human life. Surely we want to mitigate those disasters.

We also know that Australians are the worst polluters per capita in the developed world. Surely this is cause for concern and should be a priority of any responsible government. The science is clear. In light of the overwhelming scientific evidence that climate change is real and human induced, the need to act is also clear. The cost of inaction will far outstrip the cost of effective action now. That is exactly why our government has announced that we will cut pollution, tackle climate change and deliver economic reform to move from a high-polluting economy to a clean energy future. To achieve this, we are proposing, as you know, a two-stage plan for a carbon price mechanism that will start with a fixed period of three to five years before transitioning to an emissions trading scheme. Putting a price on pollution will give a very strong incentive for high-emitting businesses to reduce their pollution levels through innovation, creating a stronger economy and new jobs. A fixed price will also provide business certainty and help make the transition to an ETS easier.

Business uncertainty is affecting important long-term investments. As Heather Ridout from the Australian Industry Group said in a speech in 2009:

Many of our members are telling us that they are holding off making investments until there is a greater degree of clarity around domestic climate change legislation.

Mr Rod Sims, who is an expert advisor to the government's multi party climate change committee, states:

The introduction of a carbon price will allow the currently lowest cost measures to be chosen while technological change drives the best longer term solutions.

It is a widely held view that a market mechanism is the most efficient and cost-effective way of establishing a carbon price. This was even supported by former Prime Minister John Howard. The benefits of a carbon price have been widely supported and the fearmongering we have witnessed from those opposite should be condemned for limiting and damaging our otherwise strong and stable economy. I strongly support the motion and I applaud the member for Throsby for bringing it to the parliament.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (6.55 pm)—I rise to support the motion. It is worth recalling that we are here because scientists are telling us we have a limited time within which to stop sending polluting CO₂ and other gases like methane into the atmosphere. We have a limited carbon budget—mere decades left within which to spend it. A carbon price is not going to be a cure-all. We are going to need a range of government initiatives to tackle climate change. We are going to need a significant renewable energy target, a feed-in tariff. We are going to need Commonwealth investment in a renewable energy grid.

I am less sanguine about the market than the members in the government who seem to believe it will be a cure-all. The irony always struck me, when it came to the financial crisis, that the Labor government was prepared to rediscover its inner Keynesianism, yet when it comes to a climate crisis they are not. I do hope we get to a point somewhere in the not too distant future where we say that we treat the planet with the same courtesy with which we treat a merchant bank and make the same level of funds available to it. We would then be a lot further down the road of tackling climate change.

It is also worth recalling that the agreement across Labor and the coalition of the very small target of five per cent will go nowhere near what is necessary. But because of the urgency of the challenge, we have to put all shoulders to the wheel, to do everything we possibly can to address the challenge. That means, especially in the context of this parliament, looking for those areas where we can find some room for agreement rather than accentuating where we disagree. Part of that, as a starting point, means being honest about what a carbon price is.

Up until now we have presumed that we can continue to put pollution into the atmosphere and treat the atmosphere as free. In the same way that pollution gets put into a river and one presumes that there are no associated externalities, and there are laws to fix it, so too are we addressing the very real problem that putting pollution into the atmosphere has a consequence. The purpose of a carbon price is to say that those big polluters who put pollution into the atmosphere are the ones who should pay. If they choose to pass some of that price down to consumers, there should be mechanisms to redress it. You will recall that one of the reasons the Greens were unable to support the previous Labor scheme was that not enough of the compensation went to low-income households. That will be very clearly at the forefront of the minds of the members of the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee as we work through the outstanding issues.

We have also seen from the Leader of the Opposition a manufactured scare campaign. He has moved breathlessly from saying that climate change is crap to quoting the history of climate change according to One Nation, to making up figures about price impact. It is the manufactured scare campaign which we have seen before from the likes of big tobacco and the big miners. We are going to see it again from the big polluters and the opposition working hand in glove. Just as the billionaires took to the streets of Perth for their Rolex revolution, so too this time are we going to see polluters passing themselves off as proletarians being very hard done by. Increasingly these shrill comments are going to fall on deaf ears. The Leader of the Opposition is going to show himself as the prize fighter who suffers the rope-a-dope, who goes far too early and punches far too hard. Increasingly, members of the community are realising that, if we do not want to be spending an enormous proportion of our GDP in dealing with the impacts of climate change on our children's future, if we want to save the Great Barrier Reef and all the economy and tourism which flows from it, if we want to make sure there is enough water left in the Murray-Darling, then the time to act is now.

So I say to everyone out in the community, whichever way you voted at the last election, if you want a price on pollution, this is your opportunity to have an impact. I applaud those already out in the debate, from Origin Energy calling for a \$25 per tonne price to the likes of the Climate Institute, which the member for Throsby commended earlier, saying that with a \$45 a tonne carbon price we will see almost 8,000 more permanent jobs and 26,000 more temporary jobs.

The Greens, through the confidential process of the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee, will put our view about what the price should be, but I say to everyone who is concerned about climate change: whichever way you voted at the last election, now is your time to stand up against the confected outrage that we have seen over the last few days, to stand up in your communities and explain to your neighbours why a price on pollution is necessary and stand up in the press and on the airwaves to speak out for what you believe the appropriate carbon price should be.

The Greens, through the confidential process of the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee, will put our view about what the price should be, but I say to everyone who is concerned about climate change: whichever way you voted at the last election, now is your time to stand up against the confected outrage that we have seen over the last few days, to stand up in your communities and explain to your neighbours why a price on pollution is necessary, and to stand up in the press and on the airwaves to speak out for what you believe the appropriate carbon price should be.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—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.

Community Hospitals in South Australia

Debate resumed on motion by **Mr Secker**:

That this House:

- (1) recognises the important role that community hospitals play in the lives of regional communities and in providing early access to care for life threatening conditions and trauma;
- (2) condemns the South Australian Government for deciding in its 2010 State Budget to cut funding to three community hospitals in regional areas;
- (3) recognises the critical role that the Keith and District Hospital Inc., Moonta Health and Aged Care Service Inc. and the Ardrossan Community Hospital Inc. plays in the lives of those living and travelling in regional South Australia; and
- (4) calls on the Government to:
 - (a) reduce the National Healthcare Specific Purpose Payment to the South Australian Government by \$1 046 000 in 2011-12;
 - (b) index the above amount by the growth factor contained in Schedule D of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations;
 - (c) make a direct financial transfer to the Keith and District Hospital Inc. of \$600,000 and annually index this amount by the growth factor contained in the Intergovernmental Agreement;
 - (d) make a direct financial transfer of \$300,000 to the Moonta Health and Aged Care Service Inc. and annually index this amount by the growth factor contained in the Intergovernmental Agreement; and
 - (e) make a direct financial transfer to the Ardrossan Community Hospital Inc. of \$146,000 and annually index this amount by the growth factor contained in the Intergovernmental Agreement.

Mr SECKER (Barker) (7.00 pm)—The clock is ticking loudly for the Keith and District Hospital. I must inform you that if extra funding is not provided then the great community

hospital at Keith will close in less than two months. Yes, members, it will close in April if we do not do something about it, the situation is so desperate.

Some history: 10 years ago the state government was funding Keith hospital for 35 per cent of its total costs. The other 65 per cent was funded by the Keith community, unlike other community hospitals, which are 100 per cent funded by the taxpayer. This figure over 10 years had already been whittled down to 25 per cent of the total costs provided by the state government and 75 per cent provided by the community. It was already unsustainable when the state government announced it would cut funding further by a whopping 60 per cent, meaning the state government was only going to fund the Keith hospital to about 10 per cent of its total costs compared to 100 per cent for other community hospitals. This will cause the hospital to close in a matter of weeks.

Here is the sorry state of what has to be the worst case of silo economics I have ever seen—silo economics because it looks only at the savings and not at the costs, and the costs will be five times greater than the savings.

This hospital has received over \$1 million in capital infrastructure funding from both the Howard government and the Rudd government in recent years, firstly for aged-care infrastructure and then for a doctors surgery just recently opened through Rudd government funding. But these will be totally wasted because the aged-care facility of 18 beds will close and the doctors surgery will close because the patients will go elsewhere. The St John's Ambulance volunteer service will close, and the state will be forced to put in a paid service 24 hours a day on one of the busiest and most accident-prone highways in Australia, and people will have to travel further distances.

This silo economics is so stupid. The minister, John Hill, has for the last two years refused to meet with the Keith hospital board to discuss these problems. They want to explain the financial ramifications of this decision. I repeat: the extra costs will be five times the supposed savings and both the federal government taxpayer and the state government taxpayer will pay them.

Regional hospitals are the backbone of the towns and districts that surround them. These hospitals provide important services to the community and many jobs for the residents. The importance of regional hospitals is often overlooked or taken for granted. There should be no prejudice. These hospitals are vitally important to the communities they service and are the lifeblood of the towns and districts.

In the South Australian state government budget last year, Labor announced that it would be cutting further funding to regional hospitals, including Keith and District Hospital, Ardrossan Community Hospital and Moonta Hospital. For these three hospitals there was a huge reduction in funding allocated. It was not a small cut but a huge blow, resulting in the hospitals having only so much time left before the doors would have to be shut for good. Unfortunately, Keith will be the first to do so. A massive 60 per cent of the funding allocated to Keith hospital from the state government was to be removed. There is no way the hospital could keep operating with nearly \$400,000 of funding taken away by the state government. I might add that I do not blame the federal government for this, but they can save money for themselves and the state government and send the message that we will not tolerate this financial stupidity—and it will not cost the federal government a cent.

If the Keith hospital closes its doors in April, as it will, the next closest hospitals will be Bordertown Memorial Hospital, 50 kilometres away; Naracoorte Hospital, 100 kilometres away; and Murray Bridge Hospital, nearly 200 kilometres away. On top of forcing residents to attend already overbooked hospitals, this will leave a large stretch of notoriously dangerous highway without a hospital: 180 kilometres of the Dukes Highway and 240 kilometres of the Riddoch Highway. Between 2004 and 2009, 46 per cent of fatal crashes and 30 per cent of crashes causing serious injury in the south-east occurred on the Dukes, Riddoch and Princes highways. The helipad situated at Keith hospital is used for the transfer of critically ill patients, including road crash victims, directly to major hospitals. I had personal experience of this when my own son was flown by helicopter to Flinders hospital in Adelaide. This service will be lost once the hospital closes. The effect of a hospital closure on a community such as Keith will be on more than just jobs, services and patients. Hospitals provide the vital services that communities need and are built around.

Labor just does not seem to care about regional communities. It must not concern the state or federal government much at all if Keith hospital closes in April, because, despite lobbying from every direction, the governments have not taken any action on this issue. I was totally in awe to see the way the Keith community rallied one another to create a fight that made it all the way to Parliament House in Adelaide. One thing I have learnt growing up in the country is that news travels fast—the bush telegraph. The imminent closure of Keith hospital at the hands of the state government has caused a huge stir in this community, but more so in communities all around South Australia. I have received correspondence to my office from members of the community, from members on the hospital board and from people residing in other areas of South Australia that are concerned about the raw deal that Keith hospital is getting. In my role as a member of parliament I have lobbied both the state and federal governments for months now, with no action by either. I have attended community meetings and met with members of the hospital board. These are hardworking volunteers trying to save their hospitals, but it appears to be making no difference to the ignorant Labor governments. I have written to the state minister and the federal minister. I have had delegations to the federal ministers—in fact, two—but no action was taken.

With this motion, I am calling on the federal government to do what is right by the Keith, Moonta and Ardrossan communities. This motion calls on the government to directly fund Keith, Ardrossan and Moonta hospitals, and it will not cost the federal government a cent, because, as you read the motion, it means taking the money out of the state allocations and returning it directly to the hospitals. Both the state and federal governments must realise how important these hospitals are. The funding amount, in total, is a mere \$1,046,000. This will save three hospitals. It is a very small amount to save three very important hospitals in the community. It will see Keith hospital funded with \$600,000, and this will bring it back to its rightful figure. Ardrossan will receive \$146,000 and Moonta \$300,000. These funding amounts will enable these regional hospitals to continue providing their extremely valuable services to the communities they support: the GPs, the accident and emergency services, aged care, acute care and allied health professionals. All these services that the community benefits from will be able to continue with this funding. It will enable people travelling the highways between Mount Gambier and Adelaide, or coming from Victoria to Adelaide, to feel confident that there are services close by if they are needed—and I can tell you that they will be needed.

This motion calls on the federal government to reduce the state government's national healthcare specific purpose payment by the amount that the three hospitals, if directly funded, will need. The state government must be condemned for cutting funding from regional hospitals. Labor must recognise the critical roles hospitals play. A public meeting is being held in Keith tomorrow night to further discuss the options available to the community. Talks held between the hospital board and the government have not reached any outcomes. This motion, if successful, will restore the funding needed so the important regional hospitals can continue. The state government does not seem to appreciate the importance of Keith, Ardrossan or Moonta hospitals. With this motion I hope to rectify this. No community should be pushed to the side and disadvantaged for no reason other than because the state government is city centric and ruthless.

I thank the member for Boothby and the member for Gray, who will further expand on this important issue. We must act and we must act now. (*Time expired*)

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (7.10 pm)—I thank the member for Barker for raising this very substantial issue. The members for Barker, Gray and Boothby are extremely good members who are very caring in their electorates, and I would not expect anything less of them than to speak on a motion about regional hospital funding.

This is a substantial issue and it is such a good case for the government's policy on national health funding. It is not all that often that we hear opposition members make statements in such close keeping with the stated policy of this federal Labor government. So I thank the member for his gesture, his demonstrated goodwill, cooperation and support for this federal Labor government's approach to regional health funding.

As the member demonstrates through this motion, the propensity for one level of government to blame another level of government for health funding problems, insufficient resources and poor allocation of resources has been acute. It has been the one certainty in Australian politics over the last decade that one level of government will blame the other level of government for the state of our health system, problems with our system, and externalise responsibility for improving our system, whether it be in the regions or in the cities.

The member has penned a courageous motion in which he calls for federal government responsibility for direct funding of three private hospitals which happen to be regional. Direct funding from the Commonwealth to the regions is great, but the fact that they are private hospitals does complicate the issue somewhat.

The government's health funding policy has further matured over recent weeks, as we have seen, and it is timely to remind the House where we are at at the moment. The government has long expressed the view and emphatically stated that we need to stop the blame game. We need to stop governments blaming each other—state governments blaming the federal government and federal governments blaming state governments—for sub-par health investments and outcomes. So we have advanced the concept of federal and state funding in accordance with a prescribed formula and being pooled and then targeted towards the need of local hospital networks, with health services on the ground run for the benefit of and in accordance with the needs of their region.

There has been debate as to how to fund this change and, in particular, how to fund the increase in funds required into the future to pay for a superior health system and health service

across our nation. This has now been resolved. The Council of Australian Governments meeting on 13 February produced the heads of government agreement on national health reform. The communique in part read:

The parties agree to contribute funding for hospitals into a single national pool which will be administered by an independent national funding body, distinct from Commonwealth and State Departments, to be operational from 1 July 2012.

... ..

The national funding pool would also pay directly to State governments, into discrete State managed funds:

- a. block funding amounts (including base and efficient growth funding) for services better funded in that way, including relevant services in regional and rural communities;

... ..

The parties agree that payment arrangements from the national funding body will reinforce the States' role as system managers, and will involve each State directing the disbursements from State accounts to LHNs in that State.

... ..

The parties agree that the establishment of LHNs will give local communities and clinicians a greater say in the delivery of their local health services.

... ..

The parties agree that devolving the control of hospital management to LHNs, and the establishment of Medicare Locals, will lead to services which are more responsive to the needs of local communities.

The states will be system managers, responsible for system-wide public hospital planning and policy. States will also be responsible for drawing up the Local Hospital Network boundaries and establishing the service agreements entered into by those local networks. Commonwealth funding will flow automatically from the national funding body to the local networks in accordance with these service agreements.

I would like to now turn to what has been happening in South Australia, specifically to the regions the member's motion has drawn our attention to. What should be kept at the forefront of our minds when considering this member's motion is the fact that these are private enterprises. The Australian Private Hospitals Association states that private hospitals are funded by their owners and operators. The services provided to patients treated in private hospitals are partially or fully subsidised from a variety of sources, including private health insurance funds, the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Medicare, PBS and third-party insurers.

So the private hospitals mentioned expressed concern some weeks ago over the public subsidy paid for by the state of South Australia, which will be changed next financial year. They assume that without the particular South Australian government public subsidy in question they would not be viable and would either make a loss or close. These hospitals will continue to receive income from myriad sources, including—as the Australian Private Hospitals Association identifies—this federal government. So the Commonwealth supports private hospitals through its substantial subsidy of private health insurance in addition to Medicare, the PBS, the Department of Veterans' Affairs and capital works projects. It also supports such service providers in the care they deliver to ageing members of the community. For example, in 2009-10 the Keith hospital received over \$770,000 in aged-care funding, and in 2009 it also received \$500,000 to build the new Hill wing.

The aged-care funding component includes an ongoing viability supplement in recognition of the difficulties smaller scale regional aged-care providers face. The hospital in Keith, for one, would also continue to receive some \$300,000 per year from the South Australian government in recognition of the emergency services it provides in the region.

So let us understand that the South Australian government had every expectation that they would continue to receive public funds from both state and federal governments and provide public services for those funds. I understand that the South Australian department of health has been helping these hospitals, their management and their respective boards take a fresh look at their finances and plans going forward. While they might not be receiving quite as much money next year, they have been getting some very valuable management consultancy from the department in the form of Country Health SA. I understand the consultancy work has been very valuable indeed—as, in the case of the hospital in Keith, hospital management has been able to turn around their financial projections by something like \$580,000 per year, which is of course well in excess of the \$370,000 state subsidy in question that will terminate as of next financial year.

Going back to my earlier statements about the national hospitals network: one of the key drivers of the Commonwealth intervention in this area in the last 12 months has been the need for increased efficiency within the system. We have had ridiculous increases in the ordinary costs for the delivery of health care over the past few years. This will continue into the future. It will be made even more dramatic by an ageing population. This will be exacerbated by a proportionately smaller population fuelling our national economy and funding our health system. We need to lift our game and we need to start now—to drive our health dollars further and make it a viable concern going forward.

I am pleased as Punch that the Keith hospital is able to see an improved future, given there is less funding going into the hospital from the South Australian government. I sincerely hope that other regional services can perform similarly in the years ahead, adopting their management plans and funding sources to remain viable and continuing to provide the high-level services well into the future.

In conclusion, while I appreciate the member's policy direction and his support for the work that we are doing on this side of the House in health and hospital funding—and I can understand his motion and I would not expect anything less of a local member; I know the member for Barker is very committed to his area, as are the other members—I cannot support this motion for one-off deals between the Commonwealth and individual hospitals. On this side of the House, we know that we will change the whole health system and make it a better system—and a better coordinated system, as we saw in the last few weeks in the discussions that took place. Our hospital reform will provide a better health system for all Australians.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (7.20 pm)—I rise to support my colleague the member for Barker and add my voice to the call for the federal government to provide direct funding to the Ardrossan and Moonta hospitals in my electorate and the Keith hospital in the electorate of Barker. I must draw some attention to the comments from the member for Hindmarsh. I think this may in fact have been one of the most difficult speeches he has ever given in this place. I believe that in his heart he knows he is on the wrong side of this argument with his obligation to defend his state colleagues. Despite the public and community outrage, repeated attempts by the Liberal Party in South Australia and the approaches to the federal government by the

members for Barker, Boothby and me, the South Australian government and now the new Treasurer insist on enforcing last year's decision to withdraw funding for the three community owned, not-for-profit hospitals—a relatively small amount of around \$1 million that supported the various public services which form a modest part of their individual budgets but which threatens to be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

I have previously raised the plight of these hospitals during the debate on the National Health and Hospitals Network Bill late last year, and consequently wrote to the federal and state ministers. However, I was very disappointed that my inquiry to the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon, was handballed to the parliamentary secretary, who suggested I write to the state minister—and who, ever so helpfully, included his address. I had in any case already contacted the state minister and my appeals have fallen on deaf ears. I pointed out to Minister Roxon that under the current or even the future funding commitments to the state health system, the abandonment of support has financial penalties for the Commonwealth and that she should involve herself in the process. I will explain further in a minute.

This motion is intended to provide a mechanism for the Commonwealth to take an interest in state government decisions, which will result in higher costs for the Commonwealth and lead to fewer health services for the affected people in these regional communities. To explain the issues at hand, I turn firstly to the Ardrossan Community Hospital. The hospital has been receiving \$140,000 a year from the state government which recognises that the hospital's accident and emergency department provides a significant service to those who would otherwise access the public system at full cost. In any event, this \$140,000 has been meeting approximately 50 per cent of the cost of the accident and emergency department. Fifty per cent of the admissions to the Ardrossan Community Hospital come through the doors of accident and emergency. Consequently, the department is essential to the hospital's survival. Quite simply, any ambulance service has to deliver patients to an accident and emergency section, and the loss of the service at Ardrossan is simply not an option.

Ardrossan is the biggest town in the Yorke Peninsula council area. It has a population of around 1,200 but services a total population of about 3,000. It is worth noting that there is considerable growth in the region and a prospecting company, Rex Minerals, expects to establish a significant copper mine in the area in the near future which is likely to employ hundreds. The hospital was established in 1914 and, as well as the accident and emergency department, has 22 acute-care beds and also runs an unattached 25-bed aged-care facility, which accesses hospital based services such as kitchen, maintenance and administration.

The shortcomings of the current arrangements in the funding for the aged-care sector have been well chronicled in the House by me and many others. Suffice it to say that a stand-alone facility of 25 beds would simply be unviable. It is inevitable that, if the hospital were to fail, so would the aged-care facility. Where this displaced activity might be moved and the implications for the consumers, the community and the federal government are an important point that I will return to a little later.

However, I take the opportunity to express the community's anger and disgust at the state government which has been expressed at a very emotional town hall meeting, participation in a march on Parliament House in Adelaide and an ongoing campaign to raise the issue at every level. The community is bewildered at how a government which professes to care for communities could take what is such a small amount of money in the context of the state budget

away from such a valuable and essential community service yet fail to understand the potential impact of the cut. The South Australian Minister for Health, John Hill, seems completely oblivious to the concerns.

In a similar situation, the community-owned-and-run, not-for-profit Moonta Hospital has had funding of \$288,000 per annum cut from its operating budget by the state government. It is worth noting that Moonta, with a population of about 3,500, is one of three main towns in the District Council of the Copper Coast, which is the fastest growing council area in South Australia outside Adelaide. The \$288,000 has been paying for public access to eight public beds—it is, in fact, a fee for the service of providing public beds. But there is an important point here: simple arithmetic tells us those beds are funded at less than \$100 a night—one hundred bucks a night! We could solve the crisis in the Australian health system overnight if we could fund our occupied bed days at \$100 a night Australia-wide. What a bargain! Why would the government walk away from such a good deal for the taxpayer? How can \$100 per night per bed be so important to any hospital?

The Moonta Health and Aged Care Service—community owned and not-for-profit—operates 14 acute care beds, an accident and emergency section and a 64-bed aged-care facility. The \$288,000 that the state government has been providing does little more than support a critical mass to allow the combined facility to operate efficiently. If the hospital is unable to keep occupancy rates up in the small acute care section of the facility, obviously its future viability is threatened. The \$100 per day the government provides for access for public patients would struggle to meet the costs involved in supplying the service, but it does provide enough bums on beds to allow the hospital to operate efficiently. Unless the funding is reinstated, the long-term survival of the hospital services will depend on the facility attracting enough self-funded patients to fill the same beds.

It is likely that, if the hospital services were to fail in the medium term, the Moonta aged-care section, as the bigger part of the facility, would continue to operate. However, the loss of service to the local community and the resident doctors would be immediate and drastic. The Moonta community has been outraged in a similar way to the citizenry of Ardrossan. They packed a similar town meeting and attended the Adelaide demonstration.

Apart from the obvious and distressing impact on these communities, what is the federal government's interest in the decisions, good or bad, of a state government? I took the opportunity last year to point out to the minister in correspondence that the failure of any of these units will lead to extra demand on the nearest fully publicly funded facility. Not only will the taxpayer pick up the full cost of the enforced transfer but they will also meet further costs because these facilities in turn will need capital investment.

It is a little difficult to know on any given day what the government's commitment is to the state hospital system—whether it is 40 per cent, 100 per cent, 60 per cent less GST, 50 per cent or 50 per cent of new spending—but it is a given that the Commonwealth has a liability. If, for instance, the hospital facility at Moonta were to close, the patient load would inevitably end up in Wallaroo, which is about 20 kilometres to the north. The workload at Moonta is approximately 1,400 private-bed and 1,800 public-bed days per year, an average of nine per day. There are concerns that the public hospital at Wallaroo is already under pressure to meet demand. It operates a 21-bed public facility with an attached seven-bed private hospital—28 beds in all—and is often operating at full capacity. In fact, often patients are transferred to the

Maitland hospital an hour to the south. Should the Moonta workload be transferred to Wallaroo, the dramatic increase in numbers would almost certainly result in the need for a multimillion-dollar expansion which, according to the Prime Minister's last decree on health, the Commonwealth will take 50 per cent responsibility for. So it is highly likely that the efforts of the state government to save a few hundred thousand dollars could result in a multimillion-dollar bill for the Commonwealth.

Similarly, a loss of viability in the Ardrossan hospital would not only lead to the transfer of patient load to the hospital in Maitland, requiring substantial upgrades, but would also require the construction of new aged-care beds, also probably in Maitland. While this might look like a desirable outcome for that particular town, it certainly is not good use of public money. I have not spoken about the Keith hospital, which is not in my electorate and has been similarly affected, but I shall go no further than to fully endorse the comments of the member for Barker on the matter.

The impact of these short-sighted decisions by the state government on these communities can barely be overstated. The possible dislocation of the aged and frail, the loss of amenity and the enormous impact and the economy threatens to implode on the community. It is often said in regional Australia that, if you lose your school and your hospital, you have lost the battle. But underlying that is a clear financial interest for the taxpayer in the federal government taking control of this very small portion of health funding and feeding it directly to the local facility, because that is true local control.

I have spoken in this place before about the damage I believe the South Australian government has inflicted upon local and community involvement. This bill offers an opportunity for the federal government to send the message that enough is enough. (*Time expired*)

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (7.31 pm)—I thank the member for Barker for bringing this motion before the House, because it highlights the need to reform the hospital and health system throughout Australia. The government recognises that. The states recognise that. The Australian people recognise that. The only ones who do not seem to understand that are the coalition members opposite, who oppose every step of the way every reform, every initiative, every commitment and every policy that is put up by this government in order to reform our health and hospitals system. I do agree with the member for Barker that this House certainly does value the important role that community hospitals play across Australia. That goes without dispute from any member on either side of the House. As for the rest of his motion, I will speak about that in the course of my remarks in the time that I have.

Health policy is and always has been a priority for people around the country. When you are in serious need of assistance because of an ailment, little else matters. It is the No. 1 priority for you and most likely for your immediate family members. Nothing comes ahead of health in terms of priority when health is at stake. And yet, after 12 years of being in government, members opposite—and the member for Barker was a member of the government at the time—failed to keep pace with the emerging and changing demands on our health system. What they did was in fact what we are seeing tonight, and I will come back to that in just a moment. They not only failed to keep pace with the emerging changes but in fact cut a billion dollars from hospital funding. They did that and then blamed the states for failing to deliver the required services. It was a clear strategy to cut the funds, blame the states and then come in when it suited the federal government to say, 'We will assist communities in need by di-

rectly intervening,' which is exactly what this proposal aims to do—in a similar way to what they did in the lead-up to the 2007 election when they were going to directly intervene in the Mersey Community Hospital in Tasmania.

This policy clearly highlights that members opposite do not have a policy when it comes to managing the health system. This is an ad hoc move on the part of the member for Barker and I ask him: has this particular proposal been run by the shadow health minister, the member for Dickson, and does he approve of the Commonwealth intervening in this way?

Mr Secker—I'm running it, Tony. Don't you worry about that. You've tried every other way, Tony.

Mr ZAPPIA—If he does, is it then the case that every other—

Mr Secker—You asked the question and I'll tell you: I'm running this.

Mr ZAPPIA—community hospital around the country will also then be entitled to put up its hand for funding for services that they need as and when the need arises? Will every other community based hospital such as the hospitals in Bordertown, Mount Gambier, Naracoorte, Penola, Kadina, Wallaroo, Port Pirie, Clare and Balaklava in South Australia equally be in a position to say that they would rather the Commonwealth directly fund them rather than going through the state system in South Australia? I put it to members opposite that, if that is their policy, they ought to say so clearly right here and now. I would certainly be interested in the response from their shadow health minister as to whether it is their policy.

I will come to some of the reforms that are required which I referred to earlier. The first thing that comes to my mind when I talk about reforms is the shortage of doctors across Australia. I raise this issue for the specific reason that in my electorate of Makin the North East Division of General Practice, who I assume represents the doctors, have made it clear that we currently have a doctor shortage because they cannot find enough doctors to fill the practices within the division. There is also a real concern that the situation will deteriorate as many doctors are reaching a retirement age and will, quite rightly, retire. That is one of the matters that the previous coalition government neglected. Had they invested in doctors' training and not capped the amount of training for doctors available in the universities we would not now be facing this shortage.

I will come back to the required health reforms in a moment, but I just want to cover some of the ground that the member for Hindmarsh covered with respect to what the state government has been doing in regard to the three hospitals that we are dealing with today in this motion. The member for Hindmarsh articulated some of the work that has already been done by the state government. The state minister for health met with the boards of the three hospitals on 27 October and, in doing so, offered the South Australian Department of Health and the Country Health SA chief executive to work with the hospitals to try and identify not only cost savings but a better management plan for the hospitals to ensure that they could remain viable. It is my understanding that the working set up to do that in fact came up with the necessary savings that were required to ensure that the hospitals continue to provide the services.

It is also my understanding that the aged-care housing group in South Australia, which I am familiar with and which I have every confidence in, has been asked to work with the Keith and District Hospital in order to identify any opportunities in the aged-care sector, which will add to the revenue stream of the hospital and, in turn, continue to make it viable. I understand

that the chief executive of Country Health SA is still in contact with the chairman and director of the Keith and District Hospital, Mr James DeBarro. If those discussions are ongoing, and I understand that they are, then it would seem to me that it would be appropriate to allow them, at the very least, to come to a conclusion. Then, when they come to a conclusion, to act in respect of the outcomes of those negotiations and positions. It is also my understanding that state health minister John Hill has given a guarantee that a \$300,000 annual subsidy to Keith in recognition of its provision of emergency services will continue. That is important because it will enable the emergency services provided by the hospital—which nobody disputes are good services—to continue for the benefit of the community around Keith.

I have summarised the work that the South Australian state health minister is doing with those three hospitals in particular. I want to come back to the issue of health reforms because, as I said from the outset, this motion highlights the need to implement health reforms right across the sector and right across Australia. You cannot run a health system where you individually cherry-pick when the federal government will intervene and when it will not. You need to have a policy that is consistent so it is well understood by the sector right across the country. That is exactly what the federal government is aiming to do with its recently announced national health reforms.

Under those health reforms we will see \$345 million committed to increasing training for GPs, which is expected to deliver an additional 5,500 new GPs, or GPs undergoing training, over the next 10 years. Another \$390 million will go towards supporting nurses in general practice and \$650 million will go towards establishing 64 GP superclinics. Also \$467 million will go towards putting an electronic health record system into place. This is something which, I might add, will help hospitals right across the country wherever they are, and which members opposite continue to oppose after having initiated the proposal themselves when they were in government.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr ZAPPIA—The members opposite say that the reforms will not help Keith. All of these reforms will help Keith because, firstly, we will get a much more efficient health system around the country and, secondly, every one of those hospitals will benefit from the investment measures that I alluded to a moment ago, because that is a direct investment in the provision of health services around the country for all those hospitals. (*Time expired*)

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (7.41 pm)—I am very pleased to support the member for Barker and the member for Grey on this motion regarding community hospitals. The member for Barker has been forced to take an almost unprecedented step as a last resort. When the national healthcare specific purpose payment for the South Australian government was agreed there was every expectation that the South Australian government would maintain their funding effort in the area of public hospitals. There was no expectation that the South Australian government would be withdrawing support from hospitals and would be taking decisions which, in effect, would lead to the closure of three regional hospitals. At the state election in March last year, voters in South Australia were unaware that this was a decision which the state government were going to take. That has had the effect of reducing services provided by the three hospitals that we have mentioned: Keith, Ardrossan and Moonta. In practice, it will mean that for commuters who drive between Adelaide and Melbourne or between Melbourne and Adelaide, in particular that stretch between Murray Bridge and Bordertown—a stretch of

almost 180, 190 kilometres—there will be no accident and emergency unit. That is very important for the commuters in South Australia.

To put this in perspective we need to consider the history of community hospitals. Originally, all these hospitals, irrespective of whether they are now public or community hospitals, started life as community hospitals. The community supported the hospitals and, in turn, they were supported by the South Australian state government. This is only the latest chapter in a long history of downgrading country hospitals. Almost 20 years ago the Labor Party in South Australia wanted to close Tailem Bend, Laura and Blyth hospitals. Quite recently, South Australia had a country health policy which proposed the downgrading of all country hospitals bar four. Kevin Rudd's original proposal under the great health and hospital reform, about which we have heard so much, was to have activity based funding for all 760 public hospitals in Australia. The opposition immediately recognised, as did others, including the New South Wales Premier, that this would be disastrous for country hospitals. While case mix, activity based funding works well in large volume, in big city hospitals, it will not work in country hospitals.

I have been to the hospitals in Moonta and Ardrossan at the invitation of the member for Grey. I am quite familiar with the community in Keith as well. The member for Barker wants to take an unprecedented step—that is, to redirect the funding, which there was every expectation that the South Australian government were going to continue to pay. They never said in their March election last year, less than a year ago, that they would be taking this step. We are calling on the federal government to take this action—that is, to directly fund these three hospitals as a result of the actions taken by the South Australian government.

This is very important for the communities in Keith, Ardrossan and Moonta. If Ardrossan hospital closes there will be no hospital on the east coast of Yorke Peninsula. As I said, if Keith hospital closes there will be no hospital for 180 kilometres of the Dukes Highway, where a large number of serious accidents and fatalities occur. The opposition calls on all members of the House to support this motion, which will help maintain the viability of these three hospitals. It is wrong to typecast these hospitals as private hospitals. We all know that they are community hospitals. They are very different to the nature of high-volume private hospitals, which rely on large numbers of insured patients. I call on all members to support this motion. *(Time expired)*

Mr LYONS (Bass) (7.46 pm)—I rise to speak on the motion put forward by the member for Barker regarding the funding of district hospitals. May I say from the outset that district hospitals are a vital part of our community. I was a district hospital secretary, which was what hospital managers were called when they had their own boards in Tasmania. That was the model under which the Liberals sacked all the boards and replaced them with regional boards. It took another seven or eight years before the Liberals sacked all the regional boards and installed bureaucrats as operators. Hospitals, no matter what size, must be part of a regional network. A regional model is certainly the best fit for Tasmania and it is a model that works. It is the model that the community wants and it is the model that best suits the population and culture.

Today the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon, announced three new specialist doctor training places for my electorate of Bass as part of the Gillard government's \$356 million committed to boost the number of specialist doctors across the country. This is a great boost

for my electorate. The Gillard Labor government want to make it easier for local communities to see a specialist doctor closer to home. Bass will receive three specialists to provide regional services—training positions in ophthalmology at the Eye Hospital in Launceston, general medicine at Calvary Health Care in Launceston and obstetrics and gynaecology at the Launceston General Hospital.

I was at Latrobe in the north-west of Tasmania when John Howard, the then Prime Minister, like a messiah, swanned into the Mersey Hospital and announced the federal government was to take it over. While some people were conned by the election gimmick, most people who have been around the health system for some time realised that this was just an action without thought. There was no business case and no cost-benefit study. Health services are linked and people get their needs met early with the most appropriate treatment, and that was not the model when the federal government took over the Mersey Hospital. If I had my way, all services would be linked with a single fund—a reasonable model, with aged care, primary care and acute care funded from the same source. I have worked in health for 20 years. One thing that really threw us into chaos was limited grants. Sure, we obtained grants for setting up a diabetes centre and to replace hips and knees, but the problem was that these services were previously paid for but the ongoing services were not. These special purpose grants were not ongoing and they did distort what was required as the best service to the local community. One thing is certain in health and that is change. If district hospitals mentioned in this motion are doing the same service year after year without change then their future is doomed. In any event, we should be paying for services, not bucket grants.

Diseases and cures will overcome most of your planning, so you must have a coordinated and flexible funding model which encourages change. I am proud to be part of a government that is putting health reform on the agenda. Local control over the day-to-day operations of hospitals will soon rest with local health management making key decisions, not central bureaucrats hundreds of kilometres away. The Gillard Labor government recognises the importance of regional hospitals, and I will continue to be a strong advocate for my electorate to make sure we get health right. Fundamental reform is needed to ensure our health system can cope with the pressures of a growing and ageing population.

Our health system was neglected by those opposite. As a former health minister, the Leader of the Opposition saw \$1 billion cut from Australia's public hospitals and he placed a cap on GP training places. A cap on GP training places has a huge detrimental impact on rural and regional district hospitals, as these hospitals require general practitioners as the backbone of their medical coverage. We cannot trust the Liberals on health.

We are solving the problems of the past and preparing for the future. We are committed to delivering better health care across Australia. That is why we have already taken the first steps towards ensuring families in rural and regional Australia get the health care they deserve. Grants that tie district hospitals to specific services do not help. District hospitals need to be part of a regional service where they can take patients from other acute hospitals and provide allied health and specialty services, and this is best achieved by regional coordination and the flexibility of local management.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—Order! The time allotted for the 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.

Obesity

Debate resumed, on motion by **Ms Hall**:

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, to adopt healthy lifestyles which include healthy eating and exercise; and
- (3) acknowledges 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.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (7.51 pm)—Obesity is a growing problem in Australia and, for that matter, in most developed countries. Australians are getting fatter and this has enormous implications in our society. Obesity is accompanied by adverse health implications. People are getting sicker, the mortality and morbidity rate is starting to change, and it is imposing an enormous cost on our society.

The current generation of children face the prospect, for the first time in a very long time in Australia, of dying at an earlier age than their parents. When that situation develops, it means that we as members of parliament, as government and opposition, really need to look at this issue and see what we can do to turn these figures around.

The Baker Heart Research Institute released a report titled *Australia's future 'fat bomb': a report on the long-term consequences of Australia's expanding waistline on cardiovascular disease* in April 2008. That report was a wake-up call for everyone. The report argued that the 'fat bomb' was ticking loudly in Australia, with around seven out of 10 middle-aged men and six out of 10 middle-aged women being overweight or obese. Those figures are absolutely startling. Overall, around 1.5 million middle-aged Australians are currently obese and are therefore at risk of cardiovascular disease in the long term. Based on the best evidence available, our expanding middle-aged waistline will result in an extra 700,000 cardiovascular related hospital admissions in the next 20 years. That is an enormous cost for our health system, for our society and for the families of those people. Other findings of this report are that these hospital admissions are highly preventable and that the cost will be in the order of \$6 billion

in health care. The report estimated that over the next 20 years 123,000 men and women will die from cardiovascular disease directly related to obesity. A simple strategy such as losing five kilograms in five months has the potential to result in 27 to 34 per cent fewer cardiovascular related admissions over the next 20 years. So, yes, we are getting fatter; it is having health consequences; but we can actually do something about it. I recommend that members have a look at this report.

In June 2009 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing tabled its report *Weighing it up: obesity in Australia*. It made some very sound recommendations. The committee looked at all the issues that were dealt with in the Baker institute's report, it looked at issues that the health minister was particularly interested in, it looked at ways that we could turn things around, it looked at the causes and implications and it came out with some strong recommendations that are worthy of being not only considered but implemented.

The National Preventative Health Taskforce also looked at this issue. It sees obesity as one of the most challenging health issues in our nation. The National Preventative Health Strategy looks at ways that we can turn things around, including reshaping the food supply towards lower risk products, encouraging physical activity, protecting children and others from inappropriate marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages and improving public education. I think education is very important in this area. It also talks about reshaping urban environments, and I think that that is a very important strategy that needs to be put in place. It mentions upskilling and strengthening the role of primary healthcare workers, strengthening maternal and child health systems and closing the gap for disadvantaged groups within the community. It notes that there are socioeconomic factors involved in obesity and the importance of an evidence based approach.

The fact that children are getting fatter and that there is an enormous increase in the number of children who are overweight and obese has led to children as young as 10 being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. I think the challenge for us as members of parliament is to look at ways that this can be addressed and for government to put in place preventative health strategies that will deal with it. We need to put greater emphasis on diet and exercise and look at the way that technology and computer based activities have impacted upon the lives of children.

There are lifestyle issues, not only for children but for all Australians, such as food, alcohol, exercise and urban design. Urban design was mentioned in the report I referred to earlier, the National Preventative Health Strategy. We need to make our urban environment exercise friendly so that people do not have to hop into their car to drive to the local supermarket. We should try to do everything we can within the planning context to encourage exercise. From the point of view of a society, we need to value a healthy lifestyle, not the plastic images that we see on TV, which I actually think put too much pressure on people to turn to eating habits that can lead to obesity. We always see the thin young person eating chocolate and foods that do anything but promote health.

There are a lot of things that government can do through policy. We need a whole-of-government approach with the three levels of government working together. We need to address this issue from a community perspective and from a preventative health approach. We need the promotion of healthy eating, less consumption of alcohol, more exercise and workplaces that encourage exercise. Where people are working in static occupations employers

need to have in place plans where a person will, for example, answer the telephone and walk around while they are doing it.

The Active After-school Communities program is an excellent program designed for students to increase their activities. The Stephanie Alexander program is based on encouraging healthy eating in young people. At the start of life breastfeeding is the approach that leads to the right start and leads to a healthy approach to eating.

Obesity and issues associated with it are a real challenge for our society. We need to act now, otherwise the consequences will be enormous. We will end up having a society of people suffering from chronic illness and people who will be dying a lot younger than their parents did.

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (8.01 pm)—In a few short generations our nation has gone from being one of the fittest to one of the fattest. Over 18 per cent of Australians—that is over four million of us—already suffer from largely preventable chronic diseases associated with smoking, obesity and alcohol abuse. According to a study by the ABS, more than half of Australian adults are either overweight or obese—that is 62 per cent of men and 45 per cent of women. In just 15 years the proportion of obese men more than doubled from nine per cent to 19 per cent, while the proportion of obese women increased from 10 per cent to 17 per cent.

One of the many concerns with this trend is that overweight or obese people are increasingly seeing themselves as having an acceptable weight—I include myself as one of those people. It is estimated that every month an extra 10,000 Australians become overweight or obese. Obesity takes away our quality of life, it ruins our health, it damages our friendships and our families and eventually it takes our lives. This debate is overdue and should be continued in community halls, in workplaces, in classrooms and, yes, in pubs and clubs throughout the country.

I believe there is a very strong link between our burgeoning waistlines and our decreased participation in sport. Exercise, the playing of sport, is the single best thing you can do for your physical health, your mental health and your social health. Obesity is the result of the diet-exercise equation gone horribly wrong. While exercise is the major component in prevention, diet is the major component of a cure.

The Australia I grew up in played sports. Much of our heritage has been formed through our feats on sporting fields and courts throughout the world. Any success that we had in international sports competitions was a direct result of our love for participation in sport, where the really keen ones would try to emulate their heroes in competition. But over recent times we as a nation, like others in this building, have lost our way.

We have recently witnessed our country's failed world cup bid. Like most other MPs I supported the idea of this bid, as the promotion of any sport at the highest level can hopefully lead to a positive impact on our impressionable and increasingly unfit youth. But then it was announced that we spent \$45 million to win only one vote. As if that was not bad enough, the administration of this bid was so poor that over \$11 million was unaccounted for. Regardless, it is the focus of this money that is the question today. It was not so long ago that this government announced its war on obesity, yet \$45 million was spent on a promise to build stadiums to promote spectatorism, not participation. More money was spent on this one bid for a

tournament, which included wining and dining and marketing for FIFA executives, than the government spends in a whole year on the Active After-school Communities Program—an initiative brought in by the Howard government to specifically provide inactive students with opportunities to access a sporting program. My sport, tennis, has suffered the same syndrome. Once our major tennis stadiums were centres of participation. Now they are just stages to watch.

These are just a few examples of why I must speak against point (3) of this motion, which praises this government's work in investing in preventative health programs. Last year's Crawford report, *The future of sport in Australia*, was overbalanced towards improving the funding and performances of several at the elite level, rather than showing a clear understanding of the importance of promoting participation across the board. History shows us that the Australian way of producing champions is through broad based participation, not through the selection of a few to be specifically trained in a sport. What possible benefit could such a policy have on national health?

To achieve real results on this issue will require a wide-scale program of investment and consolidation of private-public partnerships. The government will need to be proactive in the support it lends to the health and fitness industry to be able to provide all Australians the opportunity to exercise and participate in sports. A very easy solution to this is the allocation of 99-year leases, which are absolutely essential to justify the commitment of capital necessary for the development of such facilities. This is common in the UK. As I referred to in my maiden speech, at the heart of the very reason why I am here in parliament today is the absolute frustration I experienced at being unable to develop sports clubs in Australia because long-term leases are simply not available. In my previous role as a sports club developer, I needed a specific act of the South Australian parliament to attain a 50-year lease for the development of the historic Memorial Drive Tennis Club. The fact that this took over seven years is a shining example of the lack of support we give to the preventative medicine industry. As policy makers we must open the doors to the development of multisports activity facilities so that every member of our community can be given the opportunity to know the joy and benefits of playing sports, experience the health improvements of keeping fit, the vitality and the friends that are won, making all those who participate winners.

The cost of such a policy direction pales into insignificance compared to the savings. According to a study by the Medical Journal of Australia, overweight and obese Australian adults cost the Australian economy \$21 billion in direct care and direct non-healthcare costs plus an additional \$35.6 billion in government subsidies. Aside from exercise, diet is a vital component in this problem. Recently I visited Epping Boys High School in my electorate for their speech night. I was amazed at the low levels of obesity amongst the students. The principal, Peter Garrard, informed me that this was because of a dedicated healthy-eating plan in the school canteen. The boys also excelled in sports. The importance of this cannot be overstated. Even a case of moderate obesity can reduce life expectancy by around three years and there are also documented links between carrying excess weight and poor mental health in middle aged Australians.

This motion somewhat ironically refers to obesity as a growing problem in Australia. When linked with the predicted impacts on our aging population, this threatens to be one of our greatest national concerns. As policymakers we must commit significant focus towards ad-

addressing the inequity between participation and inactivity. Investment must be encouraged to provide opportunities to participate in active pastimes and sports. This participation should be the major driver in preventive medicine to create a healthy and more vital Australia and to eliminate obesity.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (8.10 pm)—I thank the member for Shortland and the member for Bennelong for their contributions. The issue of health is one that is very dear to me. When I talk about health I am not just talking about the focus we have had for many years and which in many ways is a focus on illness and helping people get better when they are ill. I remember when we were in opposition. The Labor Party talked a lot about the need for us to move some of the focus back towards prevention. There have been times in the past when governments have paid quite a bit of attention to that: the Whitlam government established the National Hospitals and Health Services Commission in 1973, the Fraser government initiated the Davidson inquiry into health promotion in 1979 and the Hawke government created the Better Health Commission in 1985. Yet following that there was quite a lack of action and lack of discussion on the very important issue of keeping people healthy.

While I am very happy with what the government that I am a part of does, I still think we have a long way to go to move through a discussion on preventive health to talking about staying healthy. There is quite a difference between the two. Nevertheless, the steps that have been taken since the Labor government came to power in 2007 are very important. The government negotiated a new National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health with the state and territory governments, and as part of that agreement the Commonwealth government committed to providing \$872 million in funding over six years for a range of preventive health activities, including the establishment of a national prevention strategy—again, very good policy that has been moving along quite well. The government also commissioned three major inquiries into the health system: the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission, the Preventative Health Taskforce and, through the Department of Health and Ageing, the external reference group on primary health care. All three of those reported back to government quite early in our first term.

Unsurprisingly, the taskforce outlined quite a comprehensive plan, including the establishment of an Australian national preventive health agency whose job it would be to drive the agenda on preventive health. Three of the main areas to be tackled initially are tobacco, obesity and alcohol abuse—and, in some cases, the relationship between the three. The agency will assist in driving that prevention agenda, including by providing evidence based advice to health ministers, supporting the development of evidence and data on the state of preventive health in Australia and putting in place national guidelines and standards to guide preventive health activities.

I was surprised, when I first came to parliament in 2004, by the lack of debate on preventive health. I remember a number of debates in the House where the government made it clear that it did not consider it the job of a federal government to involve itself in preventive health. I am very pleased to see that we as a government have started doing that, and I know that over time this will contribute greatly to the work that needs to be done in facing one of the greatest public health challenges confronting Australia: obesity. We have already heard the figures, with over 60 per cent of adults and one in four children being overweight or obese. In the vast majority of cases it is completely preventable. There are some people, of course, who have

other health conditions or are on medication that makes things very difficult, but in the vast majority of cases these are completely preventable conditions caused largely by bad habits or a lack of good habits over a long period of time.

I, as a person who cares greatly about my health and who has spent many years learning to manage it, am continually surprised by the lack of information out in the community about how to be healthy. So while we are focusing very much on preventive health and that is a very good step, we really do at some point need to move the debate considerably further and concentrate much more on the issue of being healthy in the first place. It is great to improve our hospitals, and we are working very hard at that, but ultimately it is a better option if people do not go there in the first place. I thank the member for Shortland for raising this. It is a very important issue as we face the future of Australia.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (8.15 pm)—It is good to see the member for Bennelong contributing to this discussion tonight. The fact that he is an internationally recognised sportsman means he can play an important role in taking activity out to the nation and also to the children of Australia. I congratulate him on his speech. I do rise to support and speak on the motion by the member for Shortland on obesity in Australia. Both the member and I are on the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, which brought down the report *Weighing it up: obesity in Australia*, and I will quote from that report during the course of my speech.

In this place we are all prone to stacking on a few extra kilos and not looking after ourselves as well as we can. I remember my induction back here in 2007. The member for Parramatta spoke to the newbies, the class of 2007, about the dangers and the potential pitfalls that we all face, particularly with regard to lack of exercise. She spoke about her own efforts to maintain her health and the fact that she had managed after the first year to reduce her weight—I might not mention any figures—down to a level that was acceptable to her and, I guess, acceptable to most parliamentarians in this place. I do congratulate her on her presentation. It was one that stuck in my mind.

It is necessary to keep this issue in the public eye, and I congratulate the member for Shortland for her efforts to ensure that this continues to happen. It was interesting to note the number of members on the H&A committee who lost weight during the inquiry. I must make special mention of the member for Parkes who last time I spoke with him had lost 35 kilograms as a result of being on the committee and involved in the inquiry. He said I gave him inspiration when I lost 10 kilograms during the inquiry. We managed to reduce the weight that we had to put on those planes up to the islands to make sure that we had the weight distributed evenly.

Ms Hall—He weighed himself.

Mr IRONS—Thanks for that help there from the member for Shortland. The member for Parkes and I both enjoyed a recent jog around the bridges in Perth after another Health and Ageing committee hearing and we have both confirmed we will make sure that we maintain a level of activity.

Part of the problem of obesity in Australia is our lack of physical activity and our poor diet. The report that we did bears that as well. The statistics that the member for Bennelong was speaking about are probably a bit different to the ones that we had in our report. In 2009 the

ABS released reports that said that 68 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women were either overweight or obese. I guess the big worry is that 7.2 per cent of children in our society were either overweight or obese as well. As the member has put forward in her section on obesity as a growing problem in Australia, it shows a growth of four per cent in men and six per cent in women since 1995. We all know that they rate everything on the BMI index. After losing 10 kilos I am still considered to be overweight according to the BMI index, so maybe that needs to be reviewed, because I do not feel overweight anymore.

One of the most controversial of the 20 recommendations that the report came out with was recommendation 5, which was with regard to bariatric surgery. That was one of the areas that we looked at during the inquiry. We recommended that bariatric surgery be put onto the Medicare list because most of the people who required it came from a lower socioeconomic environment and their health, diet and economic situation did not give them the same facilities or the same outs as people who lived in higher socioeconomic areas. It was interesting that the media focused only on that and suggested that we were giving away freebies. It was disappointing. That was an important recommendation within the report.

We also had interesting visits to Broken Hill, which is considered the most obese town in Australia. We also went out to Wilcannia and we saw some horrific examples of poor diet out there. It was disappointing to see that some of the people in the town were taking advantage of the locals when they should have been more concerned about their health. But congratulations to the member for Shortland on bringing this motion before the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—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.

Australian Natural Disasters

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mr Neumann**:

That this House:

- (1) notes the outstanding contribution of organisations and individuals in Queensland during the natural disasters of January 2011;
- (2) acknowledges the following who all worked tirelessly to ensure the safety and security of residents in the evacuation period and beyond:
 - (a) the State Emergency Service, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Brigades, St John's Ambulance Service, Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service and Australian Defence Force;
 - (b) the Salvation Army, Lifeline, churches, charities and other community organisations; and
 - (c) flood affected school principals, teachers, staff and school communities; and
- (3) expresses its deep appreciation for the courage, commitment and professionalism shown by these organisations and individuals.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (8.20 pm)—Just to give an indication of the extent of the flood damage, what happened and what confronted the Somerset Regional Council and the Ipswich City Council, on Monday, 10 January 2011, 18 inches of water, on the old scale, landed in the Somerset Dam in 24 hours. By the afternoon, the council's administration office, the library building, was inundated, sweeping away cars and, indeed, many people in the Esk area as the floodwaters from the Redbank Creek broke their banks and swept through the caravan park.

I want to pay tribute to the mayor of Ipswich, Paul Pisasale, and the Mayor of Somerset Regional Council, Graeme Lehmann, their councillors and all the council staff who worked so well, during the flood crisis. I also want to thank the State Emergency Services workers, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, the rural fire Brigades, St John's Ambulance Service, Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service, the Australian Defence Force, the Salvation Army, Lifeline, churches, charities, the Red Cross and other community organisations as well as the school communities which have been affected, particularly the school principals, their teachers, staff and school communities.

In my area we saw floods hit a number of schools. I want to pay tribute, particularly to school principals. Di Pedersen is the school principal of the Mount Tarampa State School, a school of about 48 young people. It is a school basically on a swamp. She and the school community fixed it up. The water came through into the library and into the school buildings. Liz Bailey is the school principal of Patrick Estate School, a school of 28 kids. While she was running the evacuation centre at Esk—built under a great BER program, I might add—her school was devastated, so she went back and helped rebuild the school. I want to pay tribute to her and the whole school community.

David Raine is the principal of Fernvale State School, a school of just over 500 young people. That school also acted as an evacuation centre—another great BER project, I might add. He worked his insides out all the time during the flood. People broke into the school to get away from the water. Peter Doyle, principal of Brassall State Primary School, and his whole school community suffered so much. Every book, including every library book, and every teaching aid were destroyed. But he and the whole school community worked hard to get the school back on track and it opened for business on the day it was supposed to.

Simon Riley is the principal of Ipswich State High School. The whole school community worked hard. The manual arts building, the school sports equipment, the school oval and the shed have all gone. It was dreadful. Every school building at Bundamba State Primary School was also inundated. Marlene Eltham and her whole staff worked so hard there. Debbie Hansen and all her staff at Ipswich East State School worked so hard to get their school back on track and, with music equipment gone, I pay tribute to you, Deputy Speaker D'Ath, and to the member for Rankin, who, through your efforts, provided musical equipment to help the music room get started again at Ipswich East State School.

I want to pay tribute to the ADF: to Major Tony Smith and Brigadier Paul McLaughlin for the wonderful work they did. I also pay tribute to Energex: Justin Bowman, Joe Mulherin, Maurie Riley and Alan Savage worked hard in the Ipswich and the West Moreton areas, organising energy companies, stringing wires, replacing power poles and restoring much-needed power to ensure that these whole communities got the help they needed.

People at the RSLs worked so well. Robert Rye, of the RSL in Toogoolawah, did a great job up there. We have seen great evidence of people who work so hard in local school communities. There was Neville Finlay and his team from the SES in Toogoolawah, mainly young people, doing food drops to 140 people, including 115 adults. The SES organised helicopter drops and drove boats across rivers and creeks in places like The Glen, Ivory Creek, Eskdale, Harlin and Gregors Creek. It was a wonderful effort by these people. We saw a great deal of work done by so many people across so many areas.

We saw great work done by Tony Perera, who is the Ipswich Centrelink manager. He worked so hard across so many days until in the end they had to tell him to go home; he had worked so fiercely well across so many days. We saw the SES in Ipswich and Arie van den Ende and his team perform well. We saw people like Denise Hanly, Catie Davis, Kerry Silver, Christine McDonald, Peter Doyle—as I said before—work well. Merv Neumann, my uncle, together with Councillor Charlie Pisasale ran the evacuation and recovery centre at Avon Hall at Leichhardt-One Mile. We saw people like Pastor Mark Edwards, who set his own daughter's wedding back a week so that he and his whole church community at the Ipswich Region Community Church could run a recovery and evacuation centre for about three aged-care facilities. All the people from those aged-care facilities stayed there. The Prime Minister visited that particular centre.

Then there were the Ripley Valley Rural Fire Brigade volunteers: people like Jim Runham, Matthew Mulrone, John Bowles, Steven Woodridge, Dave Morris, Steven Phillips and all the people from the TS Ipswich volunteers flood boat teams—people like Brendon Weber, John Klæbe, Andrew Shortland, Justin Martin, Cassie Broadfoot, Frank Martin and Paul Klæbe, who did fantastic work during these flood times. We saw a lot of people suffer tremendously as a result of what went on during these days.

We saw a lot of people working in places like Karalee State School. We saw the police working particularly in that area, and I want to pay tribute to local police Superintendent Garth Pitman and also a couple of other police officers who did great work—like Senior Sergeant Terry Cantwell and Senior Sergeant Bruce Werda, who were stranded on what they call the Karalee Island. They kept law and order but also organised the local community. The state member for Ipswich, Wayne Wendt, and I arrived and they handed over to the Red Cross. It was like military precision; they ran it so brilliantly. Then there were people like Sergeant Jacqui Munn. She and a number of her young constables actually lost their shoes in the floodwaters and they had cars that were stuck in the floodwaters, but they worked so hard around Lowood. I want to pay tribute to them.

People in the Department of Communities worked really well in the area. I want to pay tribute to people like Terry Flanagan, Brooke Winters and Annabelle Johnston—who came back from her holidays to work just in time to arrive in the area. People in rural areas were cut off, like in Wivenhoe Pocket where Graham Peall from the rural fire brigade, with his offsiders Rob Scully and Wayne Gossow, together with the Energex worker stuck in that area, Richard Perry, worked so hard. I think that these local communities showed tremendous community spirit in great adversity.

I want to pay tribute to a couple of other people too. Councillor Cheryl Bromage, of her own volition, with Kevin Bianchi, the Principal at St Joseph's Primary School, set up an evacuation centre there, catering to the people of North Ipswich and Brassall. I think those people were fed the best meals in the whole of Ipswich at the time, because Gerard Gimpel, the Deputy Principal, told me so, and so did Councillor Cheryl Bromage. We had people like Leo and Sharon Conway, who are friends of Ipswich West state member Wayne Wendt; the meals they were feeding people were like gourmet meals. In the end people were so taken by the meals that they said, 'I don't know whether I want to go home or not, because I am being so well fed'. They did such a fantastic job.

I want to pay tribute to the council workers. We saw so many of them at the evacuation centres, from Ipswich City Council and the Somerset Regional Council. I want to pay tribute to Ipswich Superintendent Robyn Rossi and her offsider, Pat Roach, from St John's Ambulance. They serviced up to about 700 people at the evacuation centre at Ipswich.

I cannot forget the Brisbane Valley and Ipswich Meals on Wheels, the Harvest Rain Christian Care, the Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul and the Ipswich Region Community Church, and who could forget the wonderful efforts of the archdeacon, Reverend Matthew Jones, from St Paul's Anglican Parish during the flood crisis, particularly at the evacuation centre at Ipswich. He really was a spiritual mentor and counsellor to many people.

I have paid tribute to the young people of the Riverview area but I also pay tribute to the wonderful women of Riverview. Kerry Silver and Christine Macdonald led the Riverview community centre so well. I want to pay tribute to many people but there are too many to thank. I have named a few just in honour of the work they did. I was very proud to be the member for Blair when I saw the wonderful work being done by people who showed courage, determination, commitment and resilience at this time.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (8.30 pm)—This summer was a season of disasters and devastation, of clean-ups and courage, and of heartache and, most importantly, humanity. We all heard throughout the condolence motion countless stories of loss and despair, but also of bravery and kinship. Throughout, humanity shone through. The power of human compassion is a humbling thing. It is important that we recognise this and I commend the motion for doing so.

It is important that we recognise the toll this summer has taken on members of our State Emergency Service, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service and the Australian Defence Force. These service men and women were responsible for so much good. It is not easy to ask someone to leave their home when it is at risk, as these men and women had to in North Queensland during the cyclone and in Brisbane during the floods. It is not easy to think of the safety of others when you know your own family needs help. It is not easy to not turn around your helicopter with a full load on board when you can see a victim you cannot help. It is not easy to reassure someone that you will be back with help and return to find them gone.

This is what the selfless men and women of our rescue and emergency services did this summer. Furthermore, these disasters have been back-to-back, one after another. Just as flood waters began to recede in central Queensland, the terrifying wall of water was washing its destructive and fatal path through Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley. As fear for the missing rose, so did the Brisbane River. It inundated suburbs and shut down Australia's third largest city.

While Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria were underwater, fires raged in Perth and took 62 homes with them. Just as the south-east corner conquered the initial clean-up, exhausted Queenslanders returned home to news reports of a massively destructive cyclone heading for the state's north, bringing with it even more fear for loved ones and despair at the potential devastation.

Throughout these events our emergency and rescue service personnel just kept going. When the next disaster struck they were there. They were calm and professional but, most of

all, they were compassionate. In some ways we were lucky in my electorate of Ryan and in the surrounding Brisbane suburbs. Whilst the waters rose quickly, they did not smash through the town in less than an hour. Our residents were able to get out safely, if not with their most prized possessions.

As terrible as it was for me to see the devastation in my own electorate and speak with so many who had lost so much, I cannot imagine what the men and women of our rescue and emergency services went through in the aftermath of the floods through the Lockyer Valley. Single pictures on the news were shocking enough. I will never forget the photo of a front yard in Grantham with police tape tied to the fence to indicate that it had already been searched. This brought it home for me that the police were methodically searching house after house and street after street. They just kept going until the job was done. I believe that this takes a phenomenal amount of courage and selflessness, and I cannot praise and thank these men and women enough.

I also take this opportunity to thank our Australian Defence Force. As I said in my maiden speech, the men and women of our Defence Force answer the call for their country whenever they are asked—be it an offshore deployment or, as we saw this summer, to lend a hand and a strong arm to those in need at home. As I have said before, we are so blessed to be living in a country where residents breathe a sigh of relief when Army trucks roll into our streets.

Members of the Defence Force had to bush-bash their way into Bellbowrie on day 3 to reach stranded residents in need of medical assistance. They airlifted out an elderly resident with a broken hip and taking three overterm pregnant women back to Brisbane where, thankfully, their babies were delivered safely. Residents had been isolated there for four days, and our defence forces made emergency supply drops of essential items to these communities. It is appropriate to praise the efforts of Graham Barnard from the Kenmore Moggill RSL in liaising with authorities and the local community to ensure that this process occurred.

The entire Bellbowrie community is to be congratulated for their efforts. As was the case so often in the flood effort in Brisbane, communities banded together—the residents of Bellbowrie, Moggill, Mount Crosby, Karana Downs and surrounding suburbs—to help those in need. Their long-term experience with flash flooding meant that the Moggill community was better prepared than most, and for this I must once again commend the state emergency services. A few years ago, with the help of local councillor Margaret De Witt, the SES put together an action plan. This involved the SES contacting and cataloguing every community group in the area, registering their skills and having a network that could quickly be called upon when the need arose—and how they answered that call!

Don Mansfield, President of the Moggill Mount Crosby Lions Club, told me that even before the mass volunteers of the coordinated Brisbane City Council clean-up arrived, over 400 volunteers from the local area had already been involved in flood assistance. Beginning on the Tuesday, children's pastor Catherine Solomon and her husband Andrew, along with the minister of Moggill Uniting Church, Costa Stathakis, set up an emergency evacuation centre through which 350 directly affected residents would pass by the time the waters receded. In fact church groups around my entire electorate have gone above and beyond the call of duty throughout these harrowing events. I commend the member for Blair for including them in this motion.

In addition to the evacuation centre, the church groups of the western suburbs of Brisbane have coordinated recovery efforts for these and other communities further abroad. Moggill, St Michael's and All Angels Anglican Church organised toy and clothing donations; St Catherine's Catholic Church of Moggill collected furniture and household items; and the Bellbowrie Community Church provided information on local rebuilding connections. At Indooroopilly, the Holy Family Church was set up as a community recovery centre and saw thousands of flood affected residents pass through their doors. The Chinese Christian Church of St Lucia also did all that they could. They kept power while so much of the suburb was cut off for days, providing residents with the simple convenience of being able to charge mobile phones and laptop computers. It is the little things as much as the big that help communities through these heartbreaking times.

Above all, I want to thank the people of Ryan, who never hesitated to help, even when they themselves had lost so much. Time after time, I spoke to local residents who were inundated and yet their concern was for others. They confronted devastation with a strength that was truly remarkable. I must once again speak today of the outstanding work of the Red Cross. While so many community groups banded together to assist their local areas, the Red Cross coordinated relief efforts across the whole of Queensland and Victoria and, more recently, in New Zealand in the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquake.

The Red Cross was one of the first to respond as flooding swept across Central Queensland. It is hard to fathom just how much of Queensland was under water this summer. In December, before flooding hit the south-east corner, a landmass the size of Germany and France combined was already flooded. As part of my involvement as a Red Cross volunteer I was activated to Emerald. I know firsthand how efficient and effective the Red Cross is and how well we worked with other support agencies including the Salvation Army, Anglicare and Lifeline.

Over the course of the Queensland floods, the Red Cross deployed more than 1,200 personnel from all over Australia. These people were activated into 26 towns and multiple locations. Like the rescue and emergency services, the Red Cross just kept going where they were needed, contacting, coordinating volunteers in each location as town after town succumbed to floodwaters.

The Red Cross has been vital throughout each stage of these natural disasters. Firstly, they quickly deployed people into affected towns to set up and run evacuation centres. After the immediate danger passed and people could return to their homes, the Red Cross assisted with recovery centres around the state, helping people to get back on their feet and providing the comfort of a friendly face and listening ear for so many who were overcome by the enormity of what had happened to them.

Vitally, the Red Cross also provides an outreach program. Understanding that not all families are able to get to central services, the Red Cross brings it to them. There are thousands of Red Cross personnel who all deserve individual thanks; however, without executive director Greg Goebel, president Alan Clayton and their dedicated team, none of this excellent work would be achieved.

The waters may have receded, the streets may be clean and much of the visible evidence of the flood may be gone, but people's lives have changed forever. The very real loss that so many have suffered does not go away as the water goes down. The frustration of trying to

rebuild when insurance companies, banks and even the government seem to be conspiring against you must break the hearts of so many good Australians. There is still so much to be done.

There has not been a season like this one just past in living memory. It is not only the historic level of devastation caused but also the fact that it has come almost continually—one after the other—all summer that shows the absolute commitment and dedication of our emergency and rescue service personnel, the Defence Force, community groups, not-for-profit organisations, churches, schools and individuals to helping out our mates, known or unknown to us personally when they are most in need. I cannot praise and thank the efforts and courage of all involved in this tragic summer of disasters enough, and I wholeheartedly support this motion. (*Time expired*)

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (8.40 pm)—I thank the member for Blair for putting this motion on the *Notice Paper* to give those of us whose communities have been affected by floods and other disasters this summer an opportunity to say thank you to the people in our electorates and to those who came in from outside to help us through this time.

Our story in Rockhampton was different to some of the more extreme flooding disasters that we saw in southern parts of Queensland but, nonetheless, hundreds of people had their homes affected. It was really a test for the whole community of Rockhampton and the surrounding communities. It is a test that I believe we rose to, and it has made our community stronger as a result of the coming together in the way we were forced to over this summer.

I have a very long list—as I am sure all members have—of groups and individuals to recognise. I want to start by recognising a group that perhaps was a bit under the radar during the Rockhampton situation. People might remember that the Rockhampton flood actually unfolded quite slowly. We sitting there at the end of the Fitzroy waiting for all that water to come through from places like Theodore and Emerald. So there was quite a long time to prepare. A great deal was asked of family and friends of those people who knew that they were expecting flooding and were going to have to be out of their houses for quite some time. A lot of people around Rockhampton took friends and family into their homes. It stretched out for three weeks or more in some cases, where they were providing that hospitality, comfort and assistance. I really want to acknowledge that helping hand that people put out to those people in our community who were greatly in need.

Very much the face of the flooding emergency in Rockhampton was the evacuation centre at Central Queensland University. Thank you to CQU for making that available. It was a terrific facility. Again, there are little things that you do not actually recognise—things that are not up in lights. One of the great things about the centre in that hot, humid time over January was that it was air conditioned day and night. That was something that the university just took on itself to provide in that great facility. The Red Cross were running the centre and they did a wonderful job of making people feel at home, relaxing people and organising activities for them to pass the days.

There were terrific examples of people from the community going in and making life that bit more pleasant and fun for people at the recovery centre at that very difficult time. For example, a group came in and put on movies for people. One day that I was visiting the centre there was a country and western band set up and playing to entertain the families and people who were in the centre. The Salvation Army did the catering, St Johns Ambulance were there

to provide first aid, Save the Children were providing activities for children and Lifeline were there to offer counselling and basic support. The RSPCA, very importantly, set up their own animal shelter at the back of the recovery centre so that animals that had to be evacuated from homes in Rockhampton had a home during that time.

Once we moved into the recovery phase, a very important job was done by Centrelink. I really cannot praise enough the efforts of the local Centrelink manager and her whole team, who were so good at providing support and assistance to people locally. The Queensland Department of Communities were there as well.

One of the important tasks in Rockhampton was preparing for the flood. The council, the SES and the police went door to door letting people know what was happening and what to expect. They told them their options for finding a safe place to go ahead of the flooding. The local media were also terrific in doing that job, the radio stations particularly because they were on the air 24 hours a day and also the local paper and the television crews. They told the local stories and also provided essential information to people to make sure that they were prepared and keeping safe.

There were so many examples of local people donating toys, their time and money. I want to say thank you on behalf of the whole community and I am very proud to be the member for such a place. (*Time expired*)

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (8.46 pm)—I rise to support the member for Blair on this excellent motion. I am pleased to tell the House of the remarkable efforts of the people of Bundaberg in overcoming the recent floods. The Bundaberg floods have proven that, as a community, Bundaberg's finest hours followed its darkest days. It took only a matter of days for the floodwaters to inundate 200 homes and 120 businesses in the Bundaberg region over the Christmas-New Year period.

The floodwaters first hit the region—I might add the first of the provincial city regions—just after Christmas with the Burnett River reaching a peak of 7.95 metres. This resulted in about 400 people being forced from their homes while a second moderate flood saw some of those homes and businesses inundated again on 13 January with a 5.75 metre rise in the river, and again with much pain and suffering. Of course, the immediate task during the floods was to evacuate people and try to protect property. I must say the Bundaberg Regional Council—initially under Councillor Dave Batt and the Acting Mayor, Tony Ricciardi, and later, on her return from the UK where she was on holidays, Mayor Lorraine Pyefinch—were well organised.

I cannot speak highly enough of the remarkable efforts of hundreds of SES volunteers, emergency service workers, council employees, charity organisations, community groups and average everyday residents who worked tirelessly to beat the floods. It is the old story of when the going gets tough, the tough get going. This was quite evident in Bundaberg over recent months.

One of the most heartening outcomes of the floods was the establishment of the donations centre set up in the Northside Industrial Estate. Local and Sunshine Coast businessman Tony Nioa donated the use of one of his largest industrial sheds as the collection point while members of the Rotary Club of Bundaberg Sunrise swung into action calling for donations and

taking delivery of household goods, furniture and clothing, and helping the Salvation Army to organise and distribute these items to those most in need.

Hundreds of vehicles, including fully loaded trucks from Gympie and Brisbane—I might add this was before the Brisbane flood—descended on the site. Within a day of opening, volunteers of all ages were stunned at the generosity of the local and district communities. Within a matter of days the shed was filled to capacity and goods had to be distributed straightaway to make room for further donations. It was generosity at its best.

I commend everyone involved with the donations centre, especially the Salvation Army under Captain Phil Sharp. The Red Cross also provided outstanding support. They detailed all the facts and figures about people who had come to the evacuation centre in the Bundaberg Civic Centre, while the Salvation Army under Peter and Kathleen Evans ran a catering facility that served, would you believe, 4,971 meals and 17,000 snacks during the crisis period. Dozens of people sought shelter in the centre after their homes were flooded and SES workers and other volunteers were well fed and watered as the centre worked its way through the emergency.

But it was hard slog, and when the water receded there was still a lot of work to be done. The clean-up and recovery work will take months, especially for the sporting fields, parks, roads and other areas damaged by the floodwaters. The Bundaberg Regional Council workforce put in 5,000 hours of work during the crisis, and I must also commend the Green Army members who took on some of the most challenging clean-up work along river banks and removing debris. That was a very difficult job to do.

I single out the story of Steve Cooper and his Home Hardware store, where 75 people—some of them his friends, some of them just walking down the street, others who just came in—came in and helped him when his store was inundated by two or three metres of water. It reopened last week. It is marvellous to see the resilience of people and the generosity of others. I commend Steve and all his friends. I said, ‘How did you know there were 75?’ (*Time expired*)

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (8.51 pm)—I too want to thank the member for Blair for putting this motion on the table and giving us an opportunity to say a few more words about the recent Queensland floods. This summer has seen Australia most severely affected by natural disasters right across the country, from Western Australia to the north of Australia to parts of Tasmania, right through to my own state of Queensland, where we were severely affected. In my home state, it is estimated that some 500,000 square kilometres were affected by flooding. At one stage, 75 per cent of the state was declared a natural disaster zone. If you took in the tropical cyclones as well, it was almost the whole state. After the flooding, Cyclone Yasi wreaked devastation on the north as well.

In my electorate, some 17 suburbs were affected by what I would call extreme flooding—some fairly extreme circumstances. There was severe devastation, particularly in the area of Goodna and the Redbank area, as well as other groups of suburbs, the Centenary suburbs in particular—places such as Jindalee, Riverhills, Westlake, Sumner, the Sumner Park industrial area, Middle Park, Jamboree Heights and Mount Ommaney. I want to make particular mention of those western suburb areas and the people who live there for their generous spirit. I know that some of them who received assistance money admitted that they did not need it and gave it to others who were more needy than themselves. There was a generosity of spirit

which I found amazing, with people who, after the effort of cleaning their own homes, went and helped others as well, not just their neighbours but people in neighbouring suburbs. That is something they ought to be commended for.

There were literally thousands of homes and businesses completely inundated with water, something not seen for a very long time. In fact, if you compare it to 1974, it was much, much worse, even though the height of the water was a metre less, because of the extra number of people, businesses and residents in the area. The clean-up is now almost complete and we are in the recovery and building stage, which is a difficult time. During the floods and cyclones, many, many individuals made outstanding and inspiring contributions to help their fellow Queenslanders, but it is a complex situation now. The story of these natural disasters really is a human story about human courage, about the human spirit, and until we get sick of saying it I can say it is a true typification of the Australian character.

I have thanked many people before. We have seen lots of devastation and loss, bravery and selfless acts, and I do not think we can ever thank people enough. I would like to pay special tribute today to the men and women of the various emergency services who did their duty well beyond the call, to the State Emergency Service, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, the rural fire brigades, the Queensland Ambulance Service, the St John Ambulance, the Queensland Police Service and finally the personnel of the ADF, who did such a fabulous job—and one or two other individuals who came out from unusual quarters to help, wearing different types of uniforms. One that comes to mind is the Commemorative Air Force—some really great people came out. These men and women did an absolutely outstanding job in helping people in our region. On many occasions, they risked their own lives to save others, wading across water, taking a risk. We saw amazing footage of helicopter rescues in the Toowoomba flash floods and other areas.

We are indeed lucky to have so many people of goodwill. If there is anything that characterises us, that shows how we are different from the rest of the world, it is how everyone in Australia—be they, as in my area, of Pacific Islander background, of Vietnamese background or of Chinese, Greek or Italian background—rallies together as Australians. Those people from other backgrounds tell me that would not have happened in their own countries. That really touched me in a special way—somebody from another country telling me that, if they had been at home, most people would have sat and watched the others and not really known what to do but that here they instinctively understood the Australian spirit.

I also place on the record my appreciation for the work done by so many community organisations, charities and churches. These people did an absolutely amazing job. They were not asked; they just came out and did it. That was truly inspiring to all of us. This amazing work was done by people from groups such as the Shiloh Church, Westlife, Westside Community Care, St Catherine's Middle Park, the Salvation Army in Middle Park, Good News Lutheran in Jamboree Heights, Goodna Rotary, the Redbank Plains Rotary, the Centenary Rotary Club, the Jindalee Rotary Club, the Lions clubs, the Goodna RSL and the Chaplaincy Service. There were so many groups that came out. It was almost an endless list of goodwill—fabulous people all of them. I want to make special mention of Deb O'Neil, the member for Robertson, and her Central Coast NSW Caravan of Angels. They came up and did this wonderful job—truly inspirational people. I know that by naming only a few, I risk the likelihood of some being missed, but I thank them all for their great contribution. (*Time expired*)

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (8.56 pm)—I rise to support this private member's motion and to offer my gratitude to those who have made an outstanding contribution during this summer of disasters in Queensland. Over the summer, we witnessed people across Queensland pulling together during the floods. I was fortunate enough to be able to witness the efforts of volunteers in both Brisbane, during the floods, and in my own electorate of Dawson, during Cyclone Anthony and Cyclone Yasi. What I witnessed was communities, whether metropolitan centres or small regional towns, pulling together to get the job done. Others who were not directly impacted by the floods and cyclones donated their time, money and materials to help out those impacted by these extreme weather events.

It is appropriate that this parliament, by passing this private member's motion, put on record our gratitude to the emergency service workers, local councils and volunteers for their efforts during the summer. I would also like to record the efforts of so many people in the electorate of Dawson that have made an outstanding contribution during this summer of destructive floods and cyclones. The town of Giru in my electorate was hit with both a cyclone and then a flood from the torrential downpour after the cyclone. The residents of Giru were left with no power and no water, but they braved it as only the residents of Giru could. I want to pay tribute to the Giru SES volunteers and their leader, Bryan Parison, and the work that they did during the cyclone and the flood. The work of the SES volunteers is always appreciated in times of natural disaster.

Throughout the Burdekin area, residents were reliably kept up to date on the latest movements of Cyclone Yasi by the local community radio station SweetFM. It is so valuable to the Burdekin community to have locals reporting on local issues and giving relevant reports during a time of crisis such as this. The team who manned the station at SweetFM during the cyclone are to be commended and I want to make special mention of Merle Scott, Dave Giffard and Fiona Northwood, who braved it out in that building on the night of the cyclone. This is an example of why local community radio stations should be supported by government. They can provide a valuable service at that local level during these times of crisis that sometimes the ABC or commercial stations cannot.

I want to share a story of great community spirit from the cyclone in the Burdekin. As Cyclone Yasi was bearing down on the coast, with the threat of power being lost and food spoiling, staff and volunteers of the Lower Burdekin Meals on Wheels banded together to cook 600 meals for the 85 Burdekin community members who rely on that service. The staff and volunteers worked for 5 hours to ensure the food did not spoil due to the loss of power after the cyclone. That was a big effort for that group, because on an average day the service delivers 255 meals to community members. Although the service lost power due to the cyclone, food spoilage was minimal because of the efforts of volunteers. I make particular mention of Lower Burdekin Meals on Wheels manager, Gail Minehan; the cook, Jenny Barnett; the supervisor, Sherry Minehan; and volunteers Yvonne Roberts, Les Minehan, John Manassero, Silvia Carmen and Robyn Fletcher for their dedication to the community even with the threat of a cyclone bearing down on the coast. This story of a community banding together is testament to the good work that Meals on Wheels does throughout my electorate of Dawson, whether it be in Townsville, the Burdekin, Bowen, Proserpine, the Whitsundays or Mackay.

The team from Ergon Energy in the Burdekin, especially Local Operations Manager, Mark Biffanti, and Darren Fabro and his team, went to Tully from the Burdekin to restore power.

The emergency services throughout the electorate of Dawson, as with the rest of Queensland, have been stretched during this summer of challenging weather. I want to acknowledge the efforts of Senior Sergeant Steve Barton and his officers at Ayr Police Station as well as Sergeant Leon Mackenzie and his team at Home Hill. Their efforts during the cyclone were very much appreciated by the community.

As is the case with the other local government authorities throughout my electorate, the Burdekin Shire Council's local disaster management group met to coordinate the response to the cyclones. Many of the people who sit on these groups have other jobs and have to leave family at home to prepare for these threats. Mr Trevor Williams, the manager of engineering at Burdekin Shire Council and his team at the local disaster management group did an outstanding job in responding to the threat of the two cyclones. I want to place on record my thanks to those volunteers who took the time to do the coordination at a local level.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs D'Ath)—Order! It being 9 pm, the member is interrupted in accordance with standing order 41. The member will have leave to continue speaking when private members' business is resumed.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Debate resumed from 21 February.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs D'Ath)—The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Queensland Floods

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (9.01 pm)—Much has been said about the Queensland floods, but I have not had a chance to get on the speaking list, so I would like to make use of the grievance debate tonight. It has been incredibly heart-warming to witness the outpouring of support that has been coming in through my office for the victims of the Queensland floods. In Gilmore, we put out a call for anyone willing to offer their support to assist in the clean-up process. The response to this call has been simply overwhelming and it is still continuing today. Every day, tradesmen, professionals, lawyers, labourers and housewives are coming into my office ready to take their shovel and broom to Queensland and help out during their holidays. Since speaking on this, many people have gone to the flood areas and are doing just that.

I spoke to Pastor Peter Pilt of the Nowra City Church. He and a number of his congregation made the trip to Brisbane and the flood region earlier to add to the army of volunteers from across Australia lending their helping hands. His church forms part of Global Care, a Christian missions aid and development organisation that is committed to providing emotional, spiritual and physical support, along with effective aid relief, in areas of need. Even after having seen the devastation on TV, I found what Pastor Pilt was describing on the phone almost impossible to comprehend. He asked if I would like to go with him to lend moral support to the locals who had been on the front line for some time. On the Monday of the week before parliament resumed, I flew to Brisbane. From Brisbane I travelled on to Grantham, Goodna and Ipswich on the Global Care coach. What I saw shocked me to the core. The television footage we have been seeing does not even begin to scratch the surface in appreciating the utter devastation which confronts those living in the flood affected areas. The impact can perhaps be best personified in the vacant stare of the inhabitants who have literally lost everything.

A road block greeted my arrival at Grantham with only dedicated workers being allowed through as they were still searching for many of the missing. Many homes were uninhabitable and, quite frankly, the locals literally had nothing to come back to, even if they were allowed. There were over 100 defence personnel working there, along with SES volunteers, federal police, truckies and, of course, the team from Global Care. Amid all this confusion and devastation, the local council still found time to send two inspectors to make sure the barbeques and water coolers that the volunteers were using complied with council rules. It beggars belief that such a mindset can occur at such a time of grief.

When the flood torrent hit Grantham, it was like a wave that washed away everything before it. Houses were swept off their supports, so strong was the surge. It came in so fast that residents only had a 10-minute warning. The river bed now looks like a volcanic crater and the town has been effectively razed. Trucks were taking away tonne after tonne of asbestos tainted silt. Any surviving houses have to be stripped of their plaster walls because mould will grow in the pores, creating a significant health hazard whilst it remains. Arguably, it may well be cheaper to bulldoze any house left standing and start from scratch.

The federal police told us they were desperately short of new underwear and pillows. Nowra City Church and other affiliates of Global Care are accepting donations of these and other goods, as well as cash. Many people are still staying at caravan parks or with friends. The feedback from my colleague the member for Wright certainly illustrated the agony of the devastation. I congratulate him on his leadership.

In Goodna a 100-site caravan park was totally washed away. I saw the site, and any remaining caravans were piled on top of each other by the surge of water. Relief funding is slow to arrive but it is too far removed for serious contemplation. Each and every resident just wants to go home, but for some there is no home.

In Ipswich and Goodna, the situation was slightly different. There they were spared the flood wave. Instead the towns were totally inundated by rising water. When the water receded, it was clear that nothing was spared. Bridges, roadways, building structures—a myriad of community facilities will all have to be replaced. In Goodna I came across the owner of a local service station sitting amongst the wreckage of what was once a lucrative business. No more. He also had lost three houses and had nothing but the clothes on his back. I stopped to talk to him. He asked me why would the Taxation Office call him and other businesses that had lost their businesses asking for paperwork for the past few years. He told the tax officers, ‘I have nothing.’ He just sat there and stared at nothing in particular. I asked about power and I was told there wasn’t any because the power company was asking that details be sent by email or fax. How? I just could not believe the stupidity of some of these agencies.

I came away with the impression of how little the rest of us know about the true impact of this disaster. Until I actually stood there and saw with my own eyes, smelt the smells, felt the heat, I really had no idea of the reality. Many inhabitants are clearly still in shock. They have no money with which to buy food, and anyway food was very scarce. One couple I came across were shuffling in the mud with a probe in what appeared to be some sort of aimless ritual. They were actually looking for photographs. Having lost every material possession, memories are all that they have to cling to. It is very sad.

Television insulated me from the absolute emotional impact of what many Queenslanders have suffered and are suffering. But what amazed me is the utter generosity and solidarity as

characterised by this army of volunteers. For me, it was a day of contrasts but I am glad I went. The sheer hopelessness of the sight that greeted me was balanced by the energy and spirit of a community working together in the recovery process. I think what will be needed for quite some time to come is emotional support. The victims are in a varying degree of shock, some mild, some extreme, but they all will need moral support from the rest of us. Rebuilding will be a gigantic task but it will be done. I have the utmost faith in our people and our nation.

To those volunteers from Gilmore, and especially those from the Nowra City Church, I thank you. Already donations of underwear and pillows are being delivered to our office. To Bec Davies, who in real life runs the family business of HisWay Earthmoving in Nowra, you are simply the best. There is the task of arranging teams of volunteers for food distribution, cleaning of houses, removal of rubbish and a myriad of other necessary jobs, and you are just the right person to do it. To Nowra City Church, how proud I am of you for giving without fanfare or any expectation other than Christian charity. I know there are many, many Australians who are doing what they can. It is especially at times like this that I can say to the Australian people how proud and honoured I am to represent you.

Just recently in the paper the pastor of Nowra City Church, Peter Pilt, has hit out at the Queensland government handling of the flood recovery effort, claiming that none of the \$120 million donated to the Premier's relief fund has reached the people on the ground. Mr Pilt has spent much of the past month in most of the worst hit areas of Grantham and in his role as national director of global care coordinating volunteers and feeding emergency service personnel assisting in the clean-up. He said that, firstly, it is shameful that residents who have lost absolutely everything had received an insulting amount of \$1,000 from Centrelink to start rebuilding their lives when \$120 million donated by hardworking Australians and businesses sits in the Premier's relief fund. Our politicians are talking endlessly about how much money we raised but it is all froth and bubble because none of it is getting to where it is needed, he said. While many Grantham residents were still not allowed to return home as the region continued to be processed by crime scene detectives, Mr Pilt said that the \$1,000 distributed to homeless residents via Centrelink was pitiful.

Sustainable Population Strategy

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (9.09 pm)—The release of the *Sustainable Population Strategy Issues Paper* was a welcome step forward in the national debate we need to have about Australia's growing population. The Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Tony Burke, was right to say we should not have an arbitrary target. But that does not mean we should not have a considered target. Unfortunately the paper by one of the panels, the Productivity and Prosperity Panel, shows no understanding of the downside of the projected big Australia and trots out all the discredited old myths about the alleged advantages of population growth.

The first myth is: if it is balanced and managed well, living standards will rise with population growth, not fall. The fact is that a recent examination of the 100 largest US metropolitan areas from 2000 to 2009 found that faster population growth rates are associated with lower incomes, income declines and higher poverty rates. Unemployment rates tend to be higher in faster growing areas. The 25 slowest growing metro areas outperformed the 25 fastest growing in every category and averaged over \$8,000 more in per capita personal income in 2009.

The second myth is: population growth will help lift living standards, not make them fall. The fact is that if this were true the wealthiest countries would be the most populous countries of Asia and Africa. In fact they are the world's poorest. The nations in the world with the highest living standards have small populations. Eight of the top 10 nations in the world in terms of per person GDP have populations of 10 million or less.

The third myth is: a bigger workforce as a proportion of a larger population will mean more people paying taxes which will allow government to pay for essential services. The first fact is that one of the reasons the smaller nations are wealthier is they have a higher labour force participation rate. Because they are not running big skilled migration programs, job vacancies are filled by their unemployed. The second fact is that the bigger the population the more essential services and taxes you need. Bringing in more people does not make the task of providing essential services easier; it makes it harder.

The fourth myth is: the ageing of the population if ignored could produce labour market bottlenecks because there would not be enough skilled workers to go around. The fact is that Australia does not have a shortage of workers. Just to the north of my electorate, Broadmeadows has an unemployment rate of over 15 per cent. An ageing workforce helps reduce unemployment and provides opportunities for people with disabilities and Indigenous Australians to enter the workforce.

The fifth myth is: slowing population growth would not make the infrastructure problems go away. The fact is that it would certainly help. The reason Zurich has a much better public transport system than that of any Australian city, even though it is just as spread out, is Zurich's and Switzerland's stable population gives its policy makers time to address the needs. In rapidly growing cities infrastructure provision is like a dog chasing its tail—we never catch up. Jane O'Sullivan from the University of Queensland has calculated that population growth of two per cent per annum doubles the amount of money required to maintain adequate infrastructure.

The sixth myth is: slowing the rate of population growth will not make housing more affordable. The fact is that, yes, it will. During 2009 housing affordability around Australia declined by over 22 per cent due to a massive gap between the number of dwellings being built and the number of new people wanting housing. The Housing Industry Association said Australia's fast growing population was pushing new dwelling requirements to record high levels. The inevitable consequence of this is rising house prices, rising interest rates and declining housing affordability.

The seventh myth is: the environment need not suffer from population growth. The fact is it has. In 2002 the Convention on Biological Diversity pledged countries right around the world to stop the rate of biodiversity loss. Last year, the International Year of Biodiversity, saw countries right around the world confess they had failed to stop the rot. Australia is no exception. We have hundreds of species of endangered birds, plants and animals and every year their numbers deteriorate.

Let me return to the claim that we have a shortage of skilled workers. It is quite remarkable that on the one hand we are told there is a shortage of workers and high migration is needed to fill the gap while on the other hand we have over 792,000 people receiving Disability Support Pensions, more than the number receiving unemployment benefits. Disability Support Pension numbers have grown over 30 per cent over the past decade, now cover five per cent of all

Australians, will cost \$13 billion this financial year and continue to rise despite government attempts to reduce them. We should be engaging people with disabilities in employment assistance and rehabilitation where appropriate.

The outgoing head of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Dr Jeff Harmer, is quite right to say the government needs to 'explore policies to encourage disabled people and older Australians into work, to lift participation and productivity'. I think that economists who mistake five per cent unemployment for full employment do the community and the nation a disservice. And I cannot understand why there is agitation about rising incomes as a consequence of population ageing when there is no agitation about rising food prices, water bills, land prices, petrol, electricity and just about everything else you can think of as a consequence of population growth.

Then there is the question of carbon emissions. Australia is one of the highest per capita emitters of greenhouse gases in the world. There is no reasonable prospect that Australia will reduce its total level of greenhouse emissions in the way that we aspire to while our population grows by one million every three years, as is presently the case. To do so would require massive, implausible reductions in per capita greenhouse emission levels. Population policy must be part of the plan to contain greenhouse emissions, not merely for Australia but for the rest of the world as well.

The relentless lobbying by employer groups for skilled migration is a smokescreen for their real desire to keep downward pressure on wages. It showed up again in the aftermath of the January floods. The claim that we will need more skilled migrants in order to cope with the flood damage is insulting and ridiculous. We were able to build the roads, bridges, schools et cetera that have been damaged by the floods. The suggestion that we have lost the skills needed to rebuild this infrastructure, if it has any substance, also suggests that relying on skilled migration is dumbing Australia down.

Furthermore, numerous studies show that new arrivals come with a big infrastructure requirement. They bring their families with them. All require houses, roads, schools, hospitals et cetera and many require English language and other forms of assistance. One academic has found that population growth of two per cent in a community doubles the infrastructure task of that community. In the years ahead the building industry will have its work cut out for it in rebuilding flood-hit towns and communities. As a nation, we have just had a flood come through the house. This is a time for replacing the carpets and furniture and getting the power back on, not the time to be putting on an extension.

The argument that the recovery effort will drive demand for jobs, leading to price rises and then to higher interest rates, ignores the impact of higher population growth on prices and interest rates. Population growth is driving electricity price rises, gas price rises, water price rises, housing price rises, food price rises and higher grocery bills. These price rises put upward pressure on interest rates. Why is there concern about inflation caused by workers getting higher wages but no concern about inflation caused by population growth?

Finally, the Productivity and Prosperity Panel claim that my plan to reduce net overseas migration to 70,000 per annum would still see our population grow to around 30 million by 2050. They say it is a myth that Australia can avoid a bigger population. It is nonsense to imply that we can never stabilise our population. Australia's population increase is being driven

by net overseas migration, and that is entirely a matter of government policy. Population growth is not inevitable.

The report by the National Institute of Labour Studies at Flinders University, titled *Research into the long-term physical implications of net overseas migration: Australia in 2050*, posted on the Department of Immigration and Citizenship website before Christmas, has a series of population projections into the future. It suggests that net overseas migration of 70,000 would give us 26 million people, rather than 30 million, by 2050.

The debate about population is an important national debate. I welcome the fact that the government has undertaken, through these panels, a study of population. It is giving Australians the opportunity to be involved in this and to express their views. I hope that Australians take up this opportunity and that we put ourselves on a more sustainable road than the road we are presently on.

Carbon Pricing

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (9.19 pm)—The Prime Minister has practised a great deception on the Australian people. Far from being the economic conservative she promised, she has proved, yet again, that at her core she is an economic vandal. Last week, the Prime Minister declared that she would bring in a carbon tax, without a mandate, without an election, without taking it to the people—without any analysis on the impact on the Australian economy, on Australian jobs and on Australian families. It is difficult to think of any other policy with such wide-ranging effects for the Australian economy and for the average Australian that has been implemented without giving the people the chance to cast their vote on it.

This is an arrogant government, a government that would seek to impose a new tax with such significant implications for the cost of basic goods and services without allowing the people of Australia to have a say. But not only will this government deny the Australian people a say; it has lied to them. On 16 August, before the federal election, the Prime Minister stated categorically, 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.' On 20 August she made the same pledge, saying, 'I rule out a carbon tax.' The Treasurer, Wayne Swan, was equally explicit, saying, 'We have made our position very clear. We have ruled it out.' He went on to say, on 15 August, in response to a question regarding a price on carbon, 'Well, certainly what we rejected is this hysterical allegation somehow that we are moving towards a carbon tax ... we certainly reject that.'

Yet now the Prime Minister refers to her previous statements and that of her Treasurer as 'semantics'. But this fiction of semantics is even too much for Graham Richardson, former senator and Labor fixer, to bear. You will recall that Graham Richardson is the author of *Whatever it Takes* and a keen advocate for that philosophy in politics. In today's *Australian* newspaper he states:

No weasel words, no amount of spin can alter the record; she promised solemnly there would be no carbon tax from a government she led. The words were strong. There was no wriggle room, no back door.

Having gone to such lengths to assure the Australian people that there would be no carbon tax, it is inconceivable that the government would now seek to impose one. The opposition was labelled 'hysterical' for suggesting that the government was contemplating a carbon tax. This was the extent to which the government was prepared to go to assure voters that there

would be no carbon tax if they voted for it. And yet, just 26 days after the federal election, the Prime Minister was asked if she still ruled out a carbon tax, to which she replied, 'I just think the rule-in, rule-out games are a little bit silly.'

Well, our record is very different. When the Howard government developed its proposal for tax reform, we took it to the 1998 election. The GST, which involved significant changes to Australia's taxation system, was put to the Australian people, who were given an opportunity to vote for or against the coalition on the strength of our policies. The GST, which was introduced in 2000, was not universally popular. It did not have the instant support of all Australians. It required the government to make its case and to convince Australians that a new tax system was necessary to secure Australia's future prosperity. It must be said that we got rid of a number of taxes in order to implement it and to secure funding for state governments.

The Labor-Greens government under Prime Minister Gillard has shown how weak it truly is by subverting this important democratic process. It is an indication that the government has no faith in its own policy, because it is not prepared to make a case for it. Instead, it has made an explicit commitment not to introduce it and then, after the election, has breached faith with the Australian people. It is clear that the government is not in control of its own policy process. This is the result of a government that relies on the Greens to maintain its power in the parliament.

Australians see Labor's broken promise as a breach of trust with the electorate and a deliberate attempt to deceive them in order to win government. For Labor, it is merely the cost of doing business. This Labor government seems completely oblivious to the fact that it has made history with a broken promise of this size. And that is no mean feat when you consider Labor's recent track record on promises, from GP superclinics to hospital takeovers and to open and transparent government. They must be thanking their lucky stars that they broke their promise so early on GroceryWatch and Fuelwatch. The increased grocery and petrol prices as a result of a carbon tax would not have held up particularly well under their scheme. At \$26 a tonne it would add over \$300 to electricity bills and 6.5c a litre to petrol.

But this promise is not just another GroceryWatch, laptops in schools or any number of other broken promises that we have come to expect from Labor. This is the backflip to end all backflips, because it was done without any real conviction, it was done merely to sustain power, it was done against the will of the people and because the implications for the economy, jobs and cost of living are enormous. A respected economist, Henry Ergas, noted today in the *Australian*:

... in terms of Australia's national interest, it is difficult to think of a policy more harmful than such a unilateral tax.

Labor's carbon tax will be felt most clearly by households when they fill up at the petrol pump or when they receive their electricity bill. The Australian Industry Group has released a report into energy prices, based on data from the New South Wales Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal. The report states that the total annual electricity bill in 2012-13 will be \$300 higher under Labor's carbon tax. For the average four-person household it will be \$500 higher. Labor's very own climate change adviser, Professor Ross Garnaut, has said that a carbon tax will increase the cost of petrol by 2.5 cents per litre for every \$10 of tax. This means that Labor's carbon tax of \$26 per tonne will increase the price of petrol by over 6.5 cents per litre. These of course are not insignificant costs. For households that are already struggling,

this will severely affect their economic position. The Prime Minister does not understand that there are many Australians who will not be able to deal with the inevitable price increases without a reduction in their standard of living.

The carbon tax is another of Labor's reactionary policies that has not been thought through. When Prime Minister Gillard took over from the previous Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, she claimed to have resolved the mining tax impasse and had reached an agreement with the major mining companies. This agreement has now broken down due to the government's failure to uphold its end of the bargain. Prime Minister Gillard also said she had found a way to process asylum seekers in East Timor, yet this too has fallen through because she failed to consult with the East Timorese government. She said she had a brand-new plan for health reform, but it turns out it was simply the former Prime Minister's policy rebadged as her own—the same policy that failed to win support from state governments.

This carbon tax is another example of a policy that has not been thought through but is designed to cover for the government's lack of real policy ideas. Labor hopes that by putting forward a carbon tax it will be able to win support from the Greens in parliament, but the people of Australia have once again been lumped with a policy that has not been properly planned and will certainly not be effective. This policy is not about helping the environment and it is not about outcomes; it is a new tax and a political strategy to maintain power with the help of the Greens.

By contrast, the coalition do have a real policy to take effective action to invest in emissions reduction. Our policy involves \$10.5 billion of investment in direct abatement projects. We do not need to introduce yet another new tax that will eat away at household budgets. Labor's overriding political philosophy is to tax. When you realise that you cannot reach a budget surplus, introduce a mining tax. When you refuse to cut wasteful spending, introduce a flood tax. When you need the Greens to support you in the parliament, introduce a carbon tax. This \$16 billion tax, on top of the \$38.5 billion mining tax and the \$1.8 billion flood tax is just the beginning. These are just the starting figures. If we are serious about climate change then we should look to direct action. If we are serious about preserving and improving our natural environment we should maintain a strong economy.

Crohn's Disease

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (9.29 pm)—Tonight I want to raise the awareness of the parliament of a terrible disease that affects tens of thousands of Australians but receives almost no recognition in the community. It is massively debilitating, is vastly misunderstood and, unfortunately, receives no state or federal government funding for its only support group and virtually no research funding, even though in any year it is more prevalent than epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, eczema and schizophrenia. This disease is called Crohn's disease. Crohn's disease causes inflammation of the full thickness of the bowel wall and may involve any part of the digestive tract. Most frequently it affects the ileum—the lower part of the small bowel—the large bowel or both. Symptoms may include abdominal pain, diarrhoea, vomiting or weight loss. The disease may also cause symptoms outside the intestinal tract, such as skin rashes, inflammation of the eyes, tiredness, arthritis and an inability to concentrate.

Along with ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease is one of two diseases that fall under the term 'inflammatory bowel disease'—not to be confused with irritable bowel syndrome. Despite a

great deal of research, the cause of Crohn's disease is unknown. Some scientists believe it may be due to a defect in the body's immune system, while others believe that bacteria or even viruses may play some role, but it is unknown. There is no evidence that Crohn's disease is contagious in any way, and so no fear as there seems to be no evidence at all of that for any number of people. In fact, relatives of people with IBD have only a slightly greater risk of developing either disease, the reasons for which are also unknown but perhaps due to some family traits. Stress or diet is not thought to cause IBD. Both diseases are more common in the Western world than in other parts of the world. Again, it remains a mystery, and little is known about the cause of this particularly bad disease.

More than 61,000 people in Australia have IBD. Of those, 28,000 suffer specifically from Crohn's disease. Around 776 new cases of Crohn's disease are diagnosed each year. Crohn's disease is more prevalent among females, and ulcerative colitis is more prevalent among men. The peak age at onset is between 15 and 40 years, although diagnosis can occur at any age. These are very young people. They are at the prime of their lives. They are debilitated by a terrible disease that impacts not only their lives but also the lives of their families. As I said earlier, in any one year inflammatory bowel disease is more prevalent than epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, eczema and schizophrenia. While those terrible conditions and diseases receive some serious funding, attention and research—for good reason—it is unfortunate that those who suffer from IBD and from Crohn's disease specifically receive almost none of that.

The diagnosis of Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis is sometimes delayed as the same symptoms can occur with other diseases. It is usually necessary to exclude diseases such as bowel infections and irritable bowel syndrome in the first place. Blood tests are useful for looking for anaemia and measuring the severity of inflammation. They also can detect vitamin or mineral deficiencies. A faeces specimen may be required to exclude infection. Most people require an examination of part of the bowel, either by direct inspection through a colonoscopy or a sigmoidoscopy or through the mouth by gastroscopy, or by X-rays, including CT scans and barium small bowel series, whereby a dye is swallowed and X-rays are taken. I say that to put on the record the discomfort people who have to be even examined for these diseases go through. These are not just one-off tests. There is no one-off test that can reliably diagnose all the causes of IBD. Many people require ongoing and multiple tests throughout their whole life.

This all costs a great deal of money and a great deal of time. The pain and suffering these people go through is enormous, not only to themselves personally and to their families but also to the community. Treatment is simply not easy. Because IBD is a chronic condition, many people will need to take medications for long periods of time, either to bring the disease under control or to maintain remission once the symptoms have disappeared. Stopping the medication can result in a flare-up of symptoms or lead to other problems, such as relapse—sometimes even months later. At present the medications used to treat inflammation in IBD belong to five main categories: aminosaliclates, corticosteroids, immunomodulators, biological agents and antibiotics. All of these are expensive, all of these are difficult for the person who needs to take them and all of them involve a lot of medical care and attention.

So, what is the government doing? What are we doing about this? A little while ago there were a couple of drugs that could treat the conditions that were subsidised through the PBS.

The most recent was Adalimumab, announced in 2008 by Minister Roxon, a vital drug that is needed to at least relieve some of the symptoms and pain that people suffer. Advice is also being provided through Job Access, with business being eligible for the Employment Assistance Fund if modifications are required within the workplace to accommodate any employee with IBD. All this is of course welcome, and a step forward, but in the end in reality it does very little in terms of the real impact for those who suffer from these very debilitating diseases and all the difficulties that are associated with Crohn's and IBD. Sufferers are not alone, though—they have friends, family and people around them.

The main representative body for this disease is Crohn's and Colitis Australia, CCA. The Australian Crohn's and Colitis Association, the ACCA, was first established by Angela McAvoy in 1985, soon after she was diagnosed with Crohn's disease. Angela formed the ACCA, now known as CCA, after discovering there were no support services available in Australia. Angela led the organisation as a volunteer for 21 years before the first CEO was employed in 2006—so, quite recently. CCA have been making life more liveable for more than 61,000 Australians across the country. It is their mission to support Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, collectively termed IBD, with a focus on confidential support programs, education, advocacy, counselling, increasing awareness and raising funds for research and support. All the services they provide are free of charge. The reason they do fundraising is that they do not receive any funding, either from state governments or the federal government.

Last year the inaugural World IBD Day was held on 19 May. The date coincided with National Crohn's and Colitis Awareness Week, which was held 16 to 22 May. The purpose of the day was to bring to international attention the needs of people living with IBD, articulated with a unified, worldwide voice. I think it is important that somebody in this place raises these issues. I am sure there is equal concern across all parties in this place, and in the other chamber, that the people who suffer this most debilitating of diseases should receive more recognition and acknowledgement, not just in individual terms but as a collective, and should receive more financial support for research and for other lifesaving drugs.

There is not just a personal cost that these people face; there is also a cost to the community. In 2007 Access Economics released a report into IBD. It found that that economic cost of IBD in Australia is \$2.7 billion. This includes a total financial cost of \$500 million and a net cost of lost wellbeing of \$2.2 billion. Loss of productivity accounts for \$266 million, more than half the total financial cost. The health system costs are what I would say is a mere \$79 million, but it is still a huge cost. Carer costs are nearly \$24 million a year. The loss of revenue and government payments total \$91 million. The loss of productivity includes absenteeism, workplace separation, early retirement and premature death. All in all it paints a picture of people who suffer a chronic disease, a debilitating disease, who need support and have little recognition in the workplace, little understanding, little sympathy and little acknowledgement of what it is that they are actually suffering through.

I know two young people who suffer this disease—one quite young, one young. The cost to their personal lives is enormous. On a number of occasions they have had to spend long periods in hospital. The number of operations and amount of surgery they have had to endure is beyond what most people would expect to have to endure in a lifetime, let alone in a short few years.

The greatest challenge faced by many sufferers in the community is awareness. People just do not understand what they are going through. Many people associate Crohn's disease with irritable bowel syndrome, which it is not. There is often a stigma associated with this as well. My challenge, and my challenge for the parliament, is to increase the recognition and understanding of this very chronic and serious disease. I ask colleagues to work with me to help to form a parliamentary friendship group around this disease and to seek more funding to try and help people who are long-sufferers. (*Time expired*)

Climate Change

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (9.39 pm)—I rise to grieve about coastal erosion and how we can do more in public policy to mitigate what is happening right along the coast, particularly in 18 coastal hotspots around Australia. It is timely in that the issues of framing a carbon market and all the policy noise are in full flay, and I am pleased to see that both sides of this parliament recognise that when it comes to issues around climate science we are more than 90 per cent in agreement that there is an issue that does need to be dealt with.

Of a more serious nature in relation to the topic being raised this evening is that science in all the climate debate is suggesting 100 per cent proof that the sea level is rising and therefore coastal erosion is an issue Australia will have deal with. So, whilst we are 90 per cent of the way home in the broader climate science, we are 100 per cent there when it comes to sea level rise and the issues that we will have to deal with.

In light of that, I have been working with a community in my electorate at Old Bar, which is considered one of the 18 coastal hotspots with regard to coastal erosion. They have been experiencing an increasingly rapid loss of both public and private land, to the point where houses are now having to be vacated and a place like a 41-unit resort is now under direct threat in the next five to 10 years unless mitigation is put in place quickly.

That is why, in the agreement to form government, there was a request to get a full government response to the very good House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts report of the last parliament, entitled *Managing our coastal zone in a changing climate: the time to act is now*. The committee was chaired by Jennie George, with Mal Washer as the deputy chair. It was a bipartisan report that delivered, I think, some substantial and important findings for Australian public policy. We now have that full response and are moving to the stage of trying to get a government to implement these recommendations.

In light of all the events that occurred over the Christmas break, I reflect on two recommendations in particular which, if implemented would be very timely in their importance. The first is recommendation 14:

To further enhance Australia's disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery arrangements in the event of possible major coastal disasters, the Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a grants program, the Coastal Natural Disaster Mitigation Program, to fund natural disaster mitigation projects in the Australian coastal zone.

The Committee also recommends that the Australian Emergency Management Committee (AEMC) consider the following issues:

- improved data on coastal disaster risk assessment and vulnerable coastal sites
- improved access and evacuation routes for coastal communities

- improved coastal community awareness of and resilience to natural disasters
- improved coordination of coastal disaster mitigation arrangements with other initiatives currently underway, such as reviews of the Australian Building Code and land use planning policies to take into account climate change impacts
- improved early warning systems for coastal areas in the event of an extreme sea level event (storm surge, erosion, flooding)

That is a timely recommendation from last year that, on reflection, is one of great importance for us to implement.

As well, recommendation 19, on reflection, has a sense of urgency about it:

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government request the Productivity Commission to undertake an inquiry into the projected impacts of climate change and related insurance matters, with a particular focus on:

- insurance coverage of coastal properties, given the concentration of Australia's population and infrastructure along the coast
- estimates of the value of properties potentially exposed to this risk
- insurance affordability, availability and uptake
- existing and emerging gaps in insurance coverage, with a particular focus on coverage of coastal risks such as storm surge/inundation, landslip/erosion and sea level rise (including the combined effects of sea inundation and riverine flooding)
- the need for a clear definition of the circumstances under which an insurance claim is payable due to storm surge/inundation, landslip/erosion and sea level rise, as well as due to permanent submerision of some or all of the land
- the possibility of a government instrument that prohibits continued occupation of the land or future building development on the property due to sea hazard
- gaps in the information needed to properly assess insurance risk and availability of nationally consistent data on climate change risks
- examining the key actions for governments proposed by the Insurance Council of Australia and the Insurance Australia Group in their submissions to this inquiry
- possible responses to a withdrawal of insurance for certain risks or regions, noting the increased burden this could place on government and taxpayers.

We do not have to reinvent the wheel. Those recommendations are there. In the light of what happened throughout late December and early January, I urge the government to take up those very good bipartisan recommendations from the committee of the last parliament.

With regard to Old Bar, there are three other steps for which I will be seeking some support from government. Local councils are desperately in need of support from a body such as the Australian Law Reform Commission, because each council is trying to work out liability questions on its own. We need to get some consistency in the law on the liability questions faced by local planning authorities, so some support from government in charging the Australian Law Reform Commission to do that work is vitally important. The Greater Taree City Council has commissioned WorleyParsons to do a report on this particular hot spot, but it is working through the legal questions on its own and does not have the resources to come up with a long-term sustainable answer without the strong support of both the state and the federal governments. Intergovernmental work, alongside that legal support, is critically important right now.

Also, we will not be able to get away with this work cost free, and requests will come in not only from Old Bar but, I would imagine, from 17 other coastal hot spots for funding support for things such as dune stabilisation. Private landowners at Belongil Beach, Byron Bay, have put in sandbags. A current quote for that sort of work is about \$3,500 per metre. If we are talking about 100 to 200 metres, which is the case in most areas, this work will not be cheap. We will start to get up around the half a million dollars to \$1 million figure for work on dune stabilisation. This is something that local councils and local landowners cannot be left alone to do. In the Old Bar example, owners of vacant blocks are parties to a group development application for dune stabilisation work. My understanding is that they do not want to necessarily contribute at the same rate as a 41-bed resort. That is quite understandable. But what that does then is hold up a group DA being put in for this important dune stabilisation work. It is a problem that needs the intervention of higher levels of government with both financial and resource support.

Further, we are increasingly seeing the concept of offshore reefs being used to slowdown and stabilise sand movement. I understand the Gold Coast has quite successfully put in an offshore reef—the first example in Australia. Old Bar is starting to go through the process of doing a feasibility study on an offshore reef. Offshore reefs are used in other locations around the world, including some tourist resorts in India. We should not shy away from at least looking at these options. Again, I would hope that there is funding and resource support from government in chasing some of these options for the future. (*Time expired*)

Deakin Electorate: Ringwood Aquatic Centre

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (9.49 pm)—My grievance relates to the Ringwood Aquatic Centre and the current proposal by the Maroondah City Council to close this facility. This much loved and well used piece of community infrastructure was originally built in 1970 and it is the only covered 50-metre pool within the city of Maroondah. It was originally built as a 50-metre outdoor pool with a learners pool and a toddlers pool but has been substantially transformed since 1970. In 1986 the pool was covered with a roof and walls with moveable glass doors. Additionally, a diving pool, sauna, spa and new reception area were added. Later, in 1997 a health and activity pool with a moveable floor was built inside the facility.

In recent years, capital upgrades have been smaller in scale but have nevertheless provided improved infrastructure for the many users of the centre. This has included upgrades of the filtration system, upgrading the ozone treatment system, replacing the boilers used for heating and installing heat exchangers. In 2007 the spa and plunge pool were renovated and the chlorine generator was replaced in 2004. A reverse osmosis backwash water recycling system was installed in 2009 along with maintenance to the pool hall air-handling system. Also in 2009 the granulated rubber flooring to the pool concourse was replaced and the showers and flooring in the pool change rooms were upgraded. Additionally in 2009, retractable seats were installed in the pool hall and pool blankets were put in place for the indoor pools to save heating costs. There has also been an upgrade of the diving tower and in 2010 a federally funded co-generation plant was installed at the Ringwood centre.

Last year, Maroondah council put forward a plan to completely rebuild the aquatic centre from scratch on the same site in Ringwood. This facility was to be of a regional standard and would have substantially improved the experience of all users of the centre. But the price tag for the project was \$48 million and it depended on attracting substantial funding from both

the federal and state governments. This funding request was in the order of \$20 million in total and to date the council have not been successful in attracting a commitment from either level of government to contribute the cost of the project.

The Ringwood Aquatic Centre is aged and somewhat tired but it is not broken. In fact, it is far from it. In 2008-09, the last attendance figures that I have available, the total attendance for the year was 287,426 people. It is true to say that this figure has declined in recent years but I have noted that much of this drop has been caused by the drop in school swimming lessons, with students down from 164,648 in 2004-05 to only 35,134 in 2008-09. Interestingly, for reasons that I am not yet aware of, this figure of school lessons at the pool dropped from 164,648 in 2004-05 to only 46,718 in 2005-06 and has declined only slightly each year since. It is almost stable.

A survey conducted for the council in 2009 found that 46 per cent of people using the Ringwood Aquatic Centre used it two to three times per week, with another 11 per cent using it four to six times per week and 3 per cent using it every day. This same survey found that 92 per cent of current users rated the facilities at Ringwood as adequate or better, which is a huge percentage when you think about it. Not everyone rated it excellent, not everyone rated it good, but it was 92 per cent if you put adequate, good and excellent together.

I acknowledge the work that Maroondah City Council have done in seeking to upgrade the Ringwood Aquatic Centre. By aiming to upgrade it to regional status they are definitely looking at the future needs of the community and the surrounding areas. But the proposal to close the Ringwood Aquatic Centre on 31 May this year has drawn much opposition from the local community and user groups. For instance, Dr Glen Chandler and other concerned local citizens have established the Ringwood Pool Action Group, or RPAG, and they have a website at www.savingringwoodpool.com. This group held a public meeting at the Ringwood Swimming Club on 15 February this year, and over 120 people attended the meeting to hear about the future of the Ringwood Aquatic Centre. Members of the Ringwood Diving Club, the Ringwood Swimming Club, the Ringwood Water Polo Club, the Ringwood Triathlon Club and the Nunawading Synchronised Swimming Club were all in attendance. I commend the fact that the council CEO, councillors and the mayor turned up and were there to discuss this issue with their community. This action shows that they are listening, and I encourage residents of Maroondah and the members of client and user groups to let the council know of their views on this issue.

I have received many letters of petition on this issue. Although they are not in a form that can be tabled in this House, I can convey an idea of the numbers involved. These figures are over two weeks old now, and I am sure they have grown in the intervening period. I have received 1,274 signatures in a copy form of a document calling on the council to keep Ringwood pool open whilst the closure of the Ringwood Aquatic Centre is delayed until a clear redevelopment plan is in place and saying that any alternative redevelopment plans must match or extend the existing facilities, those being a five-metre diving platform, a 50-metre lane pool, a heated health and activity pool and disabled access.

The Ringwood Swimming Club uses the pool. It has a very long history of success and has a national training group with swimmers competing at the highest level. This is a group that has received local sporting champion grants as well. It is a very successful local sporting club.

I have received 18 signatures from the Ringwood Triathlon Club calling for a similar measure. Also, I have received 50 signatures from the Ringwood Diving Club, again calling for the discontinuation of plans for closure until a clear alternative redevelopment plan is in place. There are two one-metre and two three-metre FINA-standard springboards and a five-metre platform at Ringwood Aquatic Centre. This is the only such facility in the region, and Surrey Park and the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre are many, many kilometres away. The Ringwood Diving Club uses these diving boards and has an active and vibrant club, all the members of which stand to lose their local diving facility.

I have received 158 signatures from Emma's Babyswim, a user group that has been operating from the Ringwood Aquatic Centre for 15 years, which teaches very young children vital water survival skills. I have also received a copy of a letter from Darren Ross, director of the Physica spinal and physiotherapy clinic, which points out the value of the hydrotherapy pool that is used by 80 of their clients every week to assist with rehabilitation and pain management. I have even received a copy of a letter from Gillian Brooker, CEO of Diving NSW, praising the Ringwood Diving Club and the good indoor diving facilities that are on offer, which are lacking in southern New South Wales, which of course is several hundred kilometres to the north of the suburb of Ringwood.

If the Ringwood Aquatic Centre is closed, users will have to move to the council's Croydon Leisure and Aquatic Centre, which only has a 25-metre pool and no diving boards. That pool is already very popular and very heavily used. Other alternatives are at Nunawading, Boronia and Box Hill, but all are a number of kilometres away and, again, they are already well used by their own local communities.

The Ringwood Aquatic Centre as it stands may not be the best pool in Melbourne, but it is Ringwood's pool. It is not broken, but it does not make a profit. If that were the test for community facilities and they were judged by that criterion, many more may suffer the same potential fate. On behalf of the residents and user groups who have contacted me, I ask the Maroondah City Council to reconsider this decision to close the Ringwood Aquatic Centre and delay any closure until such time as ready-to-build plans and a start date for any redevelopment are in place. I thank the House for noting my grievance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! The time for the grievance debate has expired, and the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 192B. The debate is adjourned and 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**Broadband****(Question No. 4)**

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 29 September 2010.

In respect of the Government's television commercial on National Broadband Network (NBN), (a) is it a fact that the Government will invest up to \$43 billion on this network, and (b) is the Government still committed to private sector investment in the NBN.

Mr Albanese—The Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

The Australian Government has established NBN Co Limited (NBN Co) to build and operate the National Broadband Network (NBN). The government originally estimated that NBN Co would invest up to \$43 billion over eight years to fund the rollout and ongoing operations of the network.

On 20 December 2010 the government released NBN Co's Corporate Plan to the public which indicated that the total capital expenditure for the project is estimated to be \$35.9 billion, less than the government's original \$43 billion dollar estimate, in large part due to the agreement between NBN Co and Telstra. The government expects to contribute \$27.5 billion in equity for the rollout.

The government is still committed to private sector investment in the NBN following completion of the network and subject to examination of the Productivity Commission Inquiry report by a joint committee of Parliament.

Immigration**(Question No. 50)**

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 26 October 2010:

In respect of section 91Y of the *Migration Act 1958* and the obligation of the Secretary of the department to provide periodic reports to the Minister, has he been provided a report for the period 1 March to 30 June 2010; if not, why not; if so, will it be tabled in the Parliament in accordance with subsection 91Y(9) of the Act.

Mr Bowen—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship provided a report to the Minister for the period from 1 March 2010 to 30 June 2010 on 13 August 2010 in accordance with section 91Y of the *Migration Act 1958* (the Act). The report was tabled by the Minister on 16 November 2010 in accordance with subsection 91Y(9) of the Act.

Refugee Review Tribunal**(Question No. 51)**

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 26 October 2010:

In respect of section 440A of the *Migration Act 1958* and the obligation on the Principal Member of the Refugee Review Tribunal to provide periodic reports to the Minister, has he been provided a report for the period 1 March to 30 June 2010; if not, why not; if so, will it be tabled in the Parliament in accordance with subsection 440A(9) of the Act.

Mr Bowen—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Principal Member of the Refugee Review Tribunal provided a report to the Minister for the period from 1 March 2010 to 30 June 2010 on 12 August 2010 in accordance with section 440A of the *Migration Act 1958* (the Act). The report was tabled by the Minister on 16 November 2010 in accordance with subsection 440A(9) of the Act.

**Universal Service Obligation
(Question No. 74)**

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 16 November 2010:

Under the Universal Service Obligation, is it mandatory for every home in Australia to have a fixed line telephone service.

Mr Albanese—The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

The *Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999* ('the Act') provides for a Universal Service Obligation (USO) to ensure that standard telephone services are reasonably accessible to all people in Australia on an equitable basis, wherever they reside or carry on business (section 9(1)(a)). The obligation includes the supply of a standard telephone service on request (section 9(2)).

The Act does not specify a type of technology that must be used to deliver USO voice telephony. Telstra, as the primary universal service provider, provides standard telephone services through a range of customer access networks, such as optical fibre, coaxial cable, copper wire pairs, radio and satellite in fulfilment of the USO (Item 2.2 of Telstra's USO Standard Marketing Plan).

**Broadband
(Question No. 76)**

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 16 November 2010:

'In respect of the announcement by NBN Co on 12 August 2010 that it would increase the speed offered by its network to 1 Gbps: (a) what are the details of all conversations held between the Minister and his office, and/or the Prime Minister and her office, and NBN Co, before the announcement was made (ie, times, dates, participants, content of discussions); (b) did the Government suggest that NBN Co make this announcement; if so, when, by whom and to whom; (c) was the Government informed in advance of the announcement; if so, when and how; and (d) did the Government provide input to NBN Co regarding the date of the announcement; if so, what input was provided and by whom'.

Mr Albanese—The Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

- (a) The Minister was advised by NBN Co Limited (NBN Co) CEO, Mr Mike Quigley, by telephone on the evening of 11 August 2010 that NBN Co could increase the speed offered over the National Broadband Network to 1 gigabyte per second and that Mr Quigley intended to announce this in his address to the Australian Information Industry Association on 12 August 2010, as is the CEO usual practice to update the industry;
- (b) No;
- (c) See answer (a);
- (d) No.

Charles Todd Memorial Oration**(Question No. 77)**

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 16 November 2010.

In respect of the 2010 Charles Todd Memorial Oration given by the Chief Executive Officer of NBN Co, Mr Mike Quigley, on 18 August 2010: (a) what are the details of all conversations held between the Minister and his office, and/or the Prime Minister and her office, and NBN Co, before the speech was made (ie, times, dates, participants, content of discussions); (b) did the Government provide input on the timing of or contents of the speech; if so, what are the details (ie, who and the nature of the communications between the Government and NBN Co); (c) was the Government informed in advance of the speech and/or its content; if so, when and how; and (d) has the Government, or NBN Co, sought advice at any point concerning whether the speech might breach election caretaker provisions, either before or after the speech was given; if so, when was advice sought and given, by whom, and what advice was received.

Mr Albanese—The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

- (a) NBN Co informed the Minister's office of the speech and its contents prior to its delivery at the Charles Todd Memorial Oration. NBN Co did not seek clearance for the speech.
- (b) No. Mr Quigley accepted the invitation to speak at the Charles Todd Memorial Oration many months before the federal election was called. Mr Quigley had no foreknowledge the Oration would fall during the 2010 federal election.
- (c) See answer at a) above.
- (d) No. Matters raised by Mr Quigley in relation to the National Broadband Network within the speech were consistent with government policy decisions made prior to the caretaker period.

Army Reserves**(Question No. 108)**

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, in writing, on the 25 November 2010:

- (1) Why did the Government not send a Reserve Rifle Company to Butterworth on the most recent rotation; and if it was because Reserves had indicated they could not man the rotation, why did the Government not instead call for a High Readiness Reserve Company to be sent?
- (2) What is the current posted strength of each High Readiness Reserve Company?
(3) When will the promised Reserve Future Force document be released?
- (4) In respect of the 2009 Defence White Paper stating that capability will be transferred from the Australian Regular Army to the Reserves, what are these capabilities and when will they be transferred?
- (5) When will the proposed document *Re-balancing the Army* be released and what impact will this paper have on the Reserves?

Mr Snowden—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) (a) Why did a Reserve Company not get deployed to Butterworth? The most recent Australian Army rotation to Rifle Company Butterworth, was rotation 92, comprising of members from the 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment from within the 3rd Brigade based in Townsville. The deployment of an element of the 1st Battalion was an integral component in their training schedule in accordance with Army's force generation cycle.

- (b) Why did the Government not instead call for a High Readiness Reserve Company to be sent?

The Government can not “**call for**” a HRR company. Only the Service Chiefs (in this case CA/CDF) can “call for” a particular unit/member to volunteer for service. A “call out” is a lawful order made by the Governor-General for a member or members to undertake continuous full time service in accordance with Section 50D of the Defence Act. It is limited to specific circumstances:

- war or warlike operation;
- defence emergency;
- defence preparation;
- peacekeeping or peace enforcement, assistance to Commonwealth, State, Territory or foreign government authorities and agencies in matters involving Australia’s national security or affecting Australian defence interest;
- support to community activities of national or international significance, and
- civil aid, humanitarian assistance, medical or civil emergency or disaster relief.

Consequently, a rotation to Rifle Company Butterworth does not fall within “**call out**” circumstances.

- (2) As at 26 November 2010, the current posted strength of each High Readiness Reserve Company was as follows:

4th Brigade – 150

5th Brigade – 167

8th Brigade - 163

9th Brigade - 151

11th Brigade - 138

13th Brigade – 132

- (3) and (5) The Army Reserve Approved Future Force was the title given to a draft working document developed by Army, dealing with the Reserve specific component of the whole of Army review, titled “Rebalancing Army”. As a result of a range of matters, most importantly lessons learned from ongoing operations, Army is continuing a holistic review of the structure of Army’s Total Force in 2011 and will draw on lessons learned from Rebalancing Army. A final implementation plan is due in late 2011.
- (4) The White Paper states that Army’s “implementation plan **will contain options** for (among other considerations) how part-time force elements might act as a ‘repository’ of some high end, longer lead time capabilities for contingencies related to the defence of Australia, as a hedge against strategic risk, and an expansion base should we require it”. The current Army Review will address these matters.

Telecommunications Policy

(Question No. 109)

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 25 November 2010:

In respect of the statement by the Minister: ‘On fixed lines connected to homes, I would anticipate, as I have said consistently for many, many months, we would have a monopoly.’ (Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee, *Supplementary Budget Estimates*, 19 October 2010, page

103): is this a reversal of the policy direction towards increasing competition which has characterised Australian telecommunications policy since the early 1990s.

Mr Albanese—The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

The Government is not creating any statutory monopolies for NBN Co. It is simply acknowledging the reality that, in the residential and small business markets, the fixed line access network by its nature has monopoly characteristics. As such NBN Co's network is likely, in a practical sense, to be a monopoly in these markets just as Telstra's copper network has been. In recognition that NBN Co's access network will have monopoly characteristics, the NBN will be wholesale-only and provide open and non-discriminatory access subject to close Australian Competition and Consumer Commission scrutiny. These arrangements are detailed in the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010, introduced into the House of Representatives on 25 November 2010.

Broadband

(Question No. 112)

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 25 November 2010:

In respect of the Access Economics Report Financial and externality impacts of high-speed broadband for telehealth (July 2010), why did the Government not extend the scope of this study to cover assessing the costs and benefits of the National Broadband Network across all sectors.

Mr Albanese—The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

As part of the development of strategies to maximise the benefits of the National Broadband Network and its impact on Australia's digital economy, the Government will continue to commission targeted research. This research will be in different areas where the National Broadband Network can deliver significant benefits as well as more in-depth research into specific areas where early benefits can be realised.

Ministers and Ministerial Staff: Mobile Phones and iPads

(Question No. 132, 165 and 166)

Mr Briggs asked the Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer and the Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation, in writing, on the 25 November 2010:

- (1) How many (a) mobile phones, (b) blackberries and (c) I-Pads are currently allocated to the (i) Minister, and (ii) the Minister's ministerial staff.
- (2) In respect of mobile phone usage between (a) 3 December 2007 and 24 November 2010, and (b) 24 June 2010 and 24 November 2010, what was the total cost for (a) the Minister, and (b) the Minister's ministerial staff.
- (3) For each month since December 2007, what was the cost of mobile phone usage for each mobile phone account allocated to the (a) Minister, and (b) Minister's ministerial staff.

Mr Swan—The answer to the Honourable Members question is as follows:

- (1) How many (a) mobile phones, (b) blackberries and (c) I-Pads are currently allocated to the (i) Minister, and (ii) the Minister's ministerial staff.

Ministers	Mobile Phones	Blackberry	iPads
Treasurer	0	1	1
Treasurer's ministerial staff	0	21	0

Ministers	Mobile Phones	Blackberry	iPads
Assistant Treasurer & Minister for Financial Services & Superannuation	0	1	1
Assistant Treasurer & Minister for Financial Services & Superannuation's Ministerial Staff	0	11	0

- (2) In respect of mobile phone usage between (a) 3 December 2007 and 24 November 2010, and (b) 24 June 2010 and 24 November 2010, what was the total cost for (a) the Minister, and (b) the Minister's ministerial staff.

	Question # 132 Treasurer		Question # 165 Assistant Treasurer		Question # 166 Minister for Financial Services & Superannuation	
	Minister	Ministerial Staff	Minister	Ministerial Staff	Minister	Ministerial Staff
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
2 (a)	28,400.63	157,787.30	3,759.08	54,557.21	1,136.58	34,049.90
2 (b)	4,364.83	32,333.38	2,326.31	11,015.01	-	2,919.77

- (3) For each month since December 2007, what was the cost of mobile phone usage for each mobile phone account allocated to the (a) Minister, and (b) Minister's ministerial staff.

	Question # 132 Treasurer		Question # 165 Assistant Treasurer		Question # 166 Minister for Financial Services & Superannuation	
	Minister	Ministerial Staff	Minister	Ministerial Staff	Minister	Ministerial Staff
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Dec-07	-	1,616.99	44.00	190.67	n/a	257.41
Jan-08	22.65	2,486.13	44.00	914.42	n/a	252.11
Feb-08	445.14	4,165.60	44.00	719.73	n/a	336.43
Mar-08	408.44	2,137.97	44.00	734.19	n/a	487.69
Apr-08	727.94	2,473.27	44.00	1,013.81	n/a	702.56
May-08	669.82	2,783.50	44.00	1,265.84	n/a	1,048.31
Jun-08	805.73	6,368.89	44.05	660.77	n/a	639.99
Jul-08	1,188.60	6,109.13	44.05	788.44	n/a	568.27
Aug-08	844.54	n/a	44.20	671.43	n/a	1,052.12
Sep-08	492.03	2,487.23	44.00	1,253.39	n/a	1,062.64
Oct-08	548.30	5,745.18	44.00	1,687.93	n/a	509.81
Nov-08	1,293.35	9,233.14	44.00	916.97	n/a	1,114.14
Dec-08	1,646.20	2,734.55	44.00	1,016.01	n/a	1,397.02
Jan-09	1,195.61	2,433.58	(7.05)	1,153.26	n/a	905.74
Feb-09	515.55	4,452.42	n/a	1,073.93	n/a	856.25
Mar-09	1,271.09	4,098.34	n/a	805.21	n/a	905.41
Apr-09	923.22	4,560.18	n/a	856.88	n/a	2,236.52
May-09	516.54	4,039.74	n/a	1,534.89	n/a	888.01
Jun-09	496.27	2,627.76	n/a	992.82	67.08	776.13
Jul-09	543.92	3,317.14	64.94	2,194.35	n/a	372.78
Aug-09	736.57	3,064.61	64.94	1,526.03	n/a	1,495.72
Sep-09	912.61	4,555.02	64.94	1,821.42	44.23	1,140.30

QUESTIONS IN WRITING

	Question # 132 Treasurer		Question # 165 Assistant Treasurer		Question # 166 Minister for Financial Services & Superannuation	
	Minister	Ministerial Staff	Minister	Ministerial Staff	Minister	Ministerial Staff
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Oct-09	686.08	4,131.89	64.94	2,445.48	35.89	1,649.92
Nov-09	1,093.87	6,006.55	64.94	1,856.28	41.71	1,200.53
Dec-09	586.73	3,166.71	67.12	2,127.14	355.78	1,113.97
Jan-10	679.67	3,916.39	81.21	1,536.10	38.28	1,224.39
Feb-10	667.13	3,091.07	82.55	1,351.04	38.28	1,089.50
Mar-10	608.51	2,975.47	70.33	1,766.65	38.28	1,185.01
Apr-10	1,047.72	5,593.83	80.98	4,668.18	383.00	1,043.58
May-10	1,009.68	6,873.10	86.53	1,841.33	55.72	1,975.41
Jun-10	1,452.29	8,208.54	74.10	2,157.61	38.33	1,642.46
Jul-10	n/a	4,663.08	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,422.48
Aug-10	1,005.53	5,246.31	99.60	2,484.72	n/a	1,497.29
Sep-10	1,178.64	4,929.45	299.44	1,909.28	not applicable	not applicable
Oct-10	1,063.85	8,926.18	889.55	3,012.97	not applicable	not applicable
Nov-10	1,116.81	8,568.36	1,037.72	3,608.04	not applicable	not applicable