

ABOUT THE HOUSE

A photograph of a woman with short brown hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, sitting behind a young boy. The boy is wearing a dark blue t-shirt with the text 'PIPING HOT' and 'THE BOARDING' visible. They are in a room with a bed and various items in the background. In the foreground, there are yellow and blue plastic storage bins.

THE ALLERGY EPIDEMIC

Safety at school –
*a mother's plea to
keep her son safe*



Photo: jupiterimages

Investment recommended in teacher education

A major reform package to improve every stage of teacher education has been proposed by the House of Representatives Education and Vocational Training Committee. The committee's new report—*Top of the class*—says the teacher education system currently serves Australia very well, but is strained at some points and could be enabled to do better. It includes recommendations to strengthen the research base of teacher education, fund better teacher education programs and research and practicum partnerships, and improve the transition from teacher education student to classroom teacher. "Each recommendation is practical, achievable and worthwhile as a stand-alone measure but together the recommendations comprise a powerful reform package," said committee chair Luke Hartsuyker (Member for Cowper, NSW). The report is at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/evt/teachereduc or for more information email evt.reps@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4573.



Call to revitalise agricultural colleges

Revitalising agricultural colleges across Australia is one of 29 recommendations from the House of Representatives Agriculture Committee aimed at overcoming shortages of skilled labour in our rural industries. The committee concluded that more needs to be done by government and industry to meet rural skill needs. Committee chair Alby Schultz (Member for Hume, NSW) said investment in world class training, extension and research services is needed to maintain and enhance our rural skills in a dynamic and highly competitive international environment. "Only by making such investment will our rural industries remain at the forefront of agriculture and forestry internationally," he said. The report is at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/primind/ruralskills or for more information email aff.reps@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4500.

Open House on 14 July

Parliament House Open Day will be held on Saturday 14 July 2007. People will be able to access areas of the building usually not open to the public and there will be displays on the work of the federal parliament.



Open Day at the House of Representatives.

Sky's the limit

The About the House TV program is growing and moving. From March, the current affairs program about the House of Representatives shown on Sky News will extend to a 30-minute program and will move to the new timeslot of 2.30pm on the Friday of parliamentary sitting weeks. The extended program will first screen at 2.30pm on 23 and 30 March. Visit www.aph.gov.au/house/news to check program dates.



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Front cover photo: Member for Chisholm (Vic), Anna Burke with her son John, who has a life-threatening food allergy. Photo: Michael Silver

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Every second counts
Fighting the allergy epidemic

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Despatch BOX



“Many services, particularly from government, are very ‘top down’ or prescriptive in their delivery, with the funding going to the service provider, rather than the client.”

Adam Johnston receives a \$100 music voucher for his letter.

HAVE YOUR SAY

Send your letters to:
About the House Mail, Liaison and
Projects Office, House of
Representatives, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600, or email:
liaison.reps@aph.gov.au or
fax: (02) 6277 8521

Please include name, address and daytime
contact details. Letters may be edited
to fit available space and for clarity.

MAIL >>

■ Setting the disability agenda

While the establishment of a Parliamentary Friendship Group for People with Disability [as announced by Dr Carmen Lawrence] is welcome, it must look at more than unmet support needs ('Disability friendship group formed', *About the House*, December 2006). There is the cost of providing additional support services, whether those of us with disabilities will be able to afford them, and how much choice we would have in the nature of their provision. Many services, particularly from government, are very 'top down' or prescriptive in their delivery, with the funding going to the service provider rather than the client.

However, as soon as someone like me is in receipt of more than a prescribed amount of money, various benefits are reassessed by Centrelink. Such adjustments can leave one with an overall reduction in fortnightly income. But there is an answer. At the National Press Club in April last year, the Head of Access Economics, Geoff Carmody, presented the speech 'Tax cuts or tax reform: Which? For whom?'. He advocated lifting the minimum tax rate, while reducing the number of tax scales and abolishing tax deductions. This will at once preserve the revenue base, but also give those of us at the lower end of the income scales, disabled or otherwise, more flexibility and choice in accessing services through a greater opportunity to earn income without penalty.

Now there's an agenda item! Over to you, Dr. Lawrence.

Adam Johnston
Davidson NSW

■ Breast is best

My husband has just shown me page 7 of the December 2006 issue of *About the House* and the article: 'Breastfeeding decline a worry'.

Excellent article. Information like this has been round for some time and has culminated in the government announcing a wide ranging inquiry into breastfeeding.

The accompanying photograph to the above mentioned article epitomises to me the very reason for this decline in breastfeeding: an item on breastfeeding is illustrated by a baby bottle-feeding. One could talk at length about the dangers of a baby as young as this being allowed to hold his own bottle, not to mention the fact that he is missing out on the close physical contact with his mother that a breastfeeding baby has automatically, but why oh why could not you have used a beautiful photo of baby of this age being breastfed.

No breastfeeding photos available in your photo library? Probably not ... and breastfeeding continues to decline. Is it all linked?

Judy Gifford
Green Point, NSW

* The breastfeeding inquiry is being conducted by the House of Representatives Health and Ageing Committee. See article page 26

■ No shortage of solutions

The article and photos in the latest *About the House* on Australia's chef shortage set near another story on the need to find work for the Indigenous population in my mind suggests one solution. Train more of the latter to become cooks and chefs! Another possibility for helping solve the chef shortage would be to encourage more women to train as chefs and cooks. Women I think have more stickability in such roles. Male chefs in my experience are more flashy creatures who often tend towards throwing a wobbly and then walking out. Just a few thoughts for discussion.

Nancy Macintyre
Edinburgh Scotland

■ What matters on the Hill

I just received your December issue and wanted to say what a fabulous publication it is. While I obviously enjoyed your article on labour shortages in the industry, there wasn't one article that I didn't want to read. As a lobbyist *About the House* is a succinct and up-to-date ready-reckoner of the issues that matter on the Hill. Keep up the good work!

Matthew Hingerty
Managing Director, Australian Tourism
Export Council, Sydney NSW

WHAT'S COOKING >>

A Parliament House cookbook, with recipes provided by MPs and parliamentary staff, is selling like hotcakes, helping the Phil Botha Memorial Charity Fund in its efforts to raise money for charity.

The fund was established in 1997 when a group of Parliament House security officers decided to run the 100 kilometres from Goulburn to Canberra to raise money for charity. The run was subsequently named in memory of Phil Botha, from that original group, who died of cancer in June 1998. In 2003 the run became a 12 hour marathon of laps around Parliament House, with MPs joining security staff in the run.

To supplement the funds raised by the run, the idea for a cookbook was hatched. It is called *Cooking for your mates*, cheekily referring to a controversy about security guards using the term 'mate' as a greeting at Parliament House.

For the past five years the fund has been making donations to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, last year donating \$14,000 to the charity that helps grant wishes to children with life-threatening diseases. The cookbook can be purchased for \$20 (plus \$5 postage and handling) from Mark Aston by emailing: mark.aston@aph.gov.au



Parliamentary security staff running for charity with Pat Farmer, Member for Macarthur, NSW (second from right).

■ Water shouldn't be territorial

In respect to water conservation and the federal system, we have a situation like the defence of this country where politics needs to be placed behind a national issue. The federal government must take this issue and place water (a basic need) as a measure where in an emergency like the present drought it has overriding legislation in place. The states must be in a situation with a grid in place that they help each other.

Rain is a natural phenomenon and where it falls shouldn't be territorial; it should be stored and piped to where it is needed. Of course there are needs and costs in all states but no state should over-ride federal authority in droughts and emergencies. It's a bit like the need for a federal rail and road grid nationally. These matters should override state politics.

A national conference on all levels of experts should be called to ascertain how the present situation can be avoided in the future with innovative ideas and good planning which hasn't happened in the past. Water is a basic need—it shouldn't be a matter of state or federal bickering. It should be subject to control—under a federal commissioner for water and conservation.

*John Luder
Brisbane QLD*



New Public Accounts and Audit Committee Chair, Phillip Barresi. Photo: AUSPIC

NEW CHAIRS IN THE HOUSE >>

Following on from the ministerial changes announced in January, there have been changes in the chairmanship of some parliamentary committees.

Phillip Barresi (Member for Deakin, Vic) is the new chair of the Public Accounts and Audit Committee. Mr Barresi (pictured) was previously chair of the House of Representatives Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation Committee.

Taking over the chairmanship of the House Employment Committee is Gary Hardgrave (Member for Moreton, Qld), previously Minister for Vocational and Technical Training.

Sophie Mirabella (Member for Indi, Vic) has become the chair of the Electoral Matters Committee, taking over from Peter Lindsay (Member for Herbert, Qld), who has been appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence.

Getting technical

THE opening of a new technical college in northern Adelaide will help revolutionise the way young people get training in trades, the Member for Wakefield (SA), David Fawcett has told federal parliament.

According to Mr Fawcett, the opening of the Australian Technical College, with 106 students, represents a new focus on technical training in Australia. "So, rather than an academic or educational institution training people in accordance with, perhaps, a syllabus or the equipment they have available and then hoping that at the end of that process somehow these young people might fit an employer's expectations, this college is industry-led," Mr Fawcett said.

The technical college is a partnership between the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide and the Northern Adelaide Industry Group.

Mr Fawcett said the students will study towards the South Australian Certificate of Education, but the focus of those studies will be relevant to the workplace. "So the maths they do is industrial maths and the communication or language they study is workplace communication," he said.

Employers will come to the college and conduct interviews with the students with the object of signing them up to school based apprenticeships by the middle of the year.

"That means that these young people will not only receive training but also build relationships with employers such that they have clear and effective pathways out of their training into the start of a career. That is a good model," Mr Fawcett said.

A gift of learning

ON the edge of an African desert there's a school with two new classrooms, made possible by the fund-raising efforts of a group of dedicated Australians.

Twenty-one women from the federal electorate of Gilmore in NSW joined their federal MP Joanna Gash on a visit to Kenya to open the two new classrooms at the high school, CCM Angaine, at Mt Kenya Meru, 500 kilometres from Nairobi.



Photo: AAP

Transport solutions key to better cities

WE are stuck in dysfunctional cities, according to the Member for Reid (NSW), Laurie Ferguson. Speaking in the House of Representatives, Mr Ferguson said we need to start reassessing our over-reliance on motor vehicles, which is contributing significantly to pollution, congestion, loss of amenity and social exclusion in our cities.

Mr Ferguson suggested that consideration be given to the establishment of a sustainable cities authority that will work with existing federal, state, territory and local government bodies and agencies to seek out and encourage innovative and sustainable transport solutions. He said it's an idea put forward by Stephen Ingrouille from the Going Solar environmental consultancy, with whom Mr Ferguson recently met.

"In effect, this will be a 'better

cities program' that also aids rural and regional areas," Mr Ferguson said.

"Under this proposal a sustainable cities authority would ultimately have offices in every state and territory. The SCA would work with existing departments in each region, including transport, tourism, infrastructure, planning, environment, sustainability, health and regional development. Each regional SCA would interact with and seek advice from local technical and community organisations, as well as other relevant government agencies."

Mr Ferguson said the solution is not to throw money at the problem but is more to do with the initial design of new suburbs and the renovation of existing suburban areas. "This task is currently outside the expertise of our existing agencies," he said.

Thanks to the fund-raising, the school, which previously had 40 students, now can accommodate more than 350 students.

"The students were full of delight and lined up expectantly with the arrival of the Gilmore group," Ms Gash said. "Dancing, refreshments and lots of joy

were shared by all. An amazing celebration of the goodwill between two nations brought about by the compassion of individuals."

The Gilmore group also visited a Kenyan doctor who has moved from a single room to a medical centre, also thanks to their sponsorship.

Recognition sought for POW memorial

THE Member for Ballarat (Vic) Catherine King has called for the Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial located in Ballarat to be declared a national memorial. "It is a fitting memorial to former POWs across all conflicts and from across the country," Ms King said.

"Located in the surroundings of the Ballarat Botanical Gardens, the POW memorial uses the basic idea of a journey," Ms King explained. "The creator, Peter Blizzard, started a pathway, long and straight, interspersed with shapes like railway sleepers—a reference to the Burma railway. Running parallel to the pathway is a polished black granite wall 130 metres long, etched with the names of all 35,000 Australian POWs.

"Standing in a reflective pool are huge basalt obelisks, up to 4.5 metres high, with the names of all the POW camps. One is fallen, to reflect the some 8,600 POWs who never made it home. The columns are out of reach and across the water, symbolising that all the POW camps were away from Australian shores. Further on there is another wall, engraved with the words 'Lest we forget', allowing for an area of contemplation and reflection on the 35,000 Australian POWs and their individual stories. It is a truly impressive and moving piece of sculpture, steeped in significance for the hundreds of families of POWs across Australia."



Ex-Prisoner of War Memorial in Ballarat, Vic. Photo: AAP

MPs demand action on domestic violence

AN estimated 440,000 Australian women experienced physical and/or sexual violence in the last 12 months. Twenty-three per cent of women who have ever been married or in a de facto relationship have experienced violence by a partner at some time during the relationship. There were 175 domestic homicides in Australia between 1996 and 2004.

Those grim statistics were outlined to parliament when MPs from both sides of the House of Representatives called for a more coordinated and sustained approach to be undertaken by all levels of government in the area of domestic violence.

"A coordinated Australia-wide approach must be adopted if we are to reduce and prevent domestic homicide, identify trends and patterns, improve community interventions and facilitate systemic change," said Margaret May, the Member for McPherson (Qld).

She called for the establishment of a national committee on violence against women to coordinate a national approach.

Mrs May also proposed the establishment of a national domestic violence death review board, stating that such review boards have been established in a number of countries, including Canada, the US and the UK, to bring together various agencies in a coordinated response to domestic violence.



"Over the years there have been a number of programs and strategies aimed at tackling domestic violence, but it is only in recent times that serious consideration has been given to the perpetrator of the violence," Mrs May said. "There is a need to increase efforts in the area of primary prevention as it is essential to tackle the causes of domestic and family violence rather than simply to deal with the outcomes."

Supporting the proposal for national action were Anthony Albanese (Member for Grayndler, NSW), Craig Emerson (Member for Rankin, Qld),

Michael Johnson (Member for Ryan, Qld), Kirsten Livermore (Member for Capricornia, Qld), and Louise Markus (Member for Greenway, NSW).

Mr Albanese expressed particular concern about the underreporting of domestic violence, with statistics showing that only 20 per cent of female victims of sexual assault and 28 per cent of female victims of other assaults report the incident to the police.

"These figures tell us that we have simply not done enough to address the problem of violence against women," Mr Albanese said.

THE LAW

Background checks to boost security

LEGISLATION to improve air and maritime security is being considered by federal parliament.

Last year, the federal government decided to establish a new service in the Attorney-General's Department to coordinate background checks on people who work in the secure areas of airports and seaports. Known as AusCheck, the service will help identify high-risk individuals who should not be granted an aviation security identification card (ASIC) or maritime security identification card (MSIC).

The new legislation currently before parliament (AusCheck Bill



New background checking service is being introduced for people needing security cards at airports. Photo: Newspix

2006) will provide the powers needed for AusCheck to coordinate and undertake the background checking.

Attorney-General Philip Ruddock said the creation of AusCheck as the centralised background checking service for the federal government was in keeping with the public's expectations that adequate security arrangements are in place.

"AusCheck will in time reduce duplication of effort where individuals

require background checks for different purposes, and should in time help develop a more consistent and reliable approach to background checking," Mr Ruddock said.

He noted that the government's decision to establish AusCheck followed a recommendation of Sir John Wheeler's Airport Security and Policing Review. AusCheck is scheduled to commence operations on 1 July 2007.

Updating the film classification system

FEDERAL parliament is debating changes to the way films, computer games and publications are classified.

The changes being brought in by the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Amendment Bill 2006 are designed to improve the operation of the national classification scheme and respond to the changing technology in entertainment media.

Current classification laws require films to be submitted for reclassification in the event of additions such as subtitles, dubbing and navigation menus on DVDs. Under the changes such modifications will not require a film to be reclassified, as they do not add new content but rather make the already classified content more accessible.

The legislation also facilitates the addition of related but new material to already classified feature movies when they are re-released on DVD for sale or hire. These include additional scenes, interviews with the director, and even featurettes taking their meaning from the content of the film.

"Currently, these additions mean that the disc constitutes a new 'film' as defined, and must be classified, even though the feature movie on the disc has already been classified," explained Attorney-General Philip Ruddock. "Additional content rarely results in a classification different from that of the feature film on the disc."

The changes will also see the integration of the Office of Film and Literature Classification into the Attorney-General's Department. At the same time the independence of the Classification Board, which classifies material, and the Classification Review Board, which reviews classifications, is reinforced.

The Classification Board will be supported by an additional assessor scheme, under which authorised assessors will recommend classification and consumer advice for additional content released with a film that is already classified or exempt. The scheme is being introduced after public consultation and is based on the existing assessment scheme for computer games, which has been working successfully for some years.

The opposition has indicated its support for the legislation. Shadow Attorney-General Kelvin Thomson told the House of Representatives there is a "clear argument for updating the law to properly classify multimedia content, such as the extra features that are now frequently included in the DVD release of movies and television programs".

"The updated guidance offers better protection for families by providing comprehensive advice to parents on content," Mr Thomson said.

More than 2 million use illicit drugs

STATISTICS indicating that more than 2 million Australians have used illicit drugs in a 12 month period have prompted the House of Representatives Families Committee to launch a public inquiry into the impact of illicit drugs on families.

One in 10 Australians had used marijuana, with amphetamines, ecstasy and speed also featuring in the list of most used drugs.

"Illicit drug use can have a devastating impact on families," said Families Committee Chairman Bronwyn Bishop (Member for Mackellar, NSW) when announcing the inquiry. "Mothers, fathers and children are on the front line in dealing with the effects of illicit drug use by a family member."

More than 7,300 drug users were referred by families and friends to professionals for treatment in 2004-05.

The committee's inquiry will examine the financial, social and personal cost to families who have a member using illicit drugs; the impact of harm minimisation programs on families; and ways to strengthen families who are coping with a member using illicit drugs.

"Families need to be adequately supported so that they can help prevent family members using illicit drugs," Mrs Bishop said.

The committee will report on how the Australian government can better address the impact on families of the importation, production, sale, use and prevention of illicit drugs, she said.

Days after the announcement of the inquiry, the Families Committee held a public hearing with Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty and representatives of the Australian Customs Service.

Mr Keelty told the MPs of the growing amphetamine problem in Australia, highlighting how 381 drug laboratories were dismantled in 2004-05, up from 58 in 1996-97. Local and overseas laboratories were producing a cocktail of illicit drugs for an estimated 100,000 methamphetamine users in Australia.



Drug overdose victim in Sydney. Photo: Newspix

He said the AFP had 88 police officers stationed overseas in 33 countries working closely with local law agencies to prevent drugs being imported to Australia. Everytime the AFP broke up an international drug ring and dismantled their laboratories, it saved lives in Australia and also the time and money of Australian law enforcement agencies trying to stop their distribution.

The Police Commissioner highlighted the AFP's role in closing down a Malaysian drug laboratory that was producing 150kgs of methamphetamine daily—all destined for Australia. He also told the MPs of another huge drug factory dismantled in Suva, Fiji, that had enough chemicals to produce a tonne of crystal methamphetamine for the Australian market.

Mr Keelty said a broad community education program was needed so young Australians and their parents actually better understand the risk of taking amphetamines and know what the differences are between heroin, ecstasy, speed and crystal methamphetamine (or ice). He told the committee he would welcome a pamphlet being sent to all parents about the dangers of their children taking amphetamines.

"There's a general education gap there for both mums and dads and users so any campaign that increases our knowledge and therefore helps reduce demand could be a positive step," Mr Keelty said.

"There has been a lot in the popular press about ice and yet many people wouldn't understand the difference between crystal methamphetamine and liquid ecstasy and other types of amphetamine."

He also saw merit in running public health campaigns on television similar to those against smoking.

"I would rather educate young people about the risks in a controlled environment than in the uncontrolled environment. The uncontrolled environment today is via the internet and informal education from peers."

The Families Committee has invited people to have their say on the impact of illicit drugs on families by sending a submission to the inquiry. ■

LINKS

Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fhs/illicitdrugs

Email: fhs.reps@aph.gov.au

Phone: (02) 6277 4566

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Warning on black market rooms

A GROWING black market accommodation industry that can allow 14 backpackers to stay in a two-room apartment in Sydney threatens Australian tourism by dampening investment in new hotels.

Representatives of the hotel and accommodation industry warned a parliamentary inquiry into Australia's service industries of the ramifications of these illegal apartments going unchecked.

Peter Staveley from the Tourism and Transport Forum told the House Economics Committee of the unfair competition faced by the 100-room W Hotel at Woolloomooloo wharf in Sydney from residential apartments on the same wharf complex.

"There were upwards of 60 apartments which the local real estate agent had on the internet and was hiring out by the night, therefore directly undercutting the investment of the people who bought that hotel," Mr Staveley said. "They were right next door to each other in the same building."

Mr Staveley said these rogue accommodation providers were trading on the name of Woolloomooloo Wharf and were unfairly competing in the same market as the hotel.

"But they were residential apartments built to residential standards being let via the internet by the local real estate agent," he said. "These apartments were within hotel space but without any of the safety standards, the service or guarantee of quality."

Mr Staveley said there is a considerable black market operating in the major capital cities across Australia. Besides threatening the profitability of the legitimate accommodation sector, these illegal operations also affect the amenity of long-term residents.

"Ultimately this is not a good thing for the tourism industry in Australia because it does not guarantee quality. You are not going to fly from the far ends of the world to stay in someone else's flat."

Peter Olah from the Hotel Motel and Accommodation Association said these apartments impact negatively on investors in the industry and on the tourists themselves.

"Illegally operating short-term accommodation rooms impact on the entire investment climate because they don't have to meet all the requirements of building codes, they don't need fire proofing, sound proofing and also all the requirements of tax," Mr Olah said.

"They have an operating advantage because they pay less to build it and pay less to operate it. Those in the industry operating legitimately have higher costs and provide quality accommodation and service. Sydney is at the epicentre of this issue with the largest percentage of illegally operating rooms. It is the major port of entry into Australia for inbound tourists and is also the most expensive city to stay in."

He said investment in new hotels had dropped in recent years. "The reality is in Sydney especially and to a lesser extent in Melbourne, Brisbane and the Gold Coast, hotel investment has dried up. Why would you invest when your neighbour can do it more cheaply and reap a greater profit?"

Mr Olah gave the example of a recently-built residential tower in Sydney, which also had an approved hotel within.

"That hotel is operating legally and meets all hotel requirements, but within the residential component is a large

number of illegally operating rooms that are being sold as hotel rooms or as backpacker accommodation," he said.

"The experience in the illegal rooms can be as bad as no-one there to show the tourist in, no room key, rooms not made up and rooms significantly damaged, right through to things like 14 backpackers staying in a two bedroom apartment."

Mr Olah blames the internet for helping the illegal operators tap into the tourist and backpacker markets.

Peta Irvine from the Australian Hotels Association stressed that serviced apartments and non-serviced apartments were a great thing for the tourism industry.

"We need them," she said. "They reflect the way some people want to travel; they are the way people are moving, particularly for longer stay and business visitors. These travellers want to have the additional facilities that apartment style accommodation offers them, whether it is a fully serviced hotel model or an unserviced 'clean up after you leave' model."

But Ms Irvine agreed the apartments represent a risk to Australia's reputation.

"A lot of this accommodation—not all of it—is not meeting the basic standards that people expect. People do not know the difference, and that is the issue. They think that they have booked a hotel and when they get there find there is no tourist information and the key has been left in the door. When they run out of toilet paper, they have to go down the road to buy it."

John Bates from Tourism NSW defended tourists having choice and said more than 200,000 holiday homes and apartments in NSW help provide that.

"It is not a black market," he said. "It is just an alternative to commercial accommodation. If you look at the figures, basically non-commercial accommodation in the state provides something in the order of 60 to 70 per cent of all the visitor nights spent here. There is a global trend towards people wanting to have more control over the environment they stay in. They do not necessarily want to stay in a hotel or a serviced apartment." ■

LINKS

Web: www.apf.gov.au/house/committee/efpa/services

Email: efpa.reps@apf.gov.au

Phone: (02) 6277 4587



Road map for car parts industry

INNOVATION is vital for the survival of a local car parts industry.

A parliamentary committee has unanimously agreed on the changes needed to shore up an ailing Australian car parts industry hit hard by cheaper imports, high petrol prices, plant closures and job losses.

The bipartisan report by the House of Representatives Employment Committee wants to revitalise the local industry by encouraging innovation, niche product development and skills training.

The *Shifting gears* report makes 18 recommendations on how to help a billion dollar industry employing more than 20,000 people. The need for reform was highlighted by further retrenchments at component manufacturer Ajax Fasteners in Victoria late last year.

"The recommendations in the report provide a framework to turn around the pattern of closures and open up new opportunities for innovation in the industry," said committee chair Phil Barresi (Member for Deakin, Vic).

The report recommends:

- a review of research and development assistance to assess whether Australia is internationally competitive;
- extension of R&D assistance to Australian based subsidiaries of multinational companies where the R&D takes place in Australia to the benefit of Australian products;
- a vision for the automotive component industry that establishes

Australia as a niche market for innovation and investment;

- reporting on the level of local components in locally manufactured vehicles.
- a coordinated and high-level whole-of-government approach to automotive skills training;
- consolidating training resources to establish a centralised teaching foundry to service the casting industries;
- an automotive component manufacturers leaders forum to improve recruitment and the image of the industry;
- a national study on the post-redundancy outcomes for displaced workers within the industry;
- a general labour adjustment program to support the automotive component industry; and
- reviewing the status of Automotive Training Australia as the representative of the industry's skills needs.

Mr Barresi was disappointed by the reluctance of some in the troubled industry to participate in the inquiry.

"Unfortunately, a number of businesses declined to participate—in a number of cases citing the fear of retribution or contract losses as a reason," he said.

"That is a shame, considering that the inquiry was set up to assist this very industry. So, while the report makes recommendations critical to supporting

the future of the industry, the industry itself faces some serious cultural issues."

Deputy chair Brendan O'Connor (Member for Gorton, Vic) shared Mr Barresi's concern.

"Whether that is a cultural thing with respect to the industry not wanting to speak directly to the federal parliament I am not sure, but it certainly did not provide us with confidence that all in the industry know what the best approach is to solving some of the pressing problems it confronts," Mr O'Connor said.

Mr Barresi said problems of skills shortages in the industry were accentuated by a poor industry image.

"The outdated image of the greasy workshop and the constant talk of industry downturn only discourage young people from making it a first career choice. The committee heard about several industry programs getting school students out of the classroom and experiencing the workplace," Mr Barresi said.

Mr O'Connor hoped this report would assist the industry and government find answers to the problems.

"You have a paradox in the automotive parts industry: on the one hand there are skill shortages, but on the other you have redundancies," he said.

"I think the unanimous report suggests quite clearly that all members are concerned that not enough has been done with respect to skill shortages, attending to those shortages and attending to the labour adjustment policies that have been wanting. There are some very practical recommendations in this report. It is also important to note that there is no dissenting report."

Mr Barresi said the report wants the industry to focus on establishing a clear niche market by enhancing R&D assistance measures to ensure that Australia retains a share of the lucrative innovation and design market.

"While we often hear of cases of companies struggling to survive in the Australian sector, there are also companies in the automotive component manufacturing sector that are doing it well and who have established clear niche markets both here in Australia and overseas," he said. ■

LINKS

Web: www.apf.gov.au/house/committee/ewrwp/automanufacturing/report.htm
 Email: ewrwp.reps@apf.gov.au
 Phone: (02) 6277 4162

Community TV needs digital access

IT is the responsibility of the federal government to help community television move into the digital age, according to a new report by the House of Representatives Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee.

Released in February, the report makes a number of recommendations on the conversion of community television from analogue to digital.

Several community broadcasting stations currently exist in Australia, all broadcast in analogue, making them unavailable to the 20 per cent of Australians who have digital receivers. As the move to digital television becomes more widespread, less and less people will have access to community television.

Communications Committee Chair Jackie Kelly (Member for Lindsay, NSW) believes that halting the growth of community television in this way could cause irreparable damage to what is an important form of media.

"It's a fledgling industry, it really has only been operational as we know it today in the last 10 years, but the growth in 10 years has been phenomenal," Ms Kelly said. "The sector is the incubator of diverse and innovative programming, and is essentially the training ground for the commercial and national broadcasters."

The key proposal outlined in the report is that the government sell the digital channel known as Licence A—a digital channel that has remained unsold for some years—with a 'must carry' obligation that would require the new licensee to broadcast community television for the duration of the simulcast period. The committee feels this is the most viable option for keeping community television alive during the changeover from analogue to digital, as it does not impose on any working broadcaster or interfere with existing scheduling arrangements.

"It's not the ideal situation for community television, but the ideal options are gone," said Committee Deputy Chair Julie Owens (Member for Parramatta, NSW). "This was the last one we could find which we thought would work."

As a more permanent solution, the committee has recommended that the Channel 31 spectrum band, which currently hosts community broadcasting across Australia, be converted to digital and permanently allocated to current and future community broadcasters, giving community television a place in the digital world.

The committee has also called for the federal government to provide the community television sector with \$6 million in funding for the conversion of broadcasting equipment, as well as a further \$1.7 million for each year of simulcast.

Vice president of community television for the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, Andrew Brine welcomed the report.

"The timing of community television's move to digital is crucial so the committee's recommendation for a must carry provision by 2008 is very encouraging," Mr Brine said. "The other recommendations are also most welcome and will provide a great benefit to the community television sector."

Julie Owens hopes the government will take notice before a valuable part of the media landscape is lost.

"Community television, like community radio, provides this opportunity at a really local level for communities to explore what's happening within themselves, to develop opinions, to share stories, and that's something we're losing in the community in most other forms," Ms Owens said.

Jackie Kelly agreed, saying it is time for the government to take on the responsibility for bringing community broadcasting into the digital age.

"I think the government's obligated to just help them get over the line," she said. "It would just be such a shame to see it die on the vine and have to start again."

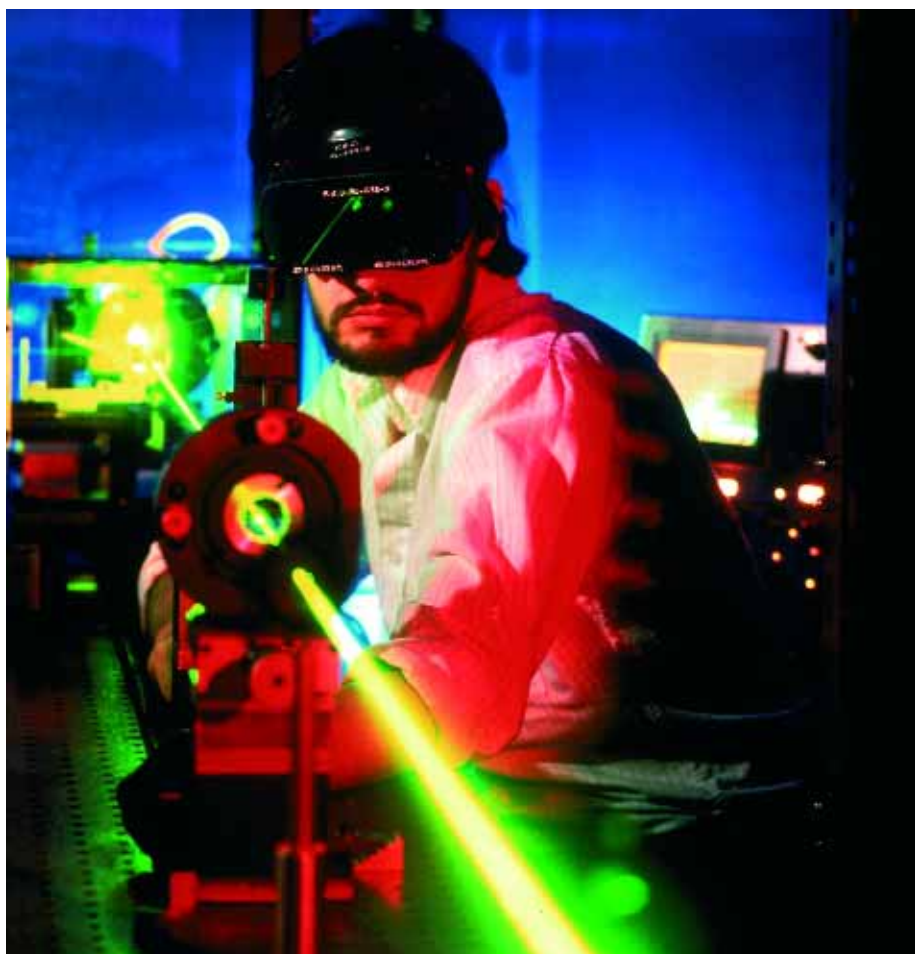
The committee is planning to release a second report later in the year, covering broader community broadcasting issues, including community radio. ■

LINKS

Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/cita/community_broadcasting/firstreport.htm
Email: cita.reps@aph.gov.au
Phone: (02) 6277 4601



Communications Committee Chair Jackie Kelly (left) and Deputy Chair Julie Owens following the release of the community TV report. Photo: AUSPIC



Manufacturing can bring future wealth

MANUFACTURING will be an important source of future wealth in Australia once the resources boom ends, a House of Representatives inquiry has heard, despite the current ill effects of the so-called 'Dutch disease' affecting the sector.

Also known as the Gregory thesis, Dutch disease is the term used to describe what happens when a country experiences a boom in natural resources at the expense of manufacturing. It was originally used to describe the decline in manufacturing after the discovery of natural gas in the Netherlands.

Appearing before the House Economics Committee's inquiry into the future of manufacturing, John Hawkins from Treasury's business and liaison unit said the exchange rate is one of its features.

"There is a tendency for countries which have a large increase in their resources exports to have an appreciation in their currency and, other things being equal, that will hurt their

manufacturing and services sectors," Mr Hawkins said.

"Usually at the same time there is a move of resources into the mining sector or the oil sector, and we are seeing that in Australia now. You have heard from people in the tourism industry that they are losing truck drivers, cooks or whatever because they are going to work in mining areas and doubling or tripling their salary.

"The concern is, if it is a short-lived boom in the mining sector, then you will have resources move out of manufacturing and the manufacturing industry will decline. Then when the mining boom ends, it is hard for the resources to move back into manufacturing," he said.

Treasury's Dr Steven Kennedy said it's a natural pattern for developed economies to move from strength in agriculture, to manufacturing, to services, and Australia shouldn't get too carried away by the resources boom.

"Some of the discussion around 'Are we going to lose our manufacturing sector and be dominated by resources?' is, not to put too fine a point on it, possibly a little overwrought," Dr Kennedy said.

"We see these types of things come and to some extent go, but the broad, steady structural changes in the economy, the shift towards services that has been going on for well over 15 years, is pretty much the same and a common feature of developed economies."

Australia's services sector, including tourism and education, is the subject of a separate inquiry by the House Economics Committee. Like manufacturing, it is also being overshadowed by the resources sector.

"Australia's resources sector is currently experiencing a well-publicised boom, driven mainly by unprecedented Chinese demand for raw materials globally," Economics Committee Chair, Bruce Baird (Member for Cook, NSW) said.

"While Australia is currently enjoying the riches of this boom, history indicates that high commodity prices cannot be sustained indefinitely. The committee is therefore investigating the state of these two trade sectors, manufacturing and services," he said.

According to the Productivity Commission, services dominate economic activity in Australia, accounting for more than 75 per cent of national output, and four out of every five jobs.

"The committee is particularly keen to investigate whether there are opportunities to improve Australia's services exports so that when the demand for, or prices of, our commodities eventually falls, we can continue to enjoy strong growth," Mr Baird said.

Manufacturers have also been examining their industry post resources boom, and have called for a more strategic approach from the Australian government.

"Australian medium and high technology manufacturing is the future generator of wealth in the post-mining boom environment," Australian Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers' Association (AEEMA) chief executive, Angus Robinson said.

"But only if Australians, that is, industry and government working together in partnership, develop the clear, strategic focus on the product and product-related service systems where Australia can develop a niche position in global markets.

"We must plan and act soon whilst we have the resources available from our

Continued page 14 ►

◀ Continued from page 13

mining wealth. There has been much talk about a skill shortage in Australia. In my view the real shortage is in strategic planning skills. Our mining wealth has made us complacent and lazy," he said.

In 2005-06 manufacturing exports reached a record high of \$75 billion, elaborately transformed manufactures reached a record of \$26.8 billion, and manufacturing value-added remained steady.

The sector employs more than one million people, which according to the AEEMA makes it Australia's largest employer.

AAEMA told the inquiry manufacturing contributes 28 per cent of Australia's total exports and, with a growth rate of more than 10 per cent in the 20 years to 2000, has grown

significantly faster than exports from any other sector.

Mr Robinson told the inquiry there are wonderful opportunities in global manufacturing because of the digital revolution, biotechnologies and nanotechnologies, but we need a change of thinking.

"We are spending a lot of money on biotechnology and nanotechnology. Has anyone asked the question of all those scientists and technologists to whom the government is channelling all that money: what is it going to be used for; what market is it going to meet?"

He said Australia can learn a lot from Taiwan about getting out in the world marketplace, working out what the world wants and making the most of global market opportunities.

"It is worth noting that in 1974

Taiwan's electronics industry was smaller than that of Australia. Thirty years on, with inspired strategic planning, this tiny island of Taiwan, population size similar to that of Australia, now sits as one of the global leaders in ICT [information, communications technology] production and in economy size, close to that of Australia.

"Taiwanese leaders have told me that they are lucky they do not have mineral resources. Their wealth has been created by the education and the acumen of their people.

"We have much to learn in Australia but not much time to waste," Mr Robinson said. ■

LINKS

Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/efpa

Email: efpa.reps@aph.gov.au

Phone: (02) 6277 4587

New look for national capital

AN exciting new vista for the national capital could be just around the corner, with proposals to redevelop Canberra according to Walter Burley Griffin's original plans.

A project of the National Capital Authority, the Griffin Legacy outlines a series of amendments to the National Capital Plan and aims to complete Griffin's vision for Canberra as a vibrant, cosmopolitan city. The proposed redevelopments will highlight the cultural and national significance of Canberra whilst enhancing the natural landscape and features of the city.

Walter Burley Griffin won the competition to design Australia's new capital city in 1912, with the aim of incorporating the natural landscape of the area into a bustling lakefront metropolis. However, disputes over his modernist design led to Griffin leaving the project in 1920, with much of his vision unrealised.

Three amendments tabled in parliament in December last year will take steps towards fulfilling Canberra's potential by redeveloping and extending the city centre. Central to the plan is the proposed development of the City Hill Precinct to ensure it takes its place as the geographical and symbolic heart of



Artist's impression of the proposed development in Canberra. Pic: National Capital Authority

Canberra. The other two amendments aim to transform two key areas of central Canberra—Constitution Avenue and West Basin—into lively cultural and entertainment areas, with new shops, outdoor dining and tree lined boulevards, as well as an integrated transport system. A fourth amendment lays out the policies and principles of the Griffin Legacy to form a basis for Canberra's future development.

The Griffin Legacy amendments were the subject of a public roundtable conducted by federal parliament's National Capital Committee on 23 February 2007. The hearing gave the National Capital Authority the opportunity to expand on the aims of the Griffin Legacy and explain the proposed developments

and how the integrity of Griffin's plans will be preserved.

Committee chairman Senator Ross Lightfoot (Senator for WA) is enthusiastic about the proposed changes, saying "the Griffin Legacy Amendments are some of the most significant and far reaching changes to the National Capital Plan ever undertaken and deserve an opportunity to be publicly aired and debated". ■

LINKS

Griffin Legacy
www.nationalcapital.gov.au/planning_and_urban_design/griffin_legacy

National Capital Committee
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ncet

Email: jscncet@aph.gov.au
Phone: (02) 6277 4355

Carbon tax ignites debate



Photo: AAP

A COMMITTEE investigating carbon capture and storage has ignited debate about the impact a price on carbon would have on research and development for both renewable and clean coal technologies.

Arguing against the introduction of a carbon tax, the Australian Coal Association and the Minerals Council told the Science and Innovation committee it would have a negative impact on all research and development.

"The premature introduction of a carbon price signal in the Australian stationary energy sector risks the perverse outcome of driving private sector investment away from vital research, development and demonstration (RD&D) towards quick fix responses," the joint submission said.

"It would also risk all levels of government abandoning their commitment to supporting RD&D on the basis that 'the market will sort it out'. This could effectively end Australia's involvement in developing 'breakthrough' technologies for both the fossil fuels and renewables," it said.

Environmental campaigner Greenpeace disagrees, believing instead that a price on carbon would encourage much-needed investment in the renewable energy industry, including wind and solar.

Greenpeace told the inquiry that geosequestration—or the process of carbon capture and storage (CCS)—will fail to deliver necessary cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, and therefore the government should not invest in it.

"Emission reductions through carbon capture and storage would be too late and too little for the costs

involved," Greenpeace political adviser Helen Oakey said.

"The limited potential for CCS to deliver emission reductions does not justify such large-scale public investment in research and development of this technology.

"Public money should not be going towards technology development for large corporations that already have the capacity to invest in extending their research base in this area," she said.

But according to the Coal Association and Minerals Council, as a major coal and gas using and exporting country, Australia has a lot at stake if CCS is not pursued.

They told the inquiry that RD&D is critical to overcome the technological challenges of integrating the elements of capture, compression, transport and storage at a power station scale, so that wide-spread commercialisation can occur.

The committee has heard that the introduction of an emissions trading scheme could be one way to accelerate the uptake of carbon capture and storage.

According to Peter Cook from the CO2CRC, the lack of a long term policy or market setting for carbon is inhibiting the capacity of industry to make longer term investment decisions regarding the implementation of CCS.

"Would an emission trading regime remove this impediment to deployment? Possibly," Dr Cook said.

"It has the benefit that it is technology neutral and is likely to produce the least cost outcome in the short term."

With growing fossil fuel energy generation in countries like China and

India, the Coal Association and Minerals Council told the inquiry that Australia's greatest contribution to reducing greenhouse gases on a global level could be developing CCS technology.

"There is a finite amount of national wealth that the Australian community will be willing to invest in responding to climate change over the next few years," the joint submission said.

"Given that Australia accounts for less than 1.4 per cent of total global emissions, it is very likely that the proportion of that finite investment allocated to RD&D—developing new technologies in both the renewable and fossil fuel areas—will eventually prove to be by far the most cost-effective and significant contribution Australia makes to solving the global problem," it said.

Supporting the call for investment in research and development is the National Generators' Forum, an industry body representing the 21 major power generators which provide 95 per cent of Australia's total electricity.

Speaking at a public hearing of the inquiry, NGF executive director, John Boshier said Australia's cheap electricity prices are based on cheap, abundant coal, and clean coal technology will be necessary to reduce emissions.

"But the technology to capture carbon dioxide is expensive and untested on a large scale," Mr Boshier told the committee.

"Very little is actually known about the practicality and the economics of the storage of the carbon dioxide once it has been extracted. There is an urgent need to firm up the estimates of both to identify if they can be factored into future planning," he said.

He agrees with the Coal Association and Minerals Council that developing the technology would be good for Australia.

"I think there is a huge opportunity for Australia, because other countries that have cheap abundant coal are China, Korea and India, and if we are to lower world emissions then exporting that technology, licensing it here and exporting it, is really important," Mr Boshier told the inquiry. ■

LINKS

Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/scin
Email: scin.reps@aph.gov.au
Phone: (02) 6277 4150

Audits good for airport security

AN aviation security review has focused on changes needed at Australia's busiest airport.

Regular unannounced audits of security at Sydney Airport have been recommended in a parliamentary report on aviation security.

The Public Accounts and Audit Committee report made 19 recommendations to improve security, including improved processes for issuing aviation security identity cards and new national standards for assessing security measures such as airport fencing, closed circuit television coverage and access points.

The committee reopened its inquiry into aviation security amid allegations of embedded criminal behaviour in the aviation industry, including reports that some baggage handlers at Sydney International Airport were involved in cocaine smuggling.

During the inquiry, further question marks about security at Sydney Airport were raised when an internal review by the Australian Customs Service claimed drug smuggling and theft by some staff from airline passengers. Last year a Qantas baggage handler was convicted for informing a cocaine supplier when the drug had been found in his luggage.

After regular reports of alleged criminal activity at Sydney Airport, the committee believed unannounced security audits would help allay any security fears and close potential terrorist opportunities. "While criminal activity does not—of itself—amount to danger to the travelling public, ongoing negative press associated with security at Australia's major airport must have some effect on public confidence in aviation security," the committee's report said.

Another key recommendation is increasing the on-ground experience of selected Office of Transport Security personnel at regional airports by accessing short term work experience.

The committee agreed it was simply not feasible to demand screening of all checked baggage at every regional airport. The committee wants the Department of Transport and Regional Services to report to parliament on which additional airports should be required to screen all checked baggage from August 2007 and update its advice every six months. It should also advise of any changes required to the list of prohibited cabin baggage.



Photo: AAP

Then committee chair Tony Smith (Member for Casey, Vic) said the measures proposed in the report will help to "ensure Australia continues to have one of the leading aviation security regimes in the world".

"While the committee believes that it is inevitable that additional airports will, in time, warrant screening of all checked baggage, it did not want to claim to have the expertise to identify which individual airports should be included in this category or when they should be included," he said.

"The expansion and intensification of aviation security measures in Australia has attempted and largely achieved a balance between, on the one hand, the implementation of adequate preventative security measures and readiness to respond to a breach if this occurs and, on the other, consideration of convenience and cost to the travelling public and Australian taxpayer."

Other proposed security measures include:

- support and flexibility in the delivery of security training;
- expanding the functions of Regional Rapid Deployment Teams at regional airports;
- improving communication services to security classified regional airports; and
- negotiating funding arrangements to upgrade security at security classified regional airports.

The inquiry received 81 submissions and held public hearings across Australia, including in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, Darwin, Cairns, Geraldton, Kalbarri, Carnarvon, Newman, Derby and Broome.

LINKS

Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jpaa/aviation_security2/report.htm

Email: jcpa@aph.gov.au

Phone: (02) 6277 4615

Census data released in July

IN July this year, the Australian Bureau of Statistics will begin releasing data from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

It is the 15th national Census since federation and will provide the Commonwealth government with the latest demographic characteristics and trends of the entire Australian population, including marital status, sex and age, as well as more complex measures such as industry of occupation, qualifications and level of English fluency.

The data will be used to determine the number of state and territory seats in the House of Representatives, equitable boundaries for electoral districts and the allocation of financial grants from the Commonwealth to the states and territories.

Under the Commonwealth Electoral Act, the Australian Statistician must provide the Electoral Commissioner with statistical information needed for the purposes of redistribution of electoral boundaries. The data is used by the Australian Electoral Commission to assess each state and territory's entitlement to members in the House of Representatives.

The ABS must also provide the AEC with a projection of the number of electors that will be enrolled in each electoral division of a given state or territory. The AEC uses the data to develop a proposed redistribution of the state or territory's electoral boundaries.

According to the Law Reform Commission, the Census is "the most important source of statistical information in the country". In a report on privacy and the Census, the commission said without the statistical and other benefits of the Census planning and decision making affecting the lives and welfare of all Australians would be "based on



Collecting Census forms. Photo: Australian Bureau of Statistics

inadequate and incomplete data, resulting in many instances in a high level of waste and inefficiency in the allocation of material and human resources".

The Commonwealth Grants Commission uses Census data to assess the financial support that each state and territory should receive from the federal goods and services tax (GST).

In 2005-06 the GST pool was estimated to be \$44.6 billion. The distribution of the funds has a major impact on the capacity of state governments to deliver comparable services, including schools, hospitals, police services and housing, and also keep state taxes and charges to a minimum.

The Grants Commission cannot make its funding recommendations on a per capita basis. Each state's costs differ based on population characteristics. Therefore, the commission relies heavily on the Census to achieve horizontal fiscal equalisation, so that funding is distributed in an equitable manner that enables each state to provide services to its population to the same level and standard as all other states.

For example, the commission uses usual residence by state, sex, age, income, English fluency and the Indigeneity of persons aged 5-18 to determine each state's portion of funding for vocational education and training.

If reliable Census data was not available to the commission, large scale funding inequities for the states would result.

Dennis Trewin, the recently retired Australian Statistician, highlighted this fact at the 2001 Census launch in Darwin when he said: "High integrity and good quality statistics are important for any democracy. If you don't have good statistics, policies and debate on policies tend to be based on anecdote rather than on fact."

Since 2005, the ABS has made access to all of its statistical data, including the Census, free of charge via its website (www.abs.gov.au). Given this, and the upcoming release of the 2006 Census data, the ABS expects the number of visits to its website to increase dramatically from the current figure of one million each week. ■



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EVERY SECOND COUNTS

AS THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN SUFFERING LIFE-THREATENING FOOD ALLERGIES CONTINUES TO INCREASE, FEDERAL MPS ARE LOOKING FOR BETTER WAYS TO HELP PROTECT ANAPHYLACTIC CHILDREN WHILE IN THE CARE OF THEIR SCHOOLS, PRESCHOOLS AND DAY CARE CENTRES.

STORY: GEORGIE OAKESHOTT

It's been called Australia's allergy epidemic—a rapid and unexplained increase in the number of children suffering allergic reactions to a range of every day items such as pets, pollens and peanuts.

Ten years ago there was only a handful of sufferers, today an estimated 40 per cent of children have an allergy of some sort, whether asthma, a food allergy or dermatitis.

The rise of food allergies is particularly concerning, because in children food allergies are the ones most likely to cause the severe and life threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis.

Of the 380,000 Australians with anaphylaxis, an estimated 5 to 8 per cent are children. That's around 20,000 children who could potentially die if exposed to the slightest trace of foods as common as eggs, milk and peanuts.

Why this is happening is unclear, but what is known is that anaphylaxis can kill in minutes. A severe anaphylactic reaction includes difficulty breathing, swelling of the tongue and throat, loss of consciousness



and collapse. Sometimes just the smell of a particular food can trigger an anaphylactic reaction.

Each year, up to 10 Australians die from anaphylaxis, while thousands more receive urgent medical treatment, usually in the form of an adrenalin shot called an EpiPen. Simple to use, an EpiPen is a disposable device designed to give a measured dose of adrenalin and can be self-administered or injected by anyone close at hand, even those without medical training.

Yet despite the apparent ease of emergency treatment, included in the statistics from the last five years are two young Australians who died while in the care of their schools.

for Chisholm, Vic) who has called for the introduction of legislation, devised in consultation with the states and territories, to ensure all preschools, primary and secondary schools have necessary policies and procedures to provide an effective response to a student who experiences an anaphylactic reaction.

Ms Burke wants policies that reduce exposure to allergens in the classroom environment; staff members to be appropriately trained to support life in the event of an anaphylactic reaction; and the development of an individual action plan for each student that has an anaphylactic allergy, including treatment plans from the student's doctor.

“DEATHS FROM ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK CAN BE AVERTED IF THE CORRECT MEASURES AND SAFEGUARDS ARE PUT IN PLACE.”

One of those victims was four year old Melbourne pre-schooler, Alex Baptist, who died despite the efforts of those around him to administer his EpiPen, which should have saved his life.

Why he died that September day in 2004 will now be examined by a coronial inquest due to commence this March, and the questions raised will undoubtedly focus more attention on what can be done to protect anaphylactic children while at school.

At the same time, federal parliamentarians from both sides of politics have spoken up in support of national guidelines to ensure schools respond more effectively to anaphylaxis.

Leading the call for action is Melbourne MP Anna Burke (Member

“Deaths from anaphylactic shock can be averted if the correct measures and safeguards are put in place,” Ms Burke told the House of Representatives.

“Amongst other things, these preventative actions would involve the training of all teachers in reducing exposure to anaphylactic inducing agents at school, and in the correct manner to administer the EpiPen, the only effective treatment, which buys valuable time until the child suffering the attack can be seen by a medical professional,” she said.

Anna Burke is the right person in the right place to lead the charge on food allergies, because not only is she a member of parliament, she is also the mother of a four year old

Continued page 20 ►

anaphylactic. Her son John is highly allergic to both eggs and nuts. He has an EpiPen and attends a kindergarten where a staff member is trained in its use.

"When you send your small child off to child care you do not expect that they will come into contact with an allergen and never come home. In memory of Alex, I hope that we never again see a small child die through an allergy, which could have been prevented if someone had been appropriately trained at that school," she said.

While many schools are supportive of allergy problems, some are not. According to Anna Burke, many parents face a real battle trying to convince their schools of the severity of their child's condition.

"I've certainly had enough parents contact me to say their principal or school teacher says it's not an issue, don't worry about it. I had one parent in tears because her teacher told her not to be ridiculous, 'if they eat enough of it they'll build up immunity to it'.

"That's just wrong. We need to raise more awareness of what an anaphylactic reaction is," she said.

Her motion has received widespread support from MPs including John Anderson (Gwydir, NSW), Ann Corcoran (Isaacs, Vic), Harry Jenkins (Scullin, Vic) and two doctors, Andrew Southcott (Boothby, SA) and Mal Washer (Moore, WA).

Former Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson told the House the government is seeking input from the relevant ministers.

"I make the point that it is not clear whether legislative approaches are necessary to achieve the very desirable aim of this proposal. If such approaches are required they would of course be the responsibility of the state and territory jurisdictions," Mr Anderson told the House.

"I can advise that the government has sought input by the office of the Minister for Health and Ageing, through the office of the Minister for Education, Science and Training, in relation to further measures which could be taken in schools, which may or may not require legislative backing," he said.

Supporting the motion, Dr Southcott and Dr Washer said a comprehensive national policy is needed to cover teacher education and training; the importance of collecting and updating medical information; strategies to avoid exposure to triggers; and age appropriate training for the children concerned.

"Anaphylaxis is becoming more prevalent," Dr Southcott said. "At least one in 100 children in Australia has had an episode of nut allergy and would be at risk from anaphylaxis. The incidence has doubled over the last 30 years. Fortunately, deaths from anaphylaxis are rare and they are also often preventable if immediate first aid is provided.

"When we look at schools and anaphylaxis we see that there are no national guidelines for managing anaphylaxis in a school setting. Each state does things differently, and national guidelines would play an

important role in making sure that every school and every child care centre has the gold standard.

"I think it would be a great thing if, at COAG, we could see that all schools, preschools, childcare centres and kindergartens have guidelines for dealing with anaphylaxis. The one caution I have is that I am not sure it would require national legislation. I think it is something that could be done through COAG, through a council of education and health ministers working together," Dr Southcott told parliament.

Supporting the motion, Dr Washer said even though anaphylactic episodes are rare, schools must have policies to deal with these life-threatening situations if they arise.

He said the prevalence of food induced anaphylaxis in pre-school aged children was one in 170 and in school aged children one in 1,900. A recent survey found that although

Peanut allergy

Even small amounts of peanut can kill a person sensitive to the nut's proteins.

Worst symptoms

- Dizziness, sudden fatigue, rapid heartbeat, chills
- Flushed face; hives; swollen lips, mouth, eyes or tongue
- Difficulty breathing; coughing, choking or wheezing
- Vomiting, nausea, diarrhea, stomach pains
- Pallor, loss of consciousness, coma, death

Allergy pitfalls

- Failure to read food labels
- Tasting bits of unknown food or sharing foods
- Not taken to hospital immediately

Shock can occur rapidly and be fatal within minutes

Shot of adrenaline is required immediately

© 2005 KRT
Source: AP, Allergy Asthma & Immunology Society Ontario, KRT Photo Service
Graphic: Thomas Jensen, Morten Lyhne

Photo: AAP



Member for Chisholm (Vic), Anna Burke with her son John, who has a severe food allergy; and the EpiPen that would save his life if he had an allergic reaction.
Photos: Michael Silver and photolibary

"I just don't want to have another four year old die at kindergarten."

90 per cent of anaphylactic food reactions occurred in preschoolers, more than 90 per cent of the fatal reactions to foods occurred in children aged five years and over.

"I strongly urge state governments and private educators that have not implemented comprehensive policies to do so. Deaths from anaphylaxis are preventable if quick and effective action is taken. It is unforgivable for any child to be at risk due to unnecessary ignorance or inadequate policy," Dr Washer said.

In October last year, the Victorian government announced it would be the first Australian state to introduce legislation for compulsory allergy training for child care workers, kindergarten and school teachers. Costing around \$2.5 million, an estimated 70,000 teachers and carers will be trained to support life in the event of an anaphylactic attack.

Anna Burke said Victorian parents are breathing a sigh of relief. "The training will include ways to minimise risks, recognise the signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction, and perform emergency treatment with an EpiPen, which gives an instant adrenalin interaction. Schools would also be required by law to have an anaphylactic policy. The AMA says

that Victoria is leading the world in introducing mandatory allergy training. This should be done so that no more small lives are lost.

"I cannot see why we in the federal sphere cannot do likewise and ensure that, via COAG, legislation consistent across all states is introduced to train all teachers and child care workers in the analysis of anaphylaxis and the correct use of an EpiPen. The lives of our children literally depend upon it."

The parliamentary support for national consistency has been welcomed by Anaphylaxis Australia, a not for profit support group which has been calling for the introduction of legislation since the 2005 coronial inquest into the death of Hamidur Rahman, a thirteen-year-old who died from a severe peanut allergy while on a school camp.

At the time, the NSW Deputy Coroner, Jacqueline Milledge, supported Anaphylaxis Australia's call and recommended the government introduce legislation similar to Canada's 'Sabrina's Law'. "The intention of the legislation would be to protect pupils at risk of anaphylaxis and to safeguard teachers and staff from prosecution if an act done to manage or save a child was undertaken in good faith," she said.

Anaphylaxis Australia expects the Victorian Coroner will make a similar recommendation after the inquest into the death of Alex Baptist.

"Children spend half their waking hours in the care of others

and legislation is the only way to ensure they're given the best care possible," said president of Anaphylaxis Australia, Maria Said.

"We've had guidelines and policies across the states, but we still have school principals who don't understand their duty of care to these children and that they need to educate all their staff. It needs to be enforced by law," she said.

Just like teaching children the dangers of crossing roads, anaphylactic children are being taught the dangers of eating out, sharing food, even holding handrails and drinking from bubblers which may have traces of allergens on them.

Anna Burke knows how easily things can go wrong, having recently bought John a seemingly harmless sausage roll which, much to her alarm, contained nuts. Luckily, they noticed before he ate it.

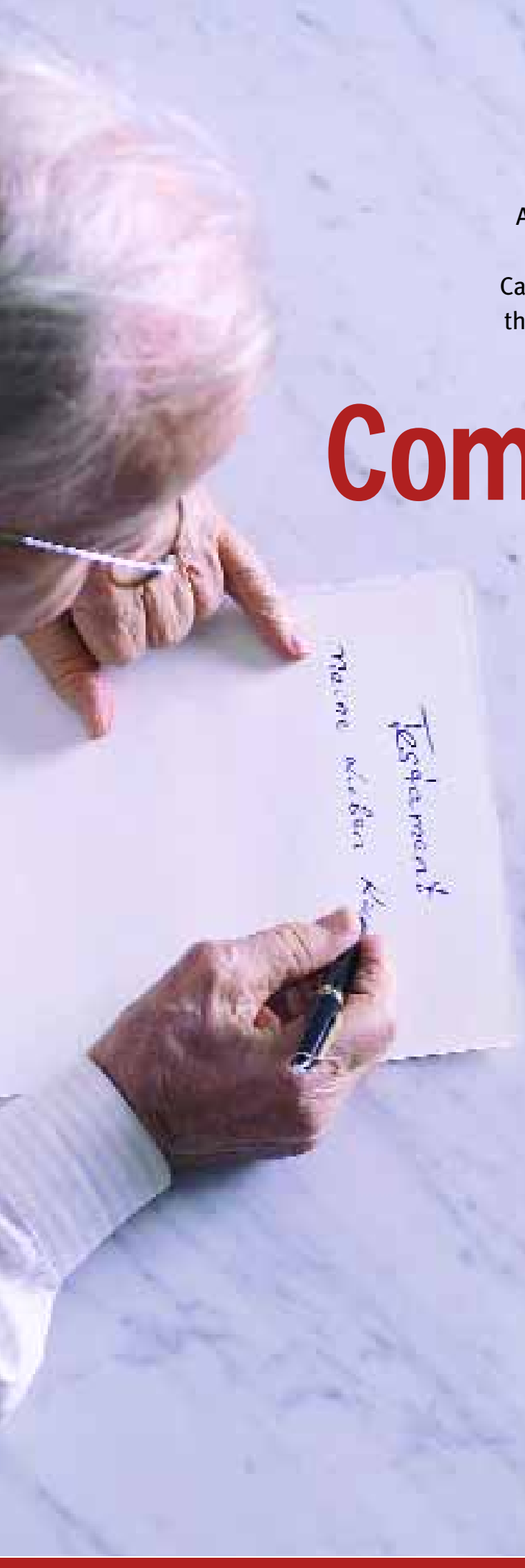
"He always tells me I squeeze his hand too tight when we're crossing the road, but I can't help it," she said.

"I don't think I'm being overprotective, I don't think it's possible to be overprotective when we're not doing enough to keep our kids safe in the first place.

"Victoria is leading the way, but why aren't the other states doing it? How difficult is it to say every school teacher must be trained in this?

"I just don't want to have another four year old die at kindergarten," she said. ■





As Australia's population ages, the legal rights of older Australians are attracting more attention. Carolyn Sappideen and Sue Field examine some of the issues confronting a House of Representatives inquiry into seniors and the law.

Coming of age

I'm not leaving them anything," was the comment from one 58 year old in a recent report on ageing. "They've had enough of my sweat and tears already."

As baby boomers become senior citizens and, those who are able, adopt lifestyles inconsistent with leaving significant assets to their children, problems of intergenerational conflict are likely to emerge. It's all about money.

It is still the case that for the majority of seniors, the family home is a major asset. The 2002 AMP-NATSEM report (*Live long and prosper, the income and assets of those about to retire*) found that baby boomers on the verge of retirement are likely to be asset rich and cash poor. Most will have little or no superannuation.

Simon Kelly, from the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, reported in 2006 that more than 50 per cent of retirees live on less than \$300 per week.

According to the 2003 AMP-NATSEM report (*You can't rely on the old folks' money*), unlike earlier generations, the current crop of baby boomers does not necessarily see the need to leave an inheritance for their children.

This is reinforced by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute's *Ageing in place* report, which found that, of the 7,000 survey respondents, more than 30 per cent of the baby boomers thought they would leave no assets in their wills.

Entering the debate is the House of Representatives Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, which has commenced a public inquiry into older people and the law. The terms of reference ask the

Photos: photolibary and jupiterimages. Continued page 24 ►

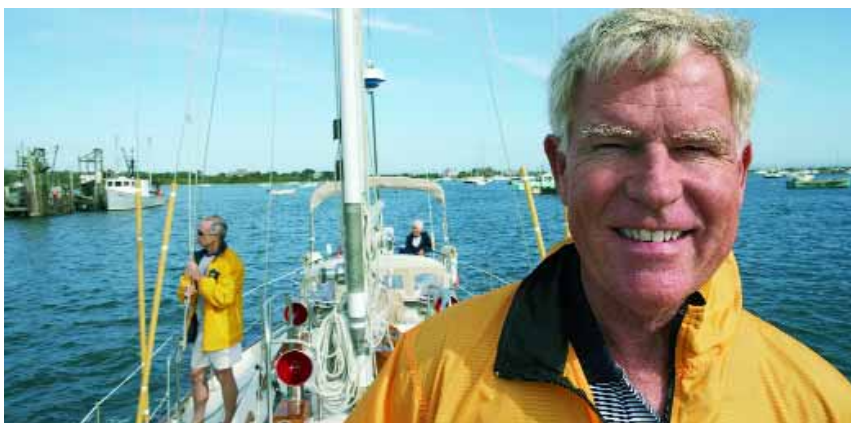
Baby boomers are adopting lifestyles inconsistent with leaving significant assets to their children.

committee to report on whether the current legislation is adequate to meet the legal needs of older Australians in the following areas: fraud, financial abuse, general and enduring 'power of attorney' provisions, family agreements, barriers to older Australians accessing legal services and discrimination.

Financial abuse is one area where seniors without significant income are at special risk. The assets of the elderly may be seen as a way of assisting adult children to purchase their own home or other assets. The *'Ageing in place'* report found that one third had given loans to children. The good news is that the loans were largely repaid. Loans might be secured by a guarantee of payment.

The NSW Law Reform Commission's Research Report No.11 found that older Australians were disproportionately likely to act as guarantors for the purchase of assets or businesses by their children. Frequently, there will be inadequate information concerning the borrower's finances and the senior will feel unable to say no to such a request. Acting as guarantor may put at risk the senior's sole or principal asset, the family home. One approach to overcome this risk is to introduce legislation restricting or prohibiting the use of the family home as security for these loans where a vulnerable senior is involved (Cummins, *Alternative Law Journal* 2002).

There are other ways in which seniors may be at the risk of financial abuse. They may sign a power of attorney usually in favour of one or more of their children. A power of attorney allows the attorney to make financial decisions, relating to property and assets. An attorney can, for example, operate bank accounts, pay bills and lease or sell property. A power of attorney will only be valid if the person giving it (the principal) has sufficient knowledge and understanding (mental capacity) to enter into a legal transaction.



Although there are two types of powers of attorney, it is important to remember that a general power of attorney is only effective so long as the principal has sufficient mental capacity to make decisions. An enduring power of attorney, however, continues to operate after the principal can no longer make decisions for themselves. In an attempt to provide safeguards against a person with dementia appointing someone as their attorney, the prescribed witness to the document (usually a lawyer) must state that in their view the principal understood the effect of the power of attorney.

Other safeguards are also available. For example the principal can state when they would like the power of attorney to come into effect. This may be on a certain date (perhaps for the time that the principal is overseas). The principal can also put limitations on the powers of the attorney. There may, for example, be a maximum on the amount of money that the attorney can manage without consulting, for example, the principal's accountant.

A recent Australian study by Tilse and others (University of Queensland) found that the management of complex assets and income often involves specialist knowledge and skills which the attorney may not possess. They also found that family members, when acting as attorney, often mix up their own money with the senior's money. This mingling of the finances can be as simple as the family member (attorney) paying the parent's bills with their own money, then reimbursing themselves at a later stage, by paying their own bills with the parent's money.

The attorney may also 'borrow' some of the parent's money on the assumption that "this is what mum would have wanted". The attorney may consider that the assets of the principal are really theirs—"after all dad is leaving it to me in the will anyway". The family member may also withhold expenditure for the care of their parent because such expenditure "eats away at my inheritance".

Although there is recourse to the various guardianship tribunals when there is a suspicion of an abuse of a power of attorney, in a family situation detection of financial abuse can be difficult. It is essential when choosing an attorney that the person be not only trustworthy but financially capable as well.

There are no 'checking mechanisms' to ensure that the attorney is fulfilling their role in accordance with the requirements set down in the legislation. At present there is no requirement to register a power of attorney, unless the attorney enters into a property transaction. There is also no requirement to present an annual report on the financial transactions that the attorney has undertaken on behalf of the principal. This is in contrast to a tribunal-appointed financial manager who is required to present an annual account. Whether all powers of attorney should be registered and/or annual accounts presented is a subject of much debate.

One solution to this problem is to adopt a recommendation made by the Alberta Law Reform Institute. In their report *Enduring powers of attorney: safeguards against abuse* (Report No. 88) it was recommended that attorneys give notice, of their



intention to act under the power of attorney, to specified family members or designated persons (identified by the principal in the enduring power of attorney). Such a requirement would provide an inbuilt checking mechanism without the requirement of registration, or an annual account referred to previously.

It is implicit in the current law that the seniors as autonomous persons can consume all their assets during their life time without any obligation to their non-dependant adult children. While many seniors are asset rich and cash poor the family home remains their principal asset. The introduction of reverse mortgages provides a means for the older person to utilise the equity in the home without having to move out.

Although the *Ageing in place* report found that the preferred option remains selling or renting the home at least for future care needs, according to a landmark survey some 20,000 households have reverse mortgages (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 October 2006) and the industry body (SEQUAL) reported that reverse mortgage lending reached \$650 million in 2005 (*SMH*, 4 October 2006).

Under a reverse mortgage, retirees 60 years and over can borrow against assets, typically a family home, to provide continuing income or a lump sum payment. The debt and interest are paid on death, moving into care or on the sale of the property. The seemingly perfect solution for retirees to remain in their own home and to boost retirement income has significant pitfalls.

The Australian Securities and Investment Commission website (www.fido.asic.gov.au) warns that some reverse mortgage products (but not all) may protect against this by setting the maximum repayment as the value of the asset. The guarantee that the loan will not exceed equity should be expressly written into the loan document to assure protection. Even then this protection may be lost if the borrower does not comply with the conditions of the loan, such as payment of outgoings, insuring and maintaining the property in good repair. This could leave borrowers with no equity in their home and at the risk of being tossed out. Payments received may also affect pension entitlements (ASIC, 'Equity release products', November 2005, p.31).

This is an area where special legislative treatment could be possible, as has been the case overseas (British Columbia Law Institute, *Report on reverse mortgages*, February 2006). It is another instance where intergenerational conflict is likely to emerge. Adult children may perceive that their inheritance is being dissipated by elderly parents on day to day living expenses, travel, renovations and lifestyle or increasingly for nursing or aged home care, (AMP-NATSEM report 2003, *You can't rely on the old folks' money*).

One of the terms of reference for the committee's inquiry into older people and the law includes the adequacy of access to legal services. This is especially important because the evidence is that, even if legal protection exists, seniors are frequently reluctant or unable to access legal services.

The Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, in its report on the legal needs of older persons in NSW (2004), confirmed that older Australians have limited access to legal services. The barriers to seeking legal assistance are financial, psychological and practical. Seniors frequently can't afford to consult a private solicitor; they are fearful of legal costs and feel that the legal profession often can't be bothered. Added to that, seniors are reluctant to seek legal assistance where personal relationships may be involved, fear confrontation and conflict, feel powerless to do anything about the problems, and lack the fortitude to pursue their legal rights (Law and Justice report, p.31). This is particularly

pertinent in areas of financial abuse by a family member.

The report also observed that, at the practical level, access may be restricted because many elderly seniors do not use the internet and are uncomfortable with using a touch button phone. This suggests that legal services should be available that are tailored to the special needs of seniors.

The Law and Justice report recommends face to face interviews, easily readable publications and legal advice accessible by referral through the services that seniors utilise such as GPs (p.49). The 65+ age group, especially those with low education, are more likely than other groups not to achieve resolution of a legal problem (see Hazel Genn, *Paths to justice*, 1999). Genn also observes that those with "low levels of competence in terms of education, income, confidence, verbal skill, literacy skill and emotional fortitude" need assistance in gaining access to justice and resolution of their legal problems.

This description may be less apt for baby boomers on the verge of retirement, with better education, higher asset levels and home ownership and a willingness to be more aggressive in pursuit of their rights. What it does suggest is that the most vulnerable are the least likely to seek legal advice and assistance and that specially tailored services are desirable. There is a case for a specialised legal service for senior Australians which meets their special needs. At the time of writing it is understood that such funding is now available in three of the states.

In three areas uniform protective legislation could be considered: reverse mortgages, powers of attorney and loan guarantees. These are areas where intergenerational conflict remains likely. ■

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For more information on the public inquiry into older people and the law, visit www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/laca/olderpeople or email laca.reps@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 2358.

Food for thought

BREASTFEEDING RATES ARE WELL BELOW NATIONAL GUIDELINES, DESPITE THE WIDELY-ACCEPTED HEALTH BENEFITS, PROMPTING A PUBLIC INQUIRY.

STORY: NIC BARNARD

It was just a TV ad for a new air conditioner, but it made Margaret Grove despair. “The air conditioning was so clever it gave the baby its bottle,” she says. “Nobody would see anything wrong with that, but it just gives the message that [bottle-feeding] is absolutely normal. [These images] are everywhere in our society and it’s just so hard to beat.”

Ms Grove is president of the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA). Her message to a new House of Representatives inquiry will be clear: the government needs to do more to promote breastfeeding as the natural, first choice for new mothers and give them support to keep breastfeeding when it gets tough.

The House’s Health and Ageing Committee launched an inquiry into breastfeeding late last year. Prompted in part by an ABA submission to its inquiry into health funding, the committee will explore the health benefits of breastfeeding and ask how the government can take a lead in improving the national



health by supporting and promoting the practice.

"There is anecdotal evidence that new mothers are not being closely supported or greatly encouraged to persist with breastfeeding", committee chair Alex Somlyay (Member for Fairfax, Qld) said at the launch. "The public perception is that breastfeeding is not necessarily accepted as the most desirable way of nourishing young babies or preventing long-term health problems."

With comments like that, and a call for views on the role of infant milk formula, the committee is stepping into a raging battle between breastfeeding advocates and an infant formula lobby representing some of the largest food and pharmaceutical companies in the world.

It's more than just a matter of public health. It's also an issue that could be costing Australian taxpayers tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars in treating preventable diseases.

Almost nine out of 10 Australian mothers (87 per cent) begin breastfeeding their babies. But by the time children reach three months, only half are still on the breast. At six months, that has fallen below a third (32 per cent) and only one in 10 breastfeeds exclusively.

That compares with guidelines issued by the National Health and Medical Research Council, which recommend exclusive breastfeeding for six months and for some breastfeeding to continue until at least the first birthday. Only 23 per cent of Australian babies are still breastfed at one year.

The council says a target of 80 per cent at six months—a rate similar to Norway's—is achievable.

Numbers have been rising since the campaigns of the 1970s—in the 1960s, only one in five still breastfed after three months—but appear to have plateaued.

Increasingly, campaigners are reconsidering their strategy, believing the old "breast is best" slogan does not send a strong enough message. Parents need to know that they, in effect, risk compromising their child's health by choosing alternative sources of nutrition.

Dr Lisa Amir, GP and lactation consultant, and a research fellow at La Trobe University, says: "We should say it's the normal way of feeding and if you don't, there are risks."

The list of widely-accepted health benefits associated with breastfeeding—for baby and mother—is indeed long. Babies fed on formula or cows' milk are more likely to become obese; cows' milk may also be linked to Type 1 diabetes. Research points to heightened risks of asthma, eczema and other allergic diseases. Rates of middle ear infection, urinary tract infection, of respiratory diseases and gastroenteritis are higher.

Breastfed babies may have higher IQs and even better jaw development, with less likelihood of crowded or overlapping teeth.

"Many, many mothers are just not getting the correct information."

Breast milk contains antibodies and can pass on the mother's immunity to disease and bacteria to baby. "It's not a dead drink; it actually has living cells in it," Dr Amir says.

For mothers, breastfeeding has been found to protect against breast cancer, ovarian cancer and Type 2 diabetes. Crucially, the longer mothers breastfeed, the greater the benefits. Mothers who breastfeed are thought to recover from giving birth quicker, and lose weight faster; breastfeeding also protects them against becoming pregnant again.

So if breast milk is the miracle food that even the formula companies admit it is, why are breastfeeding rates so low? Why do so many women start to introduce formula foods, cows' milk and even solids so early?

Figures from the 2001 National Health Survey suggest the biggest cause is that mothers feel they are not producing enough milk—a reason given by 40 per cent of those who gave up in the first year. Another 17 per cent had other problems, such as extremely painful cracked nipples.

Dr Amir says many mothers are uncomfortable breastfeeding in public, feeling it is still not widely accepted. "New mothers, especially from migrant communities, don't see many women breastfeeding in public and so they're not sure if they should."

Husbands and boyfriends are often unsupportive, being both protective and possessive of their partner's breasts. Dr Amir says one UK study into male attitudes proved almost unprintable, such was the language expressed.

Another reason is the modern obsession with timetables, good practice and doing things the right way. New mums believe they have to set rigid feeding times.

Behind these reasons, however, is an underlying cause, she suggests: the lack of support and information given to new mothers.

"Breastfeeding is a learned art," the ABA's Margaret Grove says. "When we had extended families, people learned by osmosis—we still see that in other cultures. But that extended family, passing down knowledge from one generation to the next, has gone."

Women who return to work often give up or cut back on breastfeeding, because they work in unsupportive workplaces, or have nowhere to express and store their milk during the day.

She says we need more and better trained health professionals to support new mums. GPs, for example, spend only an hour or two on breastfeeding in their entire training.

"There are some absolutely brilliant health professionals, but a lot of them don't have the information and at the first sign of trouble they just advise mothers to wean, because it's easier," she says.

Some training is even sponsored by formula milk manufacturers—which points to another issue. Organisations such as ABA say the easy availability of infant formula undermines the "breast is best" message, normalises bottle feeding and makes it easy for mums to give up.

Campaigners also believe that infant formula manufacturers are trying to undermine the guidelines, despite signing the Marketing in

Photo: jupiterimages Continued page 28 ▶

GPs, for example, spend only an hour or two on breastfeeding in their entire training.

Australia of Infant Formula (MAIF) agreement with the federal government in 1992, which bans promotion or advertising of infant formula or “follow-on” foods for children under 12 months.

ABA would like to see the MAIF code more strongly enforced, and extended. It does not cover retailers, for example, who have conducted price wars for infant formula in contravention of World Health Organization guidelines (MPs may wish to hear from the retail sector).

The formula lobby takes a dim view of this. David Forsythe, spokesman for the Infant Formula Manufacturers’ Association of Australia (IFMAA), which represents companies including Nestlé, Heinz, Bayer and Wyeth, talks scathingly of “the breastfeeding advocates”.

Mr Forsythe says manufacturers support the WHO guidelines and agree that breast is best; the industry should be viewed as “partners, not ogres”, with a role to play in providing the best possible nutrition for Australia’s infants.

Mr Forsythe admits companies sailed “close to the wire” in the early days of the MAIF agreement, but only a handful of complaints have been upheld in recent years. “Self-regulation is working,” he says.

Companies do provide generic (unbranded) information on formula feeding on their websites. Mr Forsythe says this is a vital public service as some parents—including those who cannot breastfeed—are not getting this information from health professionals.

“If a mother isn’t able to breastfeed, it’s absolutely essential to provide infant formula for an infant aged under 12 months But we’re finding that many, many mothers are just not getting the correct information, and as a consequence there’s been a denigrating of infant formula by health workers, no doubt influenced by breastfeeding advocates, creating a sense of despair and a sense



Top: Kirstie Marshall caused controversy when she breastfed her baby in the Victorian parliament. Photo: AAP;
Bottom: The baby formula association says if a mother isn’t able to breastfeed, it’s essential to provide infant formula for an infant aged under 12 months.

of guilt among mothers who are bottle-feeding.

“If we had a situation where companies were blatantly advertising or providing samples of infant formula in take-home packs from the hospital, I would accept the criticism. But they’re not allowed to, and they don’t.”

The formula lobby also says research has shown there to be high levels of iron deficiency among Australian babies, especially in Aboriginal communities. Cows’ milk, lower in iron than breast milk, is a major factor. Companies have developed “toddler formula” for the over-ones but say it is marketed against cows’ milk not breastfeeding.

The committee is likely to hear a call for more detailed statistics. There are no consistent national figures for breastfeeding rates among ethnic minorities, or Indigenous, rural,

remote or low-income families—all groups widely accepted anecdotally to have low uptake.

What figures we do have come from the National Health Survey, conducted roughly every six years. But the survey scheduled for this year is expected to drop the breastfeeding question.

The last NHS did include one proxy indicator: educational attainment of new mothers. It found breastfeeding rates consistently lower among mothers with no post-school qualifications, compared to those who gained a diploma or higher.

They were also significantly higher for new mothers aged over 30. Researchers say they are more committed to breastfeeding and more likely to seek help if they have a problem.

Professor Pranee Liamputtong, of La Trobe University’s school of



New mums are well supported by gas supplier AGL, which in 2006 became the first national company to be accredited by the Australian Breastfeeding Association as breastfeeding-friendly. The company offers lactation breaks, entirely flexible hours and help in finding child care for its staff. Photo: Newspix

public health, has conducted research into breastfeeding rates among migrants from south-east Asia.

She says the main reasons Vietnamese, Thai and other women stop breastfeeding are the same as for Western women: the need to go back to work or study, and the lack of support or information, or a fear they are not producing enough milk. But there are other factors.

A few—"only some," Prof Liamputtong says—see bottle-feeding as a symbol of living in a modern, developed society and a break with tradition. Others suffer from language barriers and are unable to read the material available from health services or access support services.

Some will be married to Australian men and isolated from their communities and traditional support networks, unlike in their home countries where they would be cared for by relatives and friends for up to a month after birth, allowing them to bond with baby and establish breastfeeding.

The inquiry is also likely to explore what all this means for the Australian taxpayer. If bottle-fed babies are more likely to suffer certain illnesses, that places an extra burden on the hospital system, it is argued.

Breastfed babies may have higher IQs.

A 2002 study, led by Dr Julie Smith of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University, calculated the hospitalisation costs of just five illnesses—gastrointestinal, respiratory, ear infections, eczema, and necrotising enterocolitis (another intestinal illness).

The extra cost to the ACT health system was between \$1m and \$2m, the study calculated. Extrapolated across Australia, it suggests that early weaning could be costing the nation between \$60m and \$120m a year in treating just those five illnesses.

Added to that would be the savings in carer's leave for parents and the longer term costs in treating chronic conditions such as asthma, obesity and diabetes.

Despite the consensus that breast is best, research into its benefits is not unproblematic or without controversy. A long-term study conducted in New Zealand and published in *The Lancet* in 2002 caused shockwaves when it suggested breastfeeding might

actually *increase* the risk of allergic diseases such as asthma and atopy.

Those findings have themselves been questioned. A Melbourne University School of Population Health study led by Adrian Lowe concluded that mothers who recognised the risk of asthma and atopy in their families breastfed for longer to give their children greater protection—thereby skewing the results.

"This research area is fraught with difficulties" Mr Lowe admits.

But perhaps the biggest difficulty those working in the field face is the sheer sensitivity of the issue. The majority of mothers stop breastfeeding earlier than the experts think they should; but every mother likes to believe she is doing the best for her child.

"We don't want to put guilt on mothers who are not breastfeeding," says the ABA's Margaret Grove. How the Health and Ageing Committee avoids that trap could be its greatest challenge. ■

For more information on the public inquiry into breastfeeding, visit www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/haa/breastfeeding or email haa.reps@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4145.



Truth is the most valuable thing we have," Mark Twain once said. "Let us economise it." In the increasingly contentious debate over Australia's temporary work visas, the truth often seems to be economised.

Is it really the case, as critics claim, that thousands of migrant workers are being exploited by a growing number of ruthless

way the government hopes they'll be used: that's to drive wages down, to take away your rights at work. You need to have a system of temporary work visas but you don't need to have a system that is open to exploitation the way the government's allowing this to go forward."

Likewise, ACTU president Sharan Burrow has claimed that the use of temporary migration visas is

program is that about 20 per cent of 457 visa holders obtain permanent residence. Temporary skilled migrants are the best source of permanent migrants because they already have a job, have already settled into Australia and have already been contributing to our economy and community for some time."

Whether it is due to a genuine skills shortage or because more profits can be made by employing

A desperate shortage of skilled tradespeople and professionals has led Australian employers to recruit more than 50,000 foreigners on temporary visas in the past 12 months. Some ask what's wrong with that, while others say it's the wrong way to go.

STORY: GEOFFREY MASLEN

employers intent on maximising their profits by undermining the wages and working conditions of ordinary Australians?

Or is the temporary skilled migration program, as its supporters argue, a crucial element in providing essential services such as health and education as well as providing much needed skills in the critical industries of manufacturing, mining, construction and agriculture?

What is certain is that the number of migrant workers has expanded enormously in a very short time—up by 80 per cent since 2004 to some 50,000 in the past 12 months—while the number of sites where they are employed is estimated to be close to 10,000, a 25 per cent jump in the same period, according to evidence presented to a Senate estimates committee hearing in October.

"I wish I could say that this 457 visa system is out of control but it's worse than that," Shadow Minister for Immigration Tony Burke told a press conference the month before.

"What we're seeing with these visas is them being used in exactly the

out of control "because the [Immigration] department can't police its own rules". "The way the 457 visa system operates exploits foreign workers and threatens the jobs and training opportunities for Australians," Ms Burrow said.

In response, the then Immigration Minister, Senator Amanda Vanstone, rejected those accusations. Last September, Senator Vanstone noted that almost 40,000 temporary work visas were granted in the year to June—up from a little more than 27,000 in 2005—while an additional 32,000 visas were issued to the workers' dependants.

"These figures underscore the importance of the temporary skilled migration program to the provision of essential services," she said. "With average salaries of more than \$66,000, that is an indication that the visa is being used to bring in highly skilled people to meet the shortages that go hand in hand with the sustained economic growth enjoyed under the Coalition government.

"A key aspect of the success of our temporary skilled migration

foreign workers on lower wages and worse conditions, demand by employers across the various industry sectors is high.

At the beginning of this year, the road transport industry renewed its campaign to bring in more temporary migrants to tackle what it said were chronic staff shortages. Transport companies have urged the government to ease immigration rules that prevent them from hiring skilled drivers from overseas, claiming it was almost impossible to find qualified Australians to do the job in rural areas.

Chief executive of the Australian Meat Industry Council, Kevin Cottrill, estimated at least 30 employers were waiting to bring in about 1,000 workers, noting that 2,000 foreign workers were already working in Australian abattoirs. Mr Cottrill said labour shortages were worsening as graziers were having to slaughter their animals because of the drought.

But the secretary of the Meat Workers Union, Graham Bird, said by March the backlog would be

Continued page 32 ►

A recent report listed nearly 100,000 vacancies for skilled workers.

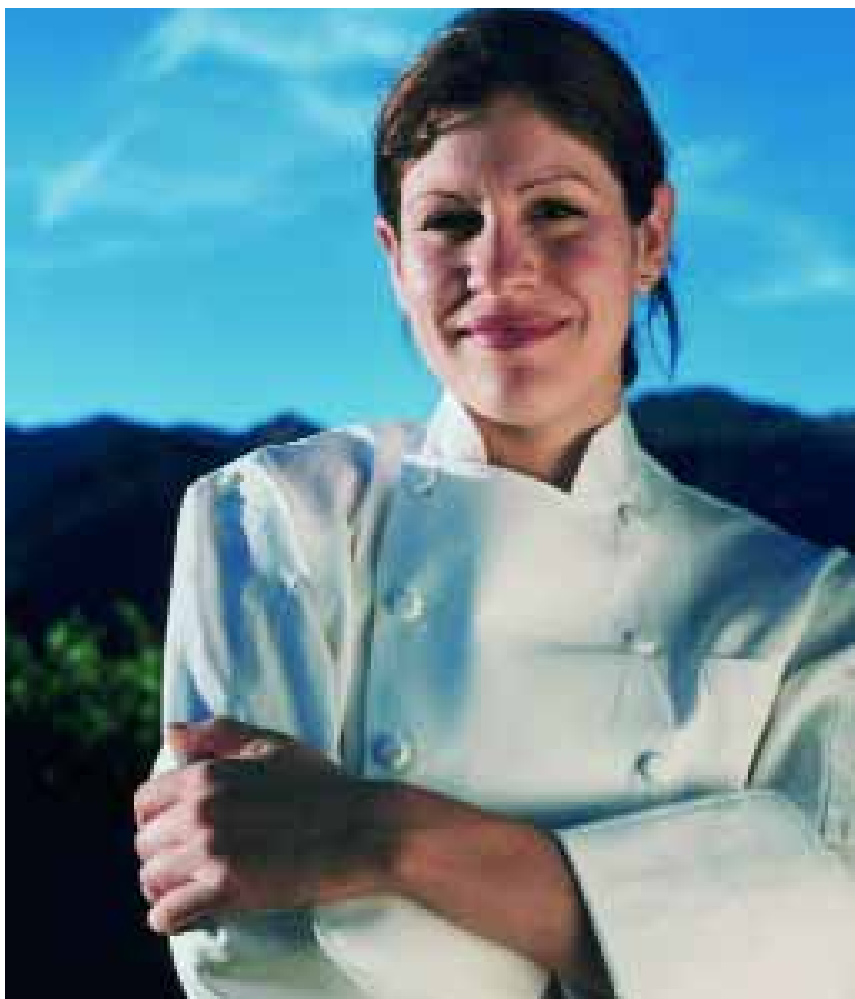
cleared and slaughtermen would again be short of work. He claimed employers were using 457 visa workers—who must be paid a minimum of \$38,000 a year or \$750 a week in rural areas—to undercut local meat workers who can earn more than \$1,000 a week.

The opposition and unions have seized on many worrying reports in the media of migrant workers being exploited to attack the scheme and to call for stricter monitoring by the Immigration Department and the federal Office of Workplace Services. Whether these examples are the tip of an ugly iceberg or merely minor instances in an overwhelmingly successful scheme has yet to be determined—despite lengthy hearings into the issue by the Senate estimates committee in May and October last year.

Perhaps two other investigations may throw more light on the topic. One is an investigation by the Ministerial Council on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs which was asked last July by the Council of Australian Governments to “identify and implement cooperative measures to ensure the effectiveness, fairness and integrity of the temporary skilled migration arrangements, including appropriate and consistent minimum standards”. The investigation was expected to include wages for 457 visa-holders, more stringent labour market tests, English language requirements, and more cooperative compliance monitoring between the various governments involved.

Similarly, the chair of federal parliament's Migration Committee, Don Randall (Member for Canning, WA), announced in December that his committee would hold a public inquiry into temporary business visas, including 457 visas. Mr Randall said temporary skilled migrants were vital to Australia's ongoing prosperity.

Australia had invested heavily in training young Australians, he said, but strong economic growth had led to a skills shortage in key industry



People trained in food, hospitality and tourism are in high demand.

sectors and the 457 visas were playing an important role in attracting people with the skills Australia needed. Now the committee wanted to see if the current arrangements were functioning efficiently or needed to be improved. It will examine the adequacy of current eligibility requirements (including English language proficiency), as well as monitoring, enforcement and reporting arrangements.

As with the Ministerial Council investigation, the Migration Committee's inquiry will almost certainly receive plenty of evidence about the impact of 457 visas. This is likely to include examples of abuse, such as the 50 Korean welders who say their lives are in tatters after coming to Australia under the 457 visa scheme.

The Koreans arrived in Western Australia early in 2005 and claim they were misled about the work they would do and the money they would be paid. They told the ABC's *7.30 Report* last October they came to

Australia believing they would be well rewarded and enjoy a better life for their families. But after they started work on a Perth building site, they discovered what they had been promised was very different to what they were getting.

“I was making a lot of money in Korea,” one of them said. “But when I saw the advertisements for the jobs in Australia, I thought it looked okay so I came here. I was guaranteed to get paid over \$75,000 a year. I don't know how much I'm paid now exactly but I get \$16 an hour after tax.”

Under the 457 visa system, employers are able to recruit skilled tradespeople and professionals from overseas as temporary residents for up to four years. The Korean's visas were arranged by a Perth-based labour recruiting company which, as well as offering attractive wages, also promised health insurance and help to get settled. The wages, however, were far less than Australian welders were

being paid, health insurance was not provided and the families received no assistance in finding homes.

Another case involved a Chinese worker, "Jack" Zhang, who was reported in the Fairfax media last September as having to pay just under \$10,000 to an employment agency in China to obtain a temporary work visa and a further \$10,000 to his employer in Australia. Each week, he had to hand over \$200 to repay that debt but, once the debt was fully paid, he was fired. When the media reported the case, he was evicted from his home because his employer was also his landlord.

Last year, too, the Office of Workplace Services investigated 38 Chinese construction workers employed at a Sydney factory on 457 visas by Hunan Industrial Equipment Ltd, a

labour hire company owned by the Chinese government. As a result of the OWS inquiries, it recovered more than \$650,000 in back-pay while the same week the office also recovered almost \$94,000 for another four Chinese workers at a Melbourne printing business.

Senator Vanstone responded to these reports of abuse of the system by announcing the allocation of nearly \$24 million over four years to fund "investigative mobile strike teams". These were to ensure employer compliance with their 457 visa undertakings, including paying temporary foreign workers the correct wages, and to improve negotiation and management of "labour agreements".

But as the Immigration Department's deputy secretary, Abul Rizvi, told the Senate estimates

hearing in October, most of the allegations made against employers come under other state or federal legislation rather than breaches of the Migration Act. Mr Rizvi said a significant proportion of the new money would be spent developing "state by state arrangements with a range of Commonwealth and state agencies" as well as coordinating cases where investigations were undertaken by another agency.

The issue of migrant worker exploitation was raised during an ABC interview last September with Prime Minister John Howard. He dismissed the opposition's claims that the government was deliberately encouraging the importation of workers from overseas and that this was taking away the jobs of Australians willing and able to fill those positions.

"Now that is not true and the Labor Party is being very hypocritical on this issue because the major users of 457 visas are state Labor governments," Mr Howard said. "There's no greater user of 457 visas in the country probably than the New South Wales Department of Health, so Labor governments are using these visas. They're constantly asking us to shorten the procedures, they're constantly saying, for example, in Western Australia that the meat industry will collapse in that state if we don't let in more foreign workers.

"Yet at a federal level, the Labor Party is saying we're taking away the jobs of Australians and trying to create the impression that the great bulk of the people who are coming in to fill these positions are from Asia and the Middle East, when they ought to know by looking at the figures that that's untrue. The largest source country for skilled migrants, and that's not surprising, is the United Kingdom because the language and the culture and the way of life and everything is still so similar to ours that it's easier to get skilled migrants with the right set of skills from that country.

"But we very happily take them from India and China because we do run a non-discriminatory policy, and the point needs to be made that if anybody is to be involved in a



The NSW Department of Health is one of the biggest users of 457 visas, the Prime Minister said.

Continued page 34 ►

responsible debate about this issue, they should not misrepresent to the Australian community the sources from which our skilled migrants come.”

Mr Howard said where there has been abuse of the 457 visa system it should be punished. But he said the whole system should not be shut down just because some individuals might abuse it.

A strong critic of the 457 visa system is Sydney labour market analyst Bob Kinnaird, who has made a study of the system and published his findings in the Monash University journal, *People and Place*. He notes the growth in 457 visas has been so rapid that, for the first time in Australia this year, there will probably be more temporary visas granted than skilled permanent residence visas.

Mr Kinnaird argues this is moving Australian skilled migration towards the American model. He says it is a deliberate strategy as the federal government has frozen the

permanent skilled migrant intake at 2004-05 levels and opted to aggressively promote employer-sponsored temporary visas as the best way to meet the nation's skilled labour needs.

“Australia has a more deregulated temporary skilled visa than either America or Britain.”

“Australia has a more deregulated temporary skilled visa than either America or Britain,” Mr Kinnaird says. “There is no US-style cap on the annual number of 457 visas and the rules do not require employers to show that there are no local residents able to do the work—or to pay market rates to the visa-holders. Even on the limited evidence the government makes available, concerns about key aspects of the 457 visa scheme are justified.”

One particular issue Mr Kinnaird has highlighted is how the 457 visa program, along with other factors, has contributed to a greatly reduced demand over the past five years for computing and information technology graduates—so much so that the poor job prospects for graduates has caused plummeting enrolments by young Australians in IT courses.

His research shows that between 2001 and 2005, the proportion of Australian computer science graduates unable to find full-time work was at record or near-record levels of 25 to 30 per cent while enrolments by Australian students in university IT courses fell by 50 per cent to less than 9,000. There are now fewer Australians commencing IT courses than in 1996 when the Howard government first came to office. Yet despite the evidence of a serious oversupply of domestic IT graduates, increasing numbers of 457 visas continue to be granted to foreign workers.

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"If the government wants to ensure community support for the expansion of 457 and other temporary visa programs, then it needs to address these concerns," Mr Kinnaird says.

"First, there should be much greater transparency and public disclosure about the 457 program.

"Second, the current policy on minimum salaries should be reviewed and the principle requiring market rates should be adopted as this is the single most important change needed to the visa rules because it offers the greatest protection against cheap labour.

"Third, the [Immigration Department's] employer compliance monitoring system should collect data on actual salaries paid to visa holders [and] this should be published regularly and compared with department-approved salaries for those visas.

"Finally, [the department] should review its blanket opposition

to labour market testing... Some form of test should be mandatory in occupations where there is an oversupply of Australians or declining training opportunities for Australians."

The government meantime shows no sign of limiting the intake of foreign workers. On the contrary, it is stepping up its efforts to attract skilled workers from abroad by establishing offshore skills assessment centres in countries with the greatest potential to supply people who can fill existing shortages. They include Britain, India, the Philippines, South Africa and Sri Lanka.

The centres will target people in the many trades where shortages exist. The government wants its offshore bases to be operating by mid-year.

A recent report from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations listed nearly 100,000 vacancies for skilled workers, including 17,000 positions for

factory and machine workers, and 11,400 jobs for people trained in food, hospitality and tourism. That suggests the 457 visa system will remain a powerful magnet in attracting many more temporary migrants to this country. ■

For more information about the Migration Committee's inquiry into temporary business visas, visit www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/457visas or email jscm@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4560.

Transcripts from the Senate estimates hearings are at www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/committee/S9331.pdf for October 2006 and www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/committee/S9770.pdf for May 2006.

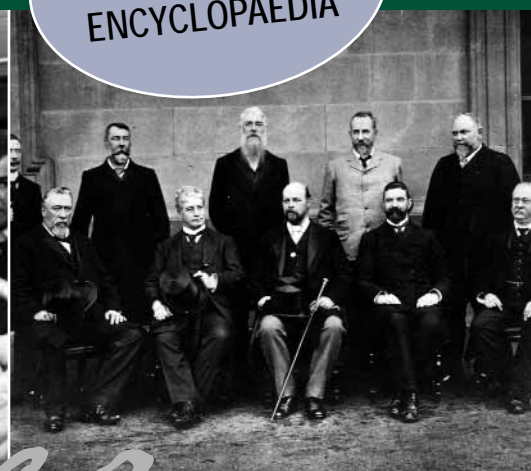
*Bob Kinnaird's paper 'Current Issues in the Skilled Entry Subclass 457 Visa' is in the Monash University journal *People and Place*, vol 14 no 2 (www.arts.monash.edu.au/sociology/cpur).*

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A NEW PARLIAMENTARY REPORT
LOOKS FOR ANSWERS ON HOW BEST
TO BALANCE WORK AND FAMILY.

STORY: JAMES NICHOLSON

Balancing ACTS

Ask just about any working parent about their biggest child care headache and the odds are you'll get any combination of answers in a similar vein. Too many conflicting priorities; not enough hours in the day; too little flexibility for after-hours care; insufficient incentive to stay in the paid workforce, or return to it.

These choppy waters of child care aren't getting any easier to navigate either. A Families Australia survey released in 2006 reported that two thirds of Australians believed that achieving a good balance between work and family life had become more difficult in the past five years.

Photo: jupiterimages

And while the cohorts of working parents soldier on in pursuit of achieving some acceptable degree of balance in their work and family responsibilities, there are, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, a further 182,000 mothers who would be willing to join the workforce if they could access child care.

It was against the background of such striking assessments that the House of Representatives Family and Human Services Committee recommended what amounted to a radical overhaul of Australia's child care system, when it released its report on balancing work and family at the end of last year.

The committee's investigation was set up in 2005 to report on how the Australian government could better help families balance their work and family responsibilities. The inquiry received more than 220 submissions and held 20 days of public hearings in every state and territory. It looked into the financial, career and social disincentives to starting families; means of helping parents return to the paid workforce; and the impact of taxation on the choices that families made in balancing work with family life.

The report—*Balancing work and family*—was a suite of 19 recommendations around the tax and child care systems that would make child care more affordable and more accessible.

It was about more equitable access to child care assistance, said the inquiry's chair, Bronwyn Bishop (Member for Mackellar, NSW), and about giving real options to parents who don't want to put their children in a centre or don't work a standard 9 to 5 day.

Mrs Bishop—a long-standing advocate of child care reform who once described the government's child care policy as “quite a mishmash”—told the ABC the current system was inequitable, failed to provide an incentive to parents who wanted to return to the workforce, and placed undue stress on families.

“The number of witnesses we heard from, who simply told us that life was just too stressed . . . get up at this hour of the morning, get the kids

bathed, dressed, ready for school, feed husbands, get off to child care centres . . .,” Mrs Bishop said.

“And then you've got a whole class of people who are shift workers, who work all sorts of different hours, and they of course are not serviced by the current child care arrangements at all.”

At the heart of the inquiry's findings was the recognition that working parents needed a more flexible range of child care choices

upshot is that it is only large employers such as the banks, universities and governments who are able to offer employees child care services free of fringe benefits tax.

Importantly, tax deductibility was not recommended as a replacement for the child care benefit and child care tax rebate. Those existing provisions raise the taxation threshold for families and allow working parents to claim 30 per cent of child care costs up to \$4,000. The



“The Tax Office allows billions of dollars in tax deductions for work clothing, cars, phones and laptop computers. Why not child care, when it is every bit as necessary for a parent to work?”

and that child care expenses incurred by working parents across the board should be tax deductible.

“The Tax Office allows billions of dollars in tax deductions for work clothing, cars, phones and laptop computers,” Mrs Bishop said. “Refunds for individuals in this current financial year are estimated to be \$16.8 billion. Why not child care, when it is every bit as necessary for a parent to work?”

The report also recommended that fringe benefits tax should be removed from all child care, so that employees could salary sacrifice their child care costs. The current taxation system, the report found, served as a barrier to women wanting to return to the paid workforce and a disincentive to starting families.

Under current taxation legislation, the fringe benefits tax exemption for child care is limited to child care that is provided on an employer's business premises. The

committee recommended that those existing provisions be retained and that families choose between opting for the child care benefit and child care tax rebate, and claiming work-related child care as a tax deduction.

Not surprisingly, affordability was a central theme during the inquiry. Of more than 220 submissions received by the committee, some two thirds related to the accessibility and affordability of child care, and its impact on women's ability to resume their place in the paid workforce.

“Can't you see that meaningful support like [making child care tax deductible] will enable an army of qualified, enthusiastic and capable women return to the workforce?,” asked one witness.

“The Tax Office's narrow view of the modern world is shameful. This is the 21st century, where women are encouraged not only to be parents but also to have careers and contribute

Photo: Newspix Continued page 38 ►

to the economy.”

Indeed, the committee presents a powerful economic case for child care reform.

Its report points to the correlation between strong economic growth in Australia over recent decades and the dramatic increase in women's workforce participation—up from 45.7 per cent to 57.2 per cent in the past 21 years. Coupled with this is the sharp rise in the number of women completing post-school education. More women than men now earn tertiary qualifications and 43 per cent of all jobs created between 1990 and 2003 went to female graduates, compared with just five per cent in 1990.

The conclusion drawn by Access Economics, who were consultants to the inquiry, was that the highest growth in national income would come from more women taking on full-time work and that Australia needed to encourage its high-income earners to participate in the workforce, both to their own advantage and to that of the nation.

“Australia's women are too valuable to waste—and their participation choices will make a notable difference to Australia's future prosperity,” Access Economics reported.

Access modelling found that increased participation by women in the paid workforce could add between 2.8 per cent and 4.4 per cent to GDP over the estimates made in the government's 2002 intergenerational report. Conversely, the forecaster suggested that if there were no further increases to women's workforce participation—or even if increases were limited to part-time participation—Australia would suffer significant budget shortfalls.

“In a competitive global economy, Australia cannot afford to lose some of its most highly-educated and highly-skilled workers,” the report said.

However, the inquiry examined other moral and social aspects of the work-life balance question, and made a range of separate recommendations with a view to constructing a fairer legislative framework around child care access.

As an incentive to encourage the participation of women in the

paid workforce, the committee recommended a freeze on HECS debts of the second earners in couple families and of single parents, until that family's youngest child reached school age.

“Australia's women are too valuable to waste—and their participation choices will make a notable difference to Australia's future prosperity.”

Other recommendations include a campaign to encourage family-friendly work practices among employers; possible concessions or tax deductions for carers of elderly or disabled relatives; and the development of a professional in-home care sector to take the pressure off child care centres and give parents more choices about arranging work and family life, and reducing stress in the home.

“At the moment there are many parents using in-home carers for a variety of reasons,” Mrs Bishop said.

“Some are shift workers, emergency workers or long hours workers for whom long day care is completely impractical. Some have been waiting for years for long day care places and have given up. Some think it's better for their kids and their family life if their children are cared for in a safe, familiar environment—their own home.”

In a dissenting report, opposition MPs, including deputy chair Julia Irwin (Member for Fowler, NSW), Kate Ellis (Member for Adelaide, SA), Harry Quick (Member for Franklin, Tas) and Jennie George (Member for Throsby, NSW) viewed the inquiry as a wasted opportunity.

“For what is one of the most important issues facing Australia today, the report fails to get to the heart of the issue,” Ms Irwin said. “It is narrowly focused on short term political measures despite a wealth of evidence pointing to the need for

greater depth of analysis and innovation in policy making.”

Ms Irwin said the report acknowledged the need for increased female participation in the workforce. But she disagreed with the recommendations that provide for greater compensation for high income earners with no changes proposed for low and middle income earners.

“The operations of existing child care programs, the child care benefit and child care tax rebate, were not examined for improvement. Instead, the inquiry focused on tax deductibility for child care expenses as a cure-all for the problems faced by working parents. As clearly shown in the Econtech report commissioned by the committee, only families with individual incomes above \$75,000 will benefit and there is no real incentive to encourage the bulk of working age women to increase work hours. Tax deductibility for child care is simply welfare for the wealthy.”

For this reason, the opposition MPs also rejected proposals for parents who use nannies to receive subsidies and tax concessions. They said it would be fairer to expand the availability of the child care benefit and child care tax rebate to more parents wanting in-home care, who do night shifts, live in remote locations or have children with disabilities.

“Taxpayer subsidies should not be available simply because parents would prefer the convenience of a nanny,” the dissenting report from the Labor MPs said. “If high paid parents want a nanny to be waiting in the afternoon when their 14 and 16 year old children arrive home to cook dinner and supervise homework, should this be subsidised by other parents who can't even afford long day care for their three year old?”

“Should a taxpayer subsidy be available if the nanny is also acting as a house keeper and doing housework? We don't think so.”

The Labor committee members also disagreed with the report's first recommendation to freeze HECS debts of second earners in families or single parents until their youngest

child reaches school age, saying the federal government should address the growing level of debt. University graduates and students are expected to owe \$18.8 billion in HECS by 2008-09, up from \$13 billion in 2005-06 with many graduates contending with debts of over \$15,000.

Notwithstanding the dissent, the range of recommendations in the report reflects the ubiquity and complexity of the massive problem with which the committee spent 18 months grappling. The child care puzzle has never been so

straightforward that it could be solved at the single stroke of a pen and the discharge of a silver bullet. It has been, and remains, a vexing issue that in so many different ways challenges myriad groups of parents, would-be parents, carers and employers throughout the Australian community.

At the very core of the problem, according to the committee, is the proposition that working parents need a range of child care choices, and that a taxation system that unfairly burdens women working in the workforce remains a serious

barrier to women wanting to return to work.

"The government needs a return on its investment in these women's education, in particular from their participation in the paid workforce, but without forcing them to become the 'over-stressed super-mum'," the report concluded.

It's a question of balance. ■

The Balancing work and family report is at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fhs/workandfamily/report.htm or for more information email fhs.reps@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4566.



"There is no real incentive to encourage the bulk of working age women to increase work hours."



Photos: AAP and Newspix



What some Chinese tourists hope to see from their hotel room window and (inset) what they get to see. Photos: AAP

taken for A RIDE

ROGUE OPERATORS ARE THREATENING AUSTRALIA'S REPUTATION IN ONE OF OUR GROWING TOURIST MARKETS. STORY: ANDREW DAWSON

Imagine this. You book a five star holiday to one of the world's premier tourist destinations. On arrival, you and your fellow travellers are herded onto a tour bus that takes you to a rather dismal three star motel out in the suburbs, nowhere near the famed landmarks that you came to see. Your tour guide then takes your passport and insists you shop at a dubious store in a stark suburban warehouse, where the inflated prices bear no relationship to the quality of the goods. And finally when you do get to see the landmarks, you are told you have to pay a fee to take photos.

That nightmare scenario is being played out right here in Australia, according to Australian Tourism Export Council managing director Matthew Hingerty, who told a tourism roundtable that scams affecting Chinese tourists are becoming more commonplace.

"Sadly what we have found is that there are a lot of rogue tour operators in a burgeoning Chinese tourism market who are prepared to rip these tourists off and send them back home to China after having had a poor experience," Mr Hingerty said.

One of the most pressing issues is forced shopping. According to the Australian Tourism Export Council, some inbound tourism operators in the Chinese market are selling travel packages to Australia at unrealistically low prices, but are then getting kickbacks from shops in order to reach their required profit margins.

"The tourists are taken into so-called duty free stores—not the ones you or I know. They are barns in the suburbs. The inbound tour operator—the wholesaler in China, Taiwan and, to a lesser degree, Korea—is these days acting as an agent of the shop. The problem we have now is that people are coming off a plane and being funnelled straight to the shop," Mr Hingerty said.

"They have their passports confiscated and are basically forced to shop. The doors are locked and they are forced to buy poor products at over-inflated prices, such as sheepskin rugs going for \$1,000 and also dubious medicinal products. They are told they shouldn't shop in Australian shops because Australians don't like Chinese and they'll be ripped off. They are also given poor accommodation. They are promised four or five star accommodation, but find themselves in three star motels out in the suburbs.

Continued page 42 ►



"They have their passports confiscated and are basically forced to shop."



"They are charged to take photographs of free iconic sites such as the Opera House or beaches in Sydney and on the Gold Coast."

Mr Hingerty indicated that stricter controls may be required on the Mandarin-speaking tour guides who accompany the tour groups.

"They have great power," he said. "These are the people who will not only show the people around the sites but also broker the deals between the shops and the group operators."

While a code of practice has been put in place for tour guides, it is not mandatory. "It is a good code but it is voluntary. As far as I know there is no real licensing mechanism around it," Mr Hingerty said.

He fears the antics of rogue tour operators and their guides will leave a lasting negative impression of Australia and threaten the Chinese tourism market.

According to many who attended the tourism roundtable held in Sydney by the House of Representatives Economics Committee, China could be the potential saviour for a stagnant Australian tourism industry.

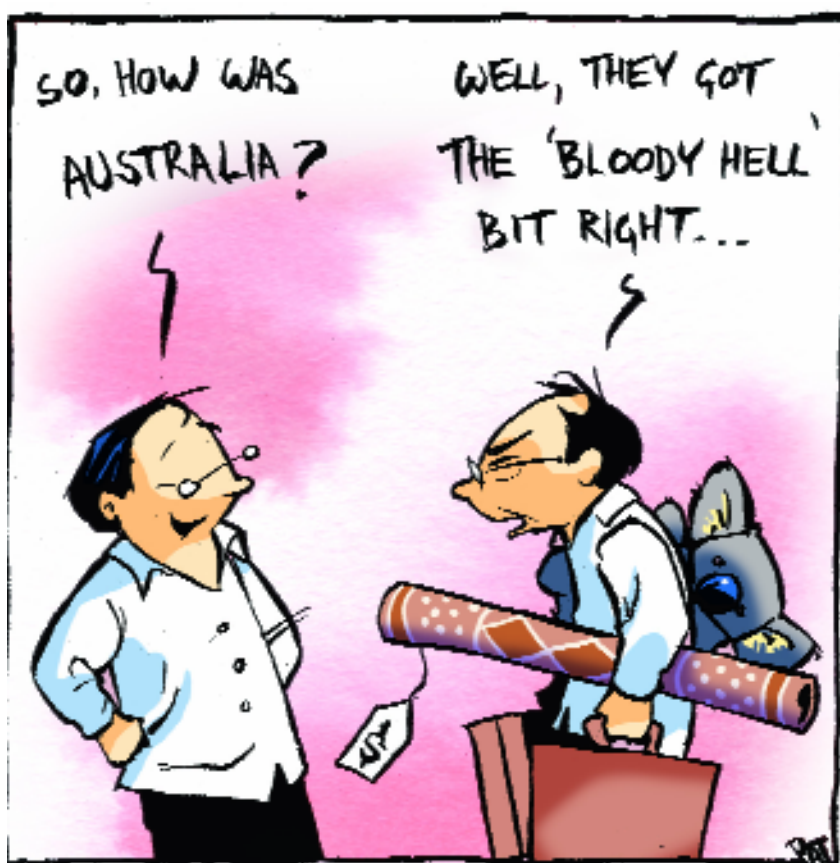
"Tourism Australia recently did an exit survey of Chinese visitors and about 40 per cent went back dissatisfied with their experience here in Australia," Mr Hingerty said.

"When we have a market in China today of roughly a quarter of a million that is going to grow by another million within 10 years, it is an issue we have to get on top of now."

Tourism Australia economist Karl Flowers said many of these Chinese tourists knew when they were being ripped off.

"The Chinese visitors who were surveyed were often quite sophisticated travellers. They were senior public servants et cetera who had also travelled widely in Europe and the US, so they were in a position to recognise that they were being abused," he said.

The Australian Tourism Export Council believes the rapid growth in Chinese tourism is making conditions favourable for rogue operators to act outside the law, particularly as many



of the tourists are non-English speaking. But it also said the problems are not insurmountable, as similar issues were encountered with the Japanese market when it first took off and were overcome.

Tourism from China has been growing steadily since 1999, when the Chinese government granted Australia approved destination status (ADS), which is a bilateral agreement between both governments for tourist visas.

According to the Australian Export Tourism Council the ADS scheme can help stamp out unscrupulous practices because it requires inbound tour operators to lodge itineraries, provide free time in tours and declare commissions. Anecdotally, ATEC noted, the scheme is having some success, and in the last budget the federal government committed \$4 million over four years to enforce the regime.

ATEC's Anna Rattray told the tourism roundtable it's tour operators working outside of the ADS scheme who cause the most problems.

State and territory governments need to follow Queensland's lead and begin enforcing consumer protection laws for tourists.

"Quite a stringent range of measures are in place to monitor the behaviour and allow or disallow operators to participate in that scheme," Mrs Rattray said.

"The reality is that it is not easy to become an ADS inbound tour operator and those measures have been ramped up quite significantly over the last 12 months. The challenge of course is that the operators that are causing the bulk of the problem sit outside the ADS arrangements."

Matthew Hingerty warned that these rogue operators, some with links to organised crime, know how to stay one step ahead of the authorities.

"It is a little hard because it is a bit like a hydra's head: you crack



*Australian Tourism Export Council managing director, Matthew Hingerty, at the tourism roundtable in Sydney.
Photo: Andrew Dawson.*

down on one of these operators and a business closes, they return to Beijing, Taiwan or wherever and come back here later and set up shop elsewhere" he said.

Mr Hingerty believes state and territory governments need to follow Queensland's lead and begin enforcing consumer protection laws for tourists. He praised the Queensland government for introducing tougher fair-trading legislation under the Queensland Tourism Services Act.

"There have not been a lot of cases come to court but merely the fact that they are stopping tour buses, reading tourists their rights and questioning tour guides has had a significant positive effect," he said.

"They have put resources behind the enforcement. To a degree, if you look at it from one side of the coin, they have shot themselves in the foot because the rogue operators are saying, 'Okay, we'll take Queensland out of our itineraries and go elsewhere; we'll find a more lax regime.'

"That more lax regime is just about everywhere else. We have evidence that some of these operators are now cutting Queensland out of their itineraries and moving them to Sydney. Sydney is brewing as an incredibly large problem in this.

"The attitude of the NSW government to enforcement of consumer laws for visiting foreign tourists is an absolute disgrace."

The head of the federal government's tourism division, Philip Noonan, said it's still early days for the ADS scheme.

"The first thing is that we are only now in the second round of assessments of people, so it is not like the scheme has been running for years," Mr Noonan said.

"It was funded for four years in the most recent budget, so it is still a scheme that is working through its operation. Certainly if there were criminal activity somebody would not be registered under the scheme."

Economics Committee Chair Bruce Baird (Member for Cook, NSW) agrees weeding out more of

these rogue tour operators will be vital because Australia can't afford to have such a high percentage of Chinese tourists returning to China dissatisfied.

"China is obviously going to be our number one market in a short space of time," he said. "But if you've been locked up in a warehouse with sub-standard products to buy, then you are not going to have a great experience. We need to address that so people think Australia is a great place to visit."

Mr Baird believes it is vital for Australia's economy to stay competitive as an international destination by improving the quality of the tourism experience on offer. He hopes the Economics Committee's inquiry into the future directions of Australia's service export industries can provide some answers.

"Tourism is the largest employer in Australia with some 650,000 people directly employed in tourism and 350,000 indirectly," he said. "It's also the second largest earner of foreign exchange after the minerals sector. It's an industry that we need to enhance, nurture and look at where the problems exist."

Mr Baird said the federal government can take a leading role beyond marketing campaigns.

"There are a number of areas in terms of encouraging business tourism, promotion of medical tourism, conventions, sports tourism and also looking at some of the regulatory areas to do with rogue operators and what they can do to the market." ■

For more information on the inquiry by the House Economics Committee into the current and future directions of Australia's service export industries, including transcripts from the tourism roundtables the committee held in Sydney and Brisbane, visit www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/efpa/services or email efpa.reps@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4587.



Left: Parliament House, Canberra. Photo: AUSPIC; Right: The Washington Monument, Washington DC. Photo: photolibrary

A capital investment

A conference held at Parliament House has looked at ways to plan, promote, enhance and maintain national capitals.

City planners in Canberra and Washington DC have expressed concerns about the increasing security measures overtaking their cities since 9/11.

The deputy executive director of Washington's National Capital Planning Commission, Marcel Acosta, said the fortress mentality of erecting walls and bollards around public buildings was impacting on the people that work in or visit his city.

"You've got to take back the streets from the security guys," he warned the international city planners at a Capitals Alliance conference held at Parliament House.

"Everyone recognises that the Parliament House in Australia as well as the White House in the US capital deserve an extra layer of protection because they are indeed symbolic places," Mr Acosta acknowledged. "That said, we are at a point now of where do you draw the line?"

Mr Acosta said every federal agency in Washington wants to be secure, but surrounding them with security measures also has significant consequences for the beauty of those buildings and the nearby streets.

"We are getting to a point right now where people need to step back and ask the basic question of what do we secure, why are we securing it and what is the probability of that building getting attacked," he said.

"We make decisions every day about public safety. There is no such thing as a 100 per cent safe highway. We fly airplanes every day

knowing there is a certain risk factor. We have to look at terrorism in the same way—what is the risk.

"We have to go on with our lives and all these security measures are very costly, especially in capital cities, where these cities are expressions of democracy."

The chief executive of Canberra's National Capital Authority, Annabelle Pegrum, agreed that finding the right balance between security and public access in Canberra remains a challenge.

"What we are trying to do in capitals is trying to encourage people to come here and encourage them to move about freely—that's part of democracy," Ms Pegrum said.

"So the last thing that you need is for the elements of democracy such as your Parliament House being closed off from the community's access. Things like the way that perimeter security around Parliament House has been dealt with are very important. The last thing you want is a sense of fear or restriction in your national capital."

Mr Acosta stressed it was important to keep the security to a minimum along the symbolic streets of a capital, such as the National Mall in Washington, which stretches from the Washington Monument to the Capitol Building.

"It's a sacred space and people do hold the National Mall with some reverence," he said. "The Mall is the place where we commemorate the most important things about our country."

He said the National Capital Planning Commission in Washington

exists to protect the federal interest in the capital, with members of Congress taking an active role in its planning decisions.


"In the early 1970s, Congress gave limited powers to local authorities so now DC has its own city council. That has helped create a balance between what the federal government wants with what local residents need," Mr Acosta said.

In a similar way, Australia's federal parliament retains oversight over the national capital, including through a parliamentary committee on the national capital.

"If the government of the day doesn't believe in the capital city, it is almost impossible to achieve progress, so retaining the commitment of government is fundamental to the future of the city," Ms Pegrum said.

Larry Beasley, former director of planning in Vancouver, Canada, found comparisons between Canberra and Washington interesting, with both being planned cities.

"Washington has achieved a kind of an urbanism with very active people-orientated streets and has a lot of those qualities that you don't yet see here in Canberra," Mr Beasley said. "You do have a very strong image here though—that idea of the landscape with those pavilions in it actually works quite beautifully, because it emphasises the monumental quality of those buildings. It creates a gracious context for those buildings, which for national buildings is important." ■



BEYOND THE HEADLINES

{ “There’s a great deal of satisfaction in working to maximise the value of the dollar spent on behalf of the taxpayer.”

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES? DO THEY REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO THE POLICY MAKING PROCESS? ABOUT THE HOUSE TALKS TO THREE MPS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED THE BENEFITS OF COMMITTEE INVESTIGATIONS FROM BOTH THE FRONT AND BACKBENCHES OF PARLIAMENT.

Frustrated by a three year delay in a government response to a committee report on regional aviation, independent MP Peter Andren (Member for Calare, NSW) recently called the parliamentary committee system a place for government backbenchers to lobby for promotion and a holding paddock for would-be parliamentary secretaries.

It isn’t the first time the parliamentary committee process has come under attack. In June 2005 the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran an article under

the headline “Democracy Denied”, which criticised the poor rate of government responses to committee reports and questioned the cost and value of committee inquiries.

But supporters of the parliamentary committee system insist it’s a process that takes parliament to the people, and influences government decisions by providing insight into public opinion on a wide range of issues, and not always in the glare of the news headlines.

The supporters include Bronwyn Bishop (Member for Mackellar, NSW), Judi Moylan (Member for Pearce, WA) and Jackie Kelly (Member for Lindsay, NSW). They believe committees play an important role examining issues in the sort of detail and with the level of public input that other parliamentary and government processes do not always allow.

And they should know—all three have been ministers in the Howard government: Bronwyn Bishop was the Minister for Defence, Science and Industry from 1996-98, and the Minister for Aged Care from 1998-2001. Jackie Kelly was Sports and Tourism Minister from 1998–2001, and

Left to right: parliamentary committee chairs Jackie Kelly, Judi Moylan and Bronwyn Bishop. Photo: AUSPIC Continued page 46 ►

Judi Moylan was Minister for the Status of Women from 1997-98 and Minister for Family Services from 1996-97.

They now all chair parliamentary committees: Bronwyn Bishop on the House of Representatives Family and Human Services Committee; Jackie Kelly on the House's Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee; and Judi Moylan on the Public Works Committee, which is a joint committee with members of the House and senators.

For Bronwyn Bishop, the committee system is how parliament connects with the community. She describes it as an extension of parliament, bound by the rules of the House of Representatives, and vital to our system of representative democracy.

"Speaking as a former government minister who actually paid attention to the House of Reps committees, I know the value of the system," she says.

"Absolutely a committee can bring about change. The laws we pass

as a legislature affect the way people live their lives, and the sorts of laws we make can indeed be determined by the work of the parliamentary committees."

To illustrate her point, Mrs Bishop singles out last year's inquiry into overseas adoption, which received 274 submissions, held 12 public hearings and took evidence from more than 100 people across Australia.

After hearing the evidence, the committee's report was highly critical of the existing arrangements for overseas adoptions. It made 27 recommendations to improve the process, the vast majority of which were accepted by the federal government, with the Attorney General, Philip Ruddock describing the report as "a blueprint for major reform".

"We've had a tremendous response to this report which really touched a nerve in the community. It has increased awareness of the issues, and we're going to see some important changes brought about as a result of it," Mrs Bishop said.

According to Judi Moylan, who has chaired the Public Works Committee since 1998, ministers don't take her committee's reports lightly.

The Public Works Committee is charged with making sure taxpayer's dollars are being properly spent on government infrastructure proposals valued at \$15 million or more. It's for that reason the government is motivated to accept the committee's recommendations.

"There is no compulsion for a minister to take on board the recommendations of the committee but, given our very specific brief, it would be a brave minister who would ignore the findings of the Public Works Committee," Ms Moylan says.

"I think our work is very helpful to a minister, because obviously they can't oversight every piece of infrastructure and scrutinise it the way we can. We have the potential to pick up problems before they become a problem."

One example is a recent accommodation project in Darwin, which Ms Moylan says could have been "a very costly mistake" had the Public Works Committee not intervened.

"There's a great deal of satisfaction in working to maximise the value of the dollar spent on behalf of the taxpayer. There's some fantastic work being done on committees, but the message doesn't get out to the public often enough. The difficulty comes because the media is looking for conflict stories, and bipartisan work on committees is not headline stuff," she says.

"Overall it's a good process and we would love the public to know more about all committee work, because they would see the value they get from the parliament if they could see the bipartisan work of committees.

"I think people are well served by the committee system because committee members have the opportunity to travel the country widely, to be in touch with the views of so many people on specific issues. I think there's great value in it."

According to Jackie Kelly, the ability of committees to travel is an



House of Representatives committee hearing at El Questro Wilderness Park in Western Australia for an inquiry into Indigenous employment. Photo: Andrew Dawson



Left: Recent parliamentary committee reports; Right: House of Representatives committee hearing on teacher education.

important part of the process because it engages people in democracy and makes them less likely to write off any final decisions as “that’s just Canberra”.

“Road trips are very valuable because people feel that parliament has heard their point of view. They may disagree with the conclusion we come up with, but they can’t deny that we listened. We still may go in another direction, but at least we have engaged people in the decision making process,” she says.

“It’s a way for people to stay engaged and connected with their government, and for them to have some ownership of government decisions. I think that’s critical to the success of any democracy.”

Committees also play a valuable role examining issues in more detail than is otherwise possible for parliament or government ministers.

“The feedback I get from ministers, who are so incredibly busy with a huge amount of work to get across, is that they’re always grateful you’ve done the work, you’ve heard the evidence. So when you’re talking to ministers, they do take what you’re saying seriously because you’ve obviously gone into more detail than they have,” Ms Kelly says.

“It’s a way for people to stay engaged and connected with their government, and for them to have some ownership of government decisions.”

But she believes we are overserved by committees, with doubling up of committees on the House and Senate sides.

Another way to improve the process, Jackie Kelly suggests, would be enforcing a time limit for government responses to committee reports, which currently take from a few months to several years.

Having just waited three years for a government response to one of her committee reports, Bronwyn Bishop says she supports measures which provide more opportunities for parliament to debate the conclusions and recommendations of committee reports, and which help to achieve more speedy replies from government. In particular, she highlights the benefits of having a second chamber for the House of Representatives, known as the Main Committee, which was established in 1994 to allow additional debating time for MPs.

“Once upon a time you had five minutes to introduce a report and then it would languish, until it might get debated by other people months later. Now we’ve changed the rules so that at the time a report is presented to parliament it will be debated in the second chamber, which is now a very active chamber for the House of Representatives, and everyone can get to debate it then and there,” she says.

“This means reports are given more timely discussion, which hopefully results in the government taking action to implement the recommendations, or at least respond to them.”

Mrs Bishop would also like public hearings to be televised.

“What I would ultimately like to see is the ABC have one of its multi-channels dedicated to the broadcasting of all parliamentary activity—not just Question Time, which is a kind of replacement for battle—but also the serious work that goes on in committees, so people can see for themselves the evidence we hear.

“I think it would bring more credit on the system of parliament, with a greater understanding of the important work that is done.” ■

Similar, but different

A parliamentary exchange program helps us to better understand our neighbour, said the leader of a visiting parliamentary committee, who spoke one on one with *About the House*.

There is a familiarity that comes with being a close neighbour—a knowledge of each other that comes through regular contact and a shared understanding of the area in which we live.

So when the chair of the New Zealand parliament's Local Government and Environment Committee, Steve Chadwick spoke with *About the House* during a recent visit to Australia, it was just like a having a neighbourly chat.

As with any neighbourhood chat, talk inevitably turned to the weather—in this case climate change.

New Zealand, like Australia, needs to face up to the challenges of changing weather patterns, Ms Chadwick said, even though the nature of the issues each country faces may be different.

"I'd say the challenges are exactly the same but not on the scale that Australia is confronting at the moment," Ms Chadwick said. "For us in New Zealand it's flooding, for you it's bushfires.

"While we are dealing with quite different climatic events, we are very aware that there are some strange weather patterns happening and some profound effects on our water. Water quality is very important to us with a lot of our major rivers and lakes in New Zealand degrading," she said.

Accompanying Ms Chadwick to Australia were members of the NZ Local Government and Environment Committee, here for discussions with Australian parliamentarians and environmental authorities on the responses being taken to key environmental challenges. The visit was part of a regular exchange between committees of the Australian and New Zealand parliaments, which Ms Chadwick applauded.

She said the committee exchanges enable sharing of information and discussions with key decision makers.

Management of water resources was a major focus for the visit, with the NZ committee holding talks with Malcolm Turnbull (now Environment Minister), the House of Representatives Environment Committee, the Murray-Darling Basin Commission, the Australian Greenhouse Office and Sydney Water.

During the visit, the NZ committee inspected an innovative sewerage system operating at Jamberoo, near Wollongong in NSW. The low pressure sewerage pumping system, which does not contaminate water courses, could be applicable to small coastal and lake communities in New Zealand.

Renewable energy was also on the agenda, with New Zealand exploring options to supplement its use of hydro power. "We have a lot of hydro power but now we are moving into geo-thermal energy and also looking at wind energy," Ms Chadwick said. But she was adamant that nuclear power would not be one of the options considered.

"We are not entering your nuclear debate," she says. "Nuclear is an absolute no no for us, which forces us to look laterally at other methods of power generation."

Ms Chadwick said parliamentary committees are a good



Chair of New Zealand's Local Government and Environment Committee, Steve Chadwick.

way to get public input into the issues parliament is considering, including public input into legislation. In New Zealand, public petitions presented to parliament are referred to the relevant parliamentary committee, which can decide whether it wishes to seek submissions on the subject of the petition from affected individuals and organisations. If the committee makes recommendations on the petition, then the government must respond within 90 days.

Ms Chadwick said parliamentary committee reports are very influential in the government decision making process in New Zealand.

Recently, for example, the Local Government and Environment Committee considered a petition to parliament concerning metal bromide and its use in the spraying of timber and strawberries prior to export. The committee investigated the issue and called for the use of metal bromide to be phased out because of its effects on health. In response, the government is now looking to find alternatives to metal bromide.

Ms Chadwick said the government adheres to the 90 day timeframe for responses. She was surprised to hear that government responses to Australian parliamentary committee reports can take up to two to three years. She said getting a timely response and action flowing from a committee report is heartening for the public and encourages people to participate actively in the work of their parliament.

"The public may not always get what they want," said Ms Chadwick, "but they will often get change." And that, she said, is one of the strengths of New Zealand's parliamentary system. ■



Photo: Heathgate Resources

Fuel for the uranium debate

A bipartisan report examines the key issues associated with uranium mining and nuclear power.

As a doorstep for one of the rooms in Valhalla, this report would do just nicely. Totalling nearly 750 pages with 12 long chapters, eight appendices, 40 tables and 32 figures, it is not a tome to toddle off to bed with.

But it does provide unequivocal answers to many troubling questions. Questions such as is uranium clean and green or catastrophically dangerous? Was the Chernobyl accident in the Ukraine 20 years ago a warning sign of the dangers of nuclear power or a tragic one-off event unlikely ever to happen again?

The title of the report sums up the final conclusion—*Australia's uranium: greenhouse friendly fuel for an energy hungry world*. Prepared by the House of Representatives Industry and Resources Committee following a year-long inquiry, the report says nuclear power unquestionably makes a significant contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and currently saves some 10 per cent of total carbon dioxide emissions from world energy use.

"This represents an immense saving of greenhouse gas emissions that would otherwise be contributing to global warming," the report states. "If

the world were not using nuclear power plants, emissions of CO₂ would be some 2.5 billion tonnes higher per year."

It admits that nuclear power, like all other major energy industries, is not entirely risk free. But it notes that Chernobyl has been the only accident in a commercial nuclear power plant resulting in loss of life for more than 50 years of civil nuclear power generation—a safety record unsurpassed by all the other energy industries.

"While the Chernobyl accident could lead, over the lifetime of the most exposed populations, to several thousand excess cancer deaths, other energy sources are responsible for killing thousands of workers and members of the public every year," the report says. It notes that more than 6,000 coal miners die annually in China alone while coal mining worldwide causes the deaths of 12,000-15,000. Even in Australia, 112 coal miners have died in NSW mines alone since 1979.

The Industry and Resources Committee was asked to report on the development of the non-fossil fuel energy industry in Australia, paying special attention to the strategic importance of Australia's uranium

resources. In particular, it was to consider the global demand for Australia's uranium, the potential implications for reducing global greenhouse gas emissions, and the regulatory environment of uranium mining.

After announcing the inquiry in March 2005, the committee received nearly 90 submissions and, at a dozen public hearings around Australia, heard from more than 80 witnesses. The submissions and witnesses represented a cross-section of the supporters and opponents of uranium mining.

As well as being packed with detail [...there are currently 441 commercial nuclear power reactors operating in 31 countries. In 2005, nuclear reactors generated 2,626 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity, representing 16 per cent of world electricity production...] the report has a list of acronyms and a glossary that alone could serve as a school textbook on uranium.

Its 12 chapters cover all the main issues, from the global demand and supply of uranium in the context of world electricity consumption to its role in limiting greenhouse gas emissions; from the problems with waste to the safety and proliferation risks associated with nuclear power generation; from the need to ensure that mining does not impact negatively on Aboriginal communities to the impediments to the uranium industry's development.

Although Australia possesses some 36 per cent of the world's uranium capable of being recovered at low cost, it only accounts for 23 per cent of production and lags behind Canada, which has less than half Australia's resources. The report argues that, provided the impediments to growth are eliminated, Australia could become the world's main supplier of uranium.

Given the threat posed by the greenhouse effect and global warming, as well as the energy demands from heavily populated developing nations, the report suggests Australia in fact has a moral responsibility to contribute to reducing global emissions by increasing its production and supply of uranium.

But what about the concerns regarding radioactive waste disposal? After weighing up the evidence, the committee concludes that claims of waste management and transportation posing unacceptable risks simply do not reflect the realities. The report says radioactive wastes generated at the various stages of the nuclear fuel cycle continue to be safely and effectively

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managed: “Indeed, the way the nuclear power industry manages its waste is an example for other energy industries to follow.”

It notes high-level atomic waste is accumulating at 12,000 tonnes a year worldwide compared with 25 billion tonnes of carbon waste released directly into the atmosphere from the use of fossil fuels. The International Atomic Energy Agency states that the volume of spent fuel produced by all the world’s nuclear reactors over 12 months would fill a soccer field to a height of 1.5 metres. And that is even without any being reprocessed for re-use.

“To date, there has been no practical need and no urgency for the construction of waste repositories,” the report says. “This has been due to the small volumes involved and the benefit of allowing interim storage for up to several decades to allow radioactivity to diminish so as to make handling the spent fuel easier. There is an international scientific consensus that disposal in geologic repositories can safely and securely store waste for the time required for long-lived waste to

decay to background levels.”

As for nuclear power generation contributing to the spread of atomic weapons, the committee argues the global safeguards regime has been remarkably successful in limiting their proliferation. As well as the five nuclear-armed states that existed prior to the 1970 international treaty on non-proliferation, the report says only four states have or are believed to have nuclear weapons: Israel, India and Pakistan—which are not signatories to the treaty—and North Korea.

“This is clearly a tremendous achievement, particularly in light of predictions that by the end of the 20th century there would be some 25 to 30 nuclear armed states,” it says.

Among the report’s 14 recommendations, the committee urges the Australian government to take steps to strengthen the non-proliferation regime, including seeking to impress on other countries the central importance of the treaty and support proposals for nuclear fuel supply guarantees for those countries that forego developing sensitive facilities.

On the controversial issue of Australia selling uranium ore to China, the committee backs the government’s decision to permit exports, but says it did not wish to make a recommendation on whether exports to India should also be allowed. At the same time, the committee says the US-India nuclear cooperation agreement will have important non-proliferation benefits such as expanding the application of International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards in India and allowing the IAEA enhanced access rights.

“Maintaining the integrity of the non-proliferation regime must remain the top priority and guiding principle for Australia’s uranium exports policy and the committee hopes that a bipartisan position on this issue can be developed,” the report says. ■

LINKS

Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/isr/uranium/report.htm

Email: ir.reps@aph.gov.au

Phone: (02) 6277 4594



Australia could become the world’s main supplier of uranium, including from the Ranger uranium mine in the Northern Territory. Photo: AAP



Beyond health's blame game

A new approach to health funding has been proposed.

An overhaul of billions of dollars in health funding has been recommended, including a significant budget boost for ailing public dental services.

The wide-ranging health funding reforms are detailed in a 254-page report—*The blame game*—by the House of Representatives Health and Ageing Committee.

The committee has made 29 recommendations on how to improve the way \$90 billion in health funding is spent. It believes a concerted shake-up of the bureaucratic inefficiencies in the health system to combat waste, duplication and buck-passing between jurisdictions could produce up to \$4 billion in savings.

In 2004-05, the federal government funded \$36 billion of the \$87 billion spent on health goods and services. The Medicare levy and surcharge raised \$6.1 billion. The state and territory governments spent \$23 billion on health, using general revenue, goods and services tax and other taxes on gaming machines or tobacco. More than \$27 billion comes from non-government sources such as out-of-pocket payments by individuals, private health insurance and workers

compensation schemes.

In 2003, the per capita cost of the Australian system was \$3,855 per person in contrast to \$7,607 in the United States or \$2,546 in New Zealand. By 2004-05, the costs for Australians had risen to \$4,319 per person.

Committee chair Alex Somlyay (Member for Fairfax, Qld) said “while Australian health care is often reported as being better than similar overseas countries, the community is getting sick of blame shifting between governments about the inadequacies of Australia’s health system”.

Mr Somlyay said all members of parliament regularly receive complaints about health care, yet the federal and state governments continue to blame each other.

“While the associated political grandstanding often makes for some good headlines, the blame game does not benefit patients,” Mr Somlyay said.

“Patients don’t care which level of government manages or pays for their health care—they want reliable access to quality care.”

Mr Somlyay cited his own frustration with trying to help an 80-year-old constituent who had been waiting five years for a hip replacement.

“I write to [the federal health minister] Tony Abbott, and he writes back to me and says: ‘Look, it’s a state matter. I can’t help her.’ Then I write to the state minister, and he writes back and says, ‘The Commonwealth doesn’t give us enough money.’ She gets two letters from the health ministers, but she does not get her hip replacement. This is ridiculous.”

Mr Somlyay said addressing the blame game will require a national approach to developing and funding health care. “This will require leadership from the Australian government, cooperation by the states and a joint commitment to end the blame game,” he said.

“An ageing population, health workforce shortages, the rate of development of new health technologies and rising community expectations mean that ongoing reform is needed.”

The committee looked at a number of different funding models to address deficiencies of current arrangements including cost shifting and duplication, lack of coordination, treating ‘illness’ rather than promoting ‘wellness’ and concerns about the safety and quality of care.

The committee’s 29 recommendations include a need for:

- leadership by the federal government to develop a national health agenda, in consultation with the states and territories;
- the federal government to supplement state and territory funding for public dental services so that reasonable access standards for appropriate services are maintained, particularly for disadvantaged groups;
- developing a purchasing agreement for clinical health workforce training with the states and territories and the private sector;
- federal funding of hospitals to better reflect rising costs and demand;
- laws requiring doctors to tell patients treatment costs in advance; and
- information on performance of doctors to be collected and made public.

The committee has also proposed changes to public hospital funding arrangements when the Australian Health Care Agreements expire in June 2008. The proposals aim to remove barriers to health reform, more closely link funding with national health policy standards and improve accountability for the quality and safety of health care.

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Following questions on the report from Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister John Howard said his government had taken "very significant steps" to end the buck-passing, particularly in the area of mental health. But Mr Howard also reaffirmed that dental care was a state responsibility.

Mr Somlyay said the federal government had undertaken significant reforms since the inquiry commenced in March 2005, particularly in making private health insurance more attractive and boosting access to primary health services.

He praised the commitment and dedication of the Australian health workforce and the level of care they manage to deliver under the financial constraints they are under.

"However, access to health care, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas requires sufficient skilled health workers training and working in major cities and in regional areas," he said.

Mr Somlyay also welcomed the federal government's recent commitment to address the "under investment in training places for medical and other health professionals over the past 15 to 20

years". "However, attention now needs to be given to ensuring that there are sufficient clinical training opportunities in both the public and private sectors for rising numbers of health trainees," he said.

The committee received 159 submissions and spoke to more than 100 individuals and organisations at 18 public hearings across the country. ■

LINKS

Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/haa

Email: haa.reps@aph.gov.au

Phone: (02) 6277 2374

Education

Essays explore influences on the House

A SERIES of essays on issues that have influenced the House of Representatives during its first century have been produced to assist in the study of Australia's parliamentary history.

The essays, supported by case studies, feature as journeys on the CD-ROM *A House for the Nation*. The journeys explore the way in which political parties have shaped the House of Representatives; concepts of responsible government; the

relationship between the House and executive government; the influence of the media; the House's relationship with the Senate; and the how the electoral system impacts on the House.

The CD-ROM comes with a free 133-page study guide linked to the school curricula. It is available for \$29.95 each (including GST), or \$199.50 for a 10 pack (including GST).

Currently there is a special offer for the purchase of the complete House of Representatives history pack, which includes the CD-ROM, a four episode documentary (30 minutes each episode) and the study guide, all for the special price of \$55 (including GST). To order and for more information email liaison.reps@aph.gov.au or phone freecall 1800 139 299.





Bridging the Tasman

Closer ties with New Zealand are promoted in a new parliamentary report.

Australia and New Zealand should consider working towards a full union with a shared currency and common trading market, the House of Representatives Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee has proposed.

In its report on harmonisation of legal systems in Australia and with New Zealand, the committee said both nations should consider forming a joint parliamentary committee to examine the merits of a union on the back of already strong economic, cultural and governmental ties.

The report deals with reducing or eliminating inconsistencies between the numerous legal systems that have resulted from Australia's system of federalism. The committee hopes its 27 recommendations can help the progressive streamlining and simplification of regulatory frameworks in Australia and with New Zealand. While the committee was pleased about the progress made in regulatory coordination and cooperation between Australia and New Zealand, it was keen to promote ways that would bring the two countries even closer together.

"Australia and New Zealand have a uniquely close and abiding relationship, and it is a relationship that continues to grow closer over time," said committee chair Peter Slipper (Member for Fisher, Qld). "Over the course of the inquiry, the committee came to the view that

this relationship, particularly in the globalised environment that now exists, should perhaps be closer still.

"Accordingly, the committee has recommended that the Australian parliament invite the parliament of New Zealand to establish a trans-Tasman committee for the purpose of monitoring and reporting on ongoing harmonisation of the two legal systems. This trans-Tasman committee would also explore further options of mutual benefit to the Australia-New Zealand relationship, including the possibility of closer association or even political union."

The committee also recommended that a common currency should be pursued and that harmonisation of the two telecommunications regulation frameworks should be proposed by the Australian government. Other areas requiring legal harmonisation include ministerial councils, banking regulation and consumer contracts.

Within Australia, the committee examined statute of limitations, legal procedures, partnership laws, service of legal proceedings, evidence law and standards of products. Power of attorney provisions, real estate, personal property securities, the not for-profit sector and the science industry were also considered.

Deputy chair John Murphy (Member for Lowe, NSW) said there can be no doubt the consequences of federalism have included many cases of duplicity and complexity.

"Numerous submissions were provided to the committee detailing absurd situations resulting from a lack of legal harmonisation in Australia," Mr Murphy said.

He cited one example which deserved special attention, as detailed in the report "A power of attorney granted by an individual in New South Wales (and probably other states) will not be valid in the Australian Capital Territory. Thus an individual who grants an enduring power of attorney in NSW, relocates to the ACT, and suffers a loss of capacity to make a new grant will not be covered by the NSW power of attorney."

Mr Murphy remarked that this anomaly could have the potential to surprise a great number of individuals who have taken the trouble to make a grant.

"This example draws attention to the fact that the operation of the law may have the power to adversely impact the most vulnerable members of our community at a time when those members most need its support," he said.

"I have been left in absolutely no doubt that the difficulties or uncertainties that arise from regulatory inconsistencies across jurisdictions may result in unacceptable impacts on ordinary Australians."

Another example related to employers providing first-aid kits for their workers. All states and territories stipulate different contents and even variable bandage widths, which is an unnecessary complication for nationwide businesses.

Mr Murphy said the scourge of red tape is ever-present for businesses and not-for-profit groups, without the added burdens that arise from a lack of legal harmonisation.

In its report, the committee has proposed further investigation, by the Council of Australian Governments and ministerial councils, of ways to achieve greater harmonisation in banking regulations, succession law, debt collection, civil debt recovery, stamp duty, partnership laws, consumer protection, electrical product safety and hazardous substance reporting. ■

LINKS

Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/laca/harmonisation/report.htm

Email: laca.reps@aph.gov.au

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Treaties Committee Chair Andrew Southcott (right) with Deputy Chair Kim Wilkie following the release of the China uranium treaties report. Photo: AAP

Green light for uranium treaties

Federal parliament's Treaties Committee has delivered its verdict on two uranium treaties with China.

Treaties on the sale of Australian uranium to China and on nuclear cooperation between Australia and China are in Australia's national interest, federal parliament's Treaties Committee has concluded.

The committee recommended in favour of ratifying the treaties, saying the agreements would provide the impetus for the expansion of Australia's uranium industry.

The agreements were signed in April last year and were tabled in the federal parliament in August.

The federal government indicated that the two agreements would be beneficial in strengthening relations between Australia and China. The nuclear cooperation agreement would provide opportunities for Australia to collaborate with China in the field of nuclear research and other science programs. The economic benefit of the two agreements could be in the vicinity of \$250 million.

Buying uranium from Australia is part of a plan recently unveiled by China to increase the country's nuclear power output fourfold by 2020, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions generated by burning fossil fuels such as coal. Although China already has trade

agreements with Canada and Kazakhstan, Australia holds around a third of the world's low cost uranium which will be vital to China in reaching its goal.

"A key reason for the current interest in developing nuclear power is the role it can play in climate change management," Peter Morris from the Minerals Council of Australia told the Treaties Committee.

During its review, the committee received substantial evidence from concerned organisations and individuals that the safeguards included in the agreements were ineffective, because the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards system is inadequate.

Committee member and Australian Democrats senator Andrew Bartlett gave voice to those concerns when he disagreed with the committee's support for the treaties, labelling the arguments presented in favour of the agreements as "unconvincing".

"The risks (security, social and environmental) of selling uranium to China far outweigh the economic benefits," Senator Bartlett said in his dissenting report. "It makes more sense to engage with China on renewable energy to avoid those risks."

Senator Bartlett raised the possibility of the agreements enabling China to produce nuclear weapons, either through direct use of Australian uranium or by freeing up the existing Chinese supply.

Concerns about the misuse of Australian uranium were also raised during public hearings for the committee's review. While the agreements specifically prohibit the use of Australian uranium for military purposes, David Noonan from the Australian Conservation Foundation questioned whether that commitment would be honoured.

"We think it is very pertinent that China is unaccountable and that they do not have the conventional checks and balances that we take for granted in Australia," Mr Noonan said. "No independent parliament, no independent parties and no inquiries such as this will ever occur in China under the current government."

But the committee received assurances from the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office that Australian uranium would be safeguarded from military use.

"Obviously, there is a degree of trust in any international treaty, but the trust is underpinned by fairly rigorous procedures," ASNO's director-general John Carlson told the committee. "Australian uranium will only be going into civil facilities which are covered by the IAEA safeguards agreement."

Mr Carlson said there was "no process by which China would divert our material from those facilities" and "no reason that it would seek to do so".

To address this issue, the committee recommended that the federal government increase funding allocated to ASNO's safeguards support and international outreach programs to ensure that effective safeguards are being applied in relation to the treaties.

The Treaties Committee also wants the Australian government to continue its dialogue with the Chinese government about governance and transparency issues, with a view to the Australian government offering practical support where appropriate. ■

LINKS

Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jsct/8august2006/report.htm

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Redefining terrorism

Proposals to clarify laws on terrorism have been made to federal parliament.

It should not be a crime to associate with terrorists, according to a bipartisan report by federal parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee.

The committee wants the federal government to re-examine its anti-terrorism laws that make it a crime, punishable by up to three years imprisonment, to associate with a known terrorist organisation.

The new offence has raised concerns in the Muslim community, worried they would be targeted simply because they may attend the same mosque as a terrorism suspect.

The parliamentary committee shared the view, expressed in the recent Sheller report on security legislation, that the offence of association was almost impossible to define and too complex to prove. It wants a re-examination of the law to see if replacing it would address constitutional and community concerns.

Since 2002 the parliament has passed more than 30 pieces of anti-terrorist legislation that have strengthened Australia's ability to respond to terrorist threats. But this raft of new terrorism laws has also raised community concerns about their impact on people's freedom.

According to the committee, an independent watchdog is needed to assess this impact and ensure the laws are not being abused. It wants the watchdog to have unrestricted access to terrorism-related material.

"The committee believes it is time for an integrated approach to monitoring and review of terrorism laws and has recommended the appointment of an independent reviewer, who can set his or her own priorities and report annually to the parliament," said committee chair David Jull (Member for Fadden, Qld).

It has also recommended that those annual reports be reviewed by the committee.

"This will ensure that ongoing democratic accountability is built into the system," Mr Jull said.

According to Mr Jull, terrorism law differs from the traditional criminal law in several ways.

"For example, the definition of a terrorist act and terrorist organisation are pivotal to Commonwealth offences and expanded intelligence and law enforcement powers," he said.

"Terrorism law also extends the criminal law by including preparatory offences, capturing conduct before intent has crystallised or any attempt is committed, and some offences relate to a person's status rather than their actions."

Mr Jull highlighted the importance of parliament assessing the quality of legislation and responding to identifiable problems.

"For example, there was criticism that the definition of terrorism was overly complex, while others described the definition as the best in the Western world," he said.

"The existing definition makes an important distinction between political motivated violence and other serious crimes. It also excludes 'protest', 'dissent' and 'industrial action' in order to send an important signal that terrorism laws are not to interfere with freedom of association, assembly or expression.

"No matter how heinous a crime may be, we believe it is crucially

important to maintain the terrorism law regime as a distinctive area of law."

Among the report's recommendations are the need for a clearer explanation of terrorist training and being a member of a terrorist group. The committee wants the government to consider making participation in terrorist groups an offence, as opposed to membership.

"Some offences were said to lack specificity and do not meet the standards necessary to preserve the rule of law," Mr Jull said. "To deal with this problem we have recommended some modest refinements to remove uncertainty and reduce the risk of unintended consequences."

The committee was concerned about mounting evidence on the negative impacts of anti-terrorism laws upon Muslim communities.

"We acknowledge that the impact upon Arab and Muslim communities is very real and potentially counterproductive," Mr Jull said.

"It is incumbent upon us all to ensure that debate about terrorism is rational, open and well informed and does not fan the flames of prejudice and resentment. While terrorism poses a threat, it is also an opportunity to promote democratic ways of expressing dissent, increase participation in public affairs and promote social cohesion." ■

LINKS

Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/pjcis/securityleg/report.htm

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Putting pep into parliament

The House of Representatives is trying news ways to enliven and enrich debate, writes Clerk of the House Ian Harris.

THE recent death of Sir Jim Killen, the former MP and minister in the Gorton and Fraser governments, resulted in reminiscences about the skill he had in the cut and thrust of debate in the House of Representatives chamber. There is a view that there was once a golden age of debate, populated by the likes of Jim Killen, Mick Young, Ian Sinclair and Fred Daly. They were, it has been said, bygone days of engaging speeches, clever interjections and witty repartee.

Perhaps there is some truth in this view. However a review of old Hansards reveals no lack of colourless speakers in the past, droning on to a soporific chamber where the few MPs and officials compelled to stay did their best to remain awake. It is fair to say that the dulllest debates in the past rival the bad patches of today.

But what about the best speeches—are they as lively and entertaining as they once were? Can memorable and clever interjections still be heard today?

Perhaps the parliamentary world we now know is a victim of the broader world we live in. Does the life we now live conspire to dull the sparks on the hill?

It is now common for members to read their speeches. Should this be attributed to the complexities of the matters they are required to deal with, the volume of material they must confront, or the demands outside the chamber that make it difficult to devote themselves to more time consuming methods of preparation?

Or is it party discipline that binds speakers to a consistent message according to the side of the chamber they occupy, with little opportunity for divergence or digression?

Perhaps we can look to the way parliament is reported for some explanation. What has gone are the days when parliamentary debates were given detailed exposure by the media. Now the grabs and sound bites focus on the gladiatorial Question Time, leaving little room in the crowded infotainment schedule for intelligent



Have we lost a golden age of debate when people like (clockwise from top left) Doug Anthony, Jim Killen, Ian Sinclair, Fred Daly and Gough Whitlam populated the pages of Hansard? Photos: Newspix

and entertaining performances, and therefore little incentive for such performances beyond parliamentary prime time.

It is not necessary to force comparisons with a (golden?) past to want to improve the standard of debate in the chamber for the present and future. Most observers would agree that an improved debating environment would support one of the most important functions of the House—to ensure legislation is properly considered (debated) before being passed. An interactive chamber in which real debates explore the detail of legislation and motions before the House is essential to this purpose.

The House of Representatives has taken one small step in this direction by the introduction of interventions in its second debating chamber, known as the Main Committee. Under the rules that operate there (standing order 66A) any MP present in the Main Committee is allowed to ask a short question of an MP who is speaking. The question (intervention) must be immediately relevant to the speech.

MPs can protect themselves from any abuse of this rule by declining to accept the intervention. While interventions have been part of debates in the Main Committee for several years now and while usage has been limited, most interventions have

been well received and responded to and have indeed encouraged a more interactive chamber.

Now it is proposed to use the mechanism of interventions to encourage more interactive exchanges in the House of Representatives chamber itself—albeit in a modest way. The House's Procedure Committee has proposed a six month trial of interventions in the chamber to commence in 2007.

The proposed interventions will be confined to second reading debates, during which legislation is debated (excluding the speeches of the minister and lead speaker for the opposition). They will not be permitted during the first 15 minutes of the speech and they can be declined.

Of course, this is just one mechanism which may help to enliven and enrich

debates. There may be others that warrant consideration.

In particular, if we are to engage future generations with the parliamentary system, the system needs to consider what will make the next generation of leaders turn parliament on rather than off.

Our education system has had to adapt its teaching methods to ensure young people remain engaged, by using new technologies to maintain interest in the subject being taught. Should not parliament, if it is looking to engage the next generation of voters, embrace new technologies within the debating chamber to give life and meaning to debates? Should we continue to accept speeches as the only mechanism for getting the point across in the chamber?

One media commentator recently wrote: "If the general standard of debate

in our parliaments is to improve, this will not come about as a result of the introduction of gadgets or rule changes, but from a determination on the part of MPs to write and deliver better speeches."

I would like to hope that better oratory would attract more people to turn on parliament. However in a world where gadgets rule, where the next generation and the technology they use are helping to rewrite the rules, should we not at least consider using some of that technology to make the parliament more real?

If you have a view about parliamentary debates, email liaison.reps@aph.gov.au or write to About the House, Liaison and Projects Office, House of Representatives, PO Box 6021, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600.

Question Time

The following is a question from a reader.

Question

Who has the record for being named or suspended the most number of times from the House of Representatives by the Speaker?

Answer

The dubious honour of being the most named and suspended member belongs to Eddie Ward, who was the Member for East Sydney (NSW) from March to December 1931 and February 1932 until his death in July 1963. He was named 16 times and suspended 15 times.

If a Speaker names a member in the House, usually a government member then moves a motion that the named member be suspended from the service of the House. A vote is then taken, and is usually carried, as government members with a majority in the House support the motion.

In some circumstances naming is not followed by suspension, particularly if the member apologises to the House immediately upon being named.

Since 1994 there have been fewer namings and suspensions than in previous years.



Eddie Ward has the dubious honour of being the MP 'bowled' out of the House most often. Photo: Newspix

The Speaker now has available a procedure by which a member may be ordered to leave the chamber for one hour (colloquially known as 'sin-binning'). Generally it is only if a member

refuses to leave the chamber or abuses the forms of the House further as he or she leaves that the Speaker names the member.

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION? If you have a question about the House of Representatives email liaison.reps@aph.gov.au or write to About the House, Liaison and Projects Office, PO Box 6021, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600. Questions published in *About the House* will receive the CD-ROM *A House for the Nation* on the first 100 years of the House of Representatives and the accompanying study guide.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee

- **Indigenous employment**
Report being prepared
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/atsia
Email: atsia.reps@aph.gov.au or **Phone:** (02) 6277 4559

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Committee

- **Rural skills training and research**
Report released 26 February
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/primind
Email: aff.reps@aph.gov.au or **Phone:** (02) 6277 4500

Australian Crime Commission Committee

- **Amphetamines and other synthetic drugs**
Report due for release
- **Future impact of serious and organised crime on Australian society**
Submissions being sought
Web: www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/acc_ctte
Email: acc.committee@aph.gov.au or
Phone: (02) 6277 3419

Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee

- **Community broadcasting**
First report released 12 February 2007. Second report being prepared.
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/cita
Email: cita.reps@aph.gov.au or **Phone:** (02) 6277 4601

Corporations and Financial Services Committee

- **Structure and operation of the superannuation industry**
Public hearings being conducted
- **Exposure Draft of the Corporations Amendment (Takeovers) Bill 2006**
Public hearings being conducted
- **Exposure Draft of the Corporations Amendment (Insolvency) Bill 2007**
Submissions being sought
Web: www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/corporations_ctte
Email: corporations.joint@aph.gov.au or
Phone: (02) 6277 3171

Economics, Finance and Public Administration Committee

- **Current and future directions of Australia's service export industries**
Public hearings being conducted
- **The state of Australia's manufactured export and import competing base now and beyond the resources boom**
Public hearings being conducted
- **Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia Annual Report 2005, Second Report**
Report released 4 December 2006
- **Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia Annual Report 2006, First Report**
Public hearing on 21 February 2007
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/efpa
Email: efpa.reps@aph.gov.au or **Phone:** (02) 6277 4587

Education and Vocational Training Committee

- **Teacher education**
Report released 26 February 2007
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/evt
Email: evt.reps@aph.gov.au or **Phone:** (02) 6277 4573

Electoral Matters Committee

- **Civics and electoral education**
Report being prepared
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/em
Email: jscem@aph.gov.au or **Phone:** (02) 6277 2374

Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation Committee

- **Workforce challenges in the Australian tourism sector**
Submissions being sought and public hearings being conducted
- **Employment in the automotive component manufacturing sector**
Report released December 2006
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ewrwp
Email: ewrwp.reps@aph.gov.au or **Phone:** (02) 6277 4162

Environment and Heritage Committee

- **A sustainability charter**
Public hearings and roundtables being conducted
Visit: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/environ
Web: environment.reps@aph.gov.au or **Phone:** (02) 6277 4580

Family and Human Services Committee

- **Impact of illicit drug use on families**
Submissions being sought, public hearings being conducted
- **Balancing work and family**
Report released December 2006
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fhs
Email: fhs.reps@aph.gov.au or **Phone:** (02) 6277 4566

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee

- **Australia's trading with Mexico and the region**
Public hearings being conducted
- **Australia's relationship with Malaysia**
Public hearings being conducted
- **Australia's aid program in the Pacific**
Submissions being sought, public hearings being conducted
- **Review of the Australia-New Zealand Closer Economic Relations (CER) Trade Agreement**
Report released December 2006
- **Australia's relationship with India as an emerging world power**
Public hearings being conducted
- **Australian Defence Force regional air superiority**
Report being considered
- **Review of the Defence Annual Report 20045–06**
Submissions being sought
- **Australia's regional strategic defence requirements**
Public hearings being conducted
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt
Email: jscfadt@aph.gov.au or **Phone:** (02) 6277 2313

Health and Ageing Committee

- **Health benefits of breastfeeding**
Submissions being sought
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/haa
Email: haa.reps@aph.gov.au or **Phone:** (02) 6277 4145

Industry and Resources Committee

- **Developing Australia's non-fossil fuel energy industry (Case study into the strategic importance of Australia's uranium resources)**
Report released 4 December 2006
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/isr
Email: ir.reps@aph.gov.au or **Phone:** (02) 6277 4594

Intelligence and Security Committee

- **Review of Security and Counter Terrorism Legislation**
Report released 4 December 2006
- **Review of Administration and Expenditure: Australian Intelligence Organisations – No. 5**
Submissions being sought
- **Review of the Listing Provisions of the *Criminal Code Act 1995***
Submissions being sought
- **Review of the re-listing of Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Jamiat ul-Ansar(JuA), Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) as terrorist organisations under the *Criminal Code Act 1995***
Report released 26 February 2007
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/pjcis
Email: pjcis@aph.gov.au or Phone: (02) 6277 2360

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

- **Older people and the law**
Submissions being sought and public hearings to commence
- **Federal implications of statehood for the Northern Territory**
Report being prepared
- **Harmonisation of legal systems**
Report released 4 December 2006
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/laca
Email: laca.reps@aph.gov.au or Phone: (02) 6277 2358

Migration Committee

- **Temporary business visas**
Submissions being sought and public hearings to commence
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig
Email: jscm@aph.gov.au or Phone: (02) 6277 4560

National Capital and External Territories Committee

- **Review of the Griffin Legacy Amendments**
Roundtable public hearing held on 23 February 2007
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ncet
Email: jscncet@aph.gov.au or Phone: (02) 6277 4355

Procedure Committee

- **Encouraging an interactive chamber**
Report released 7 December 2006
- **Motion to suspend standing orders and condemn a Member**
Report released 7 December 2006
- **The petitioning process**
Submissions being sought. Closing date for submissions was 26 October 2006 but late submissions will be accepted.
- **Question Time procedures**
Submissions being sought. Closing date for submissions was 17 November 2006 but late submissions will be accepted.
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/proc
Email: procedure.committee.reps@aph.gov.au or Phone: (02) 6277 4670

Public Accounts and Audit Committee

- **Further review of aviation security in Australia**
Report released on 4 December 2006
- **Certain taxation matters**
Public hearings being conducted
- **Financial reporting and equipment acquisition at the Department of Defence and Defence Material Organisation**
Public hearings being conducted
- **Review of Auditor-General's reports**
Inquiry ongoing

Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jpaa
Email: jcpa@aph.gov.au or Phone: (02) 6277 4615

Public Works Committee

- **Redevelopment of the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre**
- **Redevelopment of the Propellant Manufacturing Facility at Mulwala, NSW**
- **Defence Forces School of Signals Redevelopment, Simpson Barracks, Watsonia, Vic**
Reports being prepared for the above inquiries
- **Proposed extension and accommodation upgrade to the existing chancery of the Australian Embassy in Beijing, China**
Report released on 6 December 2006
- **Proposed National Towers Program Stage 1 for Airservices Australia at Adelaide, Canberra, Melbourne and Rockhampton Airports**
Submissions being sought
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/pwc
Email: jcpw@aph.gov.au or Phone: (02) 6277 4636

Science and Innovation Committee

- **Geosequestration technology**
Submissions being sought and public hearings being conducted
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/scin
Email: scin.reps@aph.gov.au or Phone: (02) 6277 4150

Transport and Regional Services Committee

- **Integration of Australian regional rail and road networks and their connectivity to ports**
Report being prepared
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs
Email: trs.reps@aph.gov.au or Phone: (02) 6277 2352

Treaties Committee

- **Treaties tabled on 8 August 2006, including sale of uranium and safeguards treaties with China**
Report released on 6 December 2006
- **CO₂ Sequestration in Sub-Seabed Formations: Proposal to amend Annex 1 to the 1996 Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter, 1972**
Report being prepared
- **Treaties tabled on 20 June 2006, including agreement with Mexico on the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments**
Report being prepared. Report on other 20 June 2006 treaties released 9 October 2006.
- **Treaty tabled on 17 October 2006**
Report being prepared
- **Treaty tabled on 28 November 2006**
Recommendation tabled in Report 82. A further detailed report being prepared.
- **Treaty tabled on 6 December 2006**
Submissions being sought and public hearings being conducted
- **Treaties tabled on 6 & 7 February 2007**
Submissions being sought and public hearings being conducted
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jsct
Email: jsct@aph.gov.au or Phone: (02) 6277 4002



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