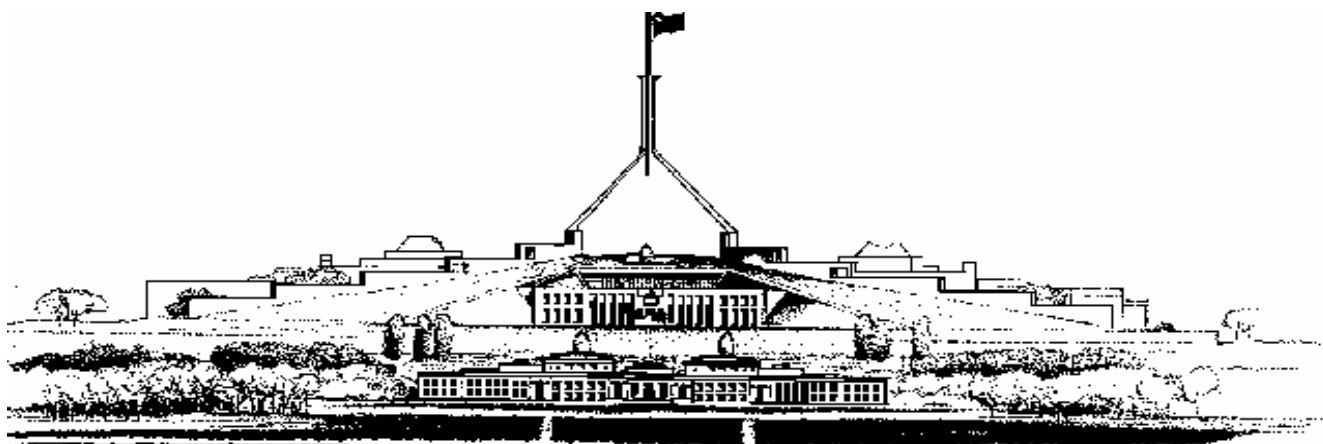




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 2, 2009

Monday, 9 February 2009

FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FOURTH PERIOD

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SITTING DAYS—2009

Month	Date
February	3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 23, 24, 25, 26
March	10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19
May	12, 13, 14, 25, 26, 27, 28
June	1, 2, 3, 4, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25
August	11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20
September	7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17
October	19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29
November	16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26

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

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

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Speaker—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP

Deputy Speaker—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP

Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

Members of the Speaker's Panel—Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Hon. Kevin James Andrews MP, Hon. Archibald Ronald Bevis MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Hon. Judith Eleanor Moylan MP, Ms Janelle Anne Saffin MP, Mr Albert John Schultz MP, Mr Patrick Damien Secker MP, Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP, Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP, Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Hon. Danna Sue Vale MP and Dr Malcolm James Washer MP

Leader of the House—Hon. Anthony Norman Albanese MP

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

Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Joseph Benedict Hockey MP

Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Party Leaders and Whips

Australian Labor Party

Leader—Hon. Kevin Michael Rudd MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP

Chief Government Whip—Hon. Leo Roger Spurway Price MP

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

Liberal Party of Australia

Leader—Hon. Malcolm Bligh Turnbull MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP

Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Alex Somlyay MP

Opposition Whip—Mr Michael Andrew Johnson MP

Deputy Opposition Whip—Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

The Nationals

Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP

Chief Whip—Mrs Kay Elizabeth Hull MP

Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

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Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Abbott, Hon. Anthony John	Warringah, NSW	LP
Adams, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry	Lyons, Tas	ALP
Albanese, Hon. Anthony Norman	Grayndler, NSW	ALP
Andrews, Hon. Kevin James	Menzies, Vic	LP
Bailey, Hon. Frances Esther	McEwen, Vic	LP
Baldwin, Hon. Robert Charles	Paterson, NSW	LP
Bevis, Hon. Archibald Ronald	Brisbane, Qld	ALP
Bidgood, James Mark	Dawson, Qld	ALP
Billson, Hon. Bruce Fredrick	Dunkley, Vic	LP
Bird, Sharon Leah	Cunningham, NSW	ALP
Bishop, Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen	Mackellar, NSW	LP
Bishop, Hon. Julie Isabel	Curtin, WA	LP
Bowen, Hon. Christopher Eyles	Prospect, NSW	ALP
Bradbury, David John	Lindsay, NSW	ALP
Briggs, Jamie Edward	Mayo SA	LP
Broadbent, Russell Evan	McMillan, Vic	LP
Burke, Anna Elizabeth	Chisholm, Vic	ALP
Burke, Hon. Anthony Stephen	Watson, NSW	ALP
Butler, Mark Christopher	Port Adelaide, SA	ALP
Byrne, Hon. Anthony Michael	Holt, Vic	ALP
Campbell, Jodie Louise	Bass, Tas	ALP
Champion, Nicholas David	Wakefield, SA	ALP
Cheeseman, Darren Leicester	Corangamite, Vic	ALP
Chester, Darren	Gippsland, Vic.	Nats
Ciobo, Steven Michele	Moncrieff, Qld	LP
Clare, Jason Dean	Blaxland, NSW	ALP
Cobb, Hon. John Kenneth	Calare, NSW	Nats
Collins, Julie Maree	Franklin, Tas	ALP
Combet, Hon. Gregory Ivan, AM	Charlton, NSW	ALP
Costello, Hon. Peter Howard	Higgins, Vic	LP
Coulton, Mark Maclean	Parkes, NSW	Nats
Crean, Hon. Simon Findlay	Hotham, Vic	ALP
Danby, Michael David	Melbourne Ports, Vic	ALP
D'Ath, Yvette Maree	Petrie, Qld	ALP
Debus, Hon. Robert John	Macquarie, NSW	ALP
Dreyfus, Mark Alfred, QC	Isaacs, Vic	ALP
Dutton, Hon. Peter Craig	Dickson, Qld	LP
Elliot, Hon. Maria Justine	Richmond, NSW	ALP
Ellis, Annette Louise	Canberra, ACT	ALP
Ellis, Hon. Katherine Margaret	Adelaide, SA	ALP
Emerson, Hon. Craig Anthony	Rankin, Qld	ALP
Farmer, Hon. Patrick Francis	Macarthur, NSW	LP
Ferguson, Hon. Laurie Donald Thomas	Reid, NSW	ALP
Ferguson, Hon. Martin John, AM	Batman, Vic	ALP
Fitzgibbon, Hon. Joel Andrew	Hunter, NSW	ALP
Forrest, John Alexander	Mallee, Vic	Nats
Garrett, Hon. Peter Robert, AM	Kingsford Smith, NSW	ALP
Gash, Joanna	Gilmore, NSW	LP

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Georganas, Steven	Hindmarsh, SA	ALP
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Georgiou, Petro	Kooyong, Vic	LP
Gibbons, Stephen William	Bendigo, Vic	ALP
Gillard, Hon. Julia Eileen	Lalor, Vic	ALP
Gray, Hon. Gary, AO	Brand, WA	ALP
Grierson, Sharon Joy	Newcastle, NSW	ALP
Griffin, Hon. Alan Peter	Bruce, Vic	ALP
Haase, Barry Wayne	Kalgoorlie, WA	LP
Hale, Damian Francis	Solomon, NT	ALP
Hall, Jill Griffiths	Shortland, NSW	ALP
Hartsuyker, Luke	Cowper, NSW	Nats
Hawke, Alexander George	Mitchell, NSW	LP
Hawker, Hon. David Peter Maxwell	Wannon, Vic	LP
Hayes, Christopher Patrick	Werriwa, NSW	ALP
Hockey, Hon. Joseph Benedict	North Sydney, NSW	LP
Hull, Kay Elizabeth	Riverina, NSW	Nats
Hunt, Hon. Gregory Andrew	Flinders, Vic	LP
Irons, Stephen James	Swan, WA	LP
Irwin, Julia Claire	Fowler, NSW	ALP
Jackson, Sharryn Maree	Hasluck, WA	ALP
Jenkins, Henry Alfred	Scullin, Vic	ALP
Jensen, Dennis Geoffrey	Tangney, WA	LP
Johnson, Michael Andrew	Ryan, Qld	LP
Katter, Hon. Robert Carl	Kennedy, Qld	Ind
Keenan, Michael Fayat	Stirling, WA	LP
Kelly, Hon. Michael Joseph, AM	Eden-Monaro, NSW	ALP
Kerr, Hon. Duncan James Colquhoun, SC	Denison, Tas	ALP
King, Catherine Fiona	Ballarat, Vic	ALP
Laming, Andrew Charles	Bowman, Qld	LP
Ley, Hon. Sussan Penelope	Farrer, NSW	LP
Lindsay, Hon. Peter John	Herbert, Qld	LP
Livermore, Kirsten Fiona	Capricornia, Qld	ALP
McClelland, Hon. Robert Bruce	Barton, NSW	ALP
Macfarlane, Hon. Ian Elgin	Groom, Qld	LP
McKew, Hon. Maxine Margaret	Bennelong, NSW	ALP
Macklin, Hon. Jennifer Louise	Jagajaga, Vic	ALP
McMullan, Hon. Robert Francis	Fraser, ACT	ALP
Marino, Nola Bethwyn	Forrest, WA	LP
Markus, Louise Elizabeth	Greenway, NSW	LP
Marles, Richard Donald	Corio, Vic	ALP
May, Margaret Ann	McPherson, Qld	LP
Melham, Daryl	Banks, NSW	ALP
Mirabella, Sophie	Indi, Vic	LP
Morrison, Scott John	Cook, NSW	LP
Moylan, Hon. Judith Eleanor	Pearce, WA	LP
Murphy, Hon. John Paul	Lowe, NSW	ALP
Neal, Belinda Jane	Robertson, NSW	ALP
Nelson, Hon. Brendan John	Bradfield, NSW	LP

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Neumann, Shayne Kenneth	Blair, Qld	ALP
Neville, Paul Christopher	Hinkler, Qld	Nats
Oakeshott, Robert James Murray	Lyne, NSW	Ind
O'Connor, Hon. Brendan Patrick John	Gorton, Vic	ALP
Owens, Julie Ann	Parramatta, NSW	ALP
Parke, Melissa	Fremantle, WA	ALP
Pearce, Hon. Christopher John	Aston, Vic	LP
Perrett, Graham Douglas	Moreton, Qld	ALP
Plibersek, Hon. Tanya Joan	Sydney, NSW	ALP
Price, Hon. Leo Roger Spurway	Chifley, NSW	ALP
Pyne, Hon. Christopher Maurice	Sturt, SA	LP
Raguse, Brett Blair	Forde, Qld	ALP
Ramsey, Rowan Eric	Grey, SA	LP
Randall, Don James	Canning, WA	LP
Rea, Kerry Marie	Bonner, Qld	ALP
Ripoll, Bernard Fernand	Oxley, Qld	ALP
Rishworth, Amanda Louise	Kingston, SA	ALP
Robb, Hon. Andrew John, AO	Goldstein, Vic	LP
Robert, Stuart Rowland	Fadden, Qld	LP
Roxon, Hon. Nicola Louise	Gellibrand, Vic	ALP
Rudd, Hon. Kevin Michael	Griffith, Qld	ALP
Ruddock, Hon. Philip Maxwell	Berowra, NSW	LP
Saffin, Janelle Anne	Page, NSW	ALP
Schultz, Albert John	Hume, NSW	LP
Scott, Hon. Bruce Craig	Maranoa, Qld	NP
Secker, Patrick Damien	Barker, SA	LP
Shorten, Hon. William Richard	Maribyrnong, Vic	ALP
Sidebottom, Peter Sid	Braddon, Tas	ALP
Simpkins, Luke Xavier Linton	Cowan, WA	LP
Slipper, Hon. Peter Neil	Fisher, Qld	LP
Smith, Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn	Casey, Vic	LP
Smith, Hon. Stephen Francis	Perth, WA	ALP
Snowdon, Hon. Warren Edward	Lingiari, NT	ALP
Somlyay, Hon. Alexander Michael	Fairfax, Qld	LP
Southcott, Andrew John	Boothby, SA	LP
Stone, Hon. Sharman Nancy	Murray, Vic	LP
Sullivan, Jonathan Harold	Longman, Qld	ALP
Swan, Hon. Wayne Maxwell	Lilley, Qld	ALP
Symon, Michael Stuart	Deakin, Vic	ALP
Tanner, Hon. Lindsay James	Melbourne, Vic	ALP
Thomson, Craig Robert	Dobell, NSW	ALP
Thomson, Kelvin John	Wills, Vic	ALP
Trevor, Chris Allan	Flynn, Qld	ALP
Truss, Hon. Warren Errol	Wide Bay, Qld	Nats
Tuckey, Hon. Charles Wilson	O'Connor, WA	LP
Turnbull, Hon. Malcolm Bligh	Wentworth, NSW	LP
Turnour, James Pearce	Leichhardt, Qld	ALP
Vale, Hon. Danna Sue	Hughes, NSW	LP
Vamvakinou, Maria	Calwell, Vic	ALP

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Washer, Malcolm James	Moore, WA	LP
Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties	New England, NSW	Ind
Wood, Jason Peter	La Trobe, Vic	LP
Zappia, Tony	Makin, SA	ALP

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia;
Nats—The Nationals; Ind—Independent

Heads of Parliamentary Departments

Clerk of the Senate—H Evans
Clerk of the House of Representatives—IC Harris AO
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—A Thompson

RUDD MINISTRY

Prime Minister	Hon. Kevin Rudd, MP
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion	Hon. Julia Gillard, MP
Treasurer	Hon. Wayne Swan MP
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Leader of the Government in the Senate	Senator Hon. Chris Evans
Special Minister of State, Cabinet Secretary and Vice President of the Executive Council	Senator Hon. John Faulkner
Minister for Finance and Deregulation	Hon. Lindsay Tanner MP
Minister for Trade	Hon. Simon Crean MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs	Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Defence	Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP
Minister for Health and Ageing	Hon. Nicola Roxon MP
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Hon. Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of the House	Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate	Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research	Senator Hon. Kim Carr
Minister for Climate Change and Water	Senator Hon. Penny Wong
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts	Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP
Attorney-General	Hon. Robert McClelland MP
Minister for Human Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate	Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Hon. Tony Burke MP
Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism	Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]

RUDD MINISTRY—*continued*

Minister for Home Affairs	Hon. Bob Debus MP
Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs	Hon. Chris Bowen MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs	Hon. Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women	Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Employment Participation	Hon. Brendan O'Connor MP
Minister for Defence Science and Personnel	Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy and Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation	Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP
Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Law	Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Minister for Ageing	Hon. Justine Elliot MP
Minister for Youth and Minister for Sport	Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Childcare	Hon. Maxine McKew MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Procurement	Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support	Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia	Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services	Hon. Bill Shorten MP
Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance	Hon. Bob McMullan MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs	Hon. Duncan Kerr MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister	Hon. Anthony Byrne MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector and Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Prime Minister for Social Inclusion	Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Trade	Hon. John Murphy MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing	Senator Hon. Jan McLucas
Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services	Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP

SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition	The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP
Shadow Treasurer and Deputy Leader of the Opposition	The Hon Julie Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for Trade, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of The Nationals	The Hon Warren Truss MP
Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate	Senator the Hon Nick Minchin
Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate	Senator the Hon Eric Abetz
Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and COAG and Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader on Emissions Trading Design	The Hon Andrew Robb AO, MP
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate	Senator the Hon Helen Coonan
Shadow Minister for Finance, Competition Policy and Deregulation and Manager of Opposition Business in the House	The Hon Joe Hockey MP
Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources	The Hon Ian Macfarlane MP
Shadow Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	The Hon Tony Abbott MP
Shadow Special Minister of State and Shadow Cabinet Secretary	Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson
Shadow Minister for Human Services and Deputy Leader of The Nationals	Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion
Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water	The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing	The Hon Peter Dutton MP
Shadow Minister for Defence	Senator the Hon David Johnston
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training	The Hon Christopher Pyne MP
Shadow Attorney-General	Senator the Hon George Brandis SC
Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	The Hon John Cobb MP
Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations	Mr Michael Keenan MP
Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship	The Hon Dr Sharman Stone
Shadow Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors, Tourism and the Arts	Mr Steven Ciobo

[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]

SHADOW MINISTRY—*continued*

Shadow Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law	The Hon Chris Pearce MP
Shadow Assistant Treasurer	The Hon Tony Smith MP
Shadow Minister for Sustainable Development and Cities	The Hon Bruce Billson MP
Shadow Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House	Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Housing and Local Government	Mr Scott Morrison
Shadow Minister for Ageing	Mrs Margaret May MP
Shadow Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Assisting Shadow Minister for Defence	The Hon Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs	Mrs Louise Markus MP
Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare, Status of Women and Youth	Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP
Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs	The Hon Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Employment Participation, Training and Sport	Dr Andrew Southcott MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia	Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Transport	Mr Don Randall MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development	Mr John Forrest MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Affairs	Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Energy and Resources	Mr Barry Haase MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector	Senator Cory Bernardi
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Water Resources and Conservation	Mr Mark Coulton MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health Administration	Senator Mathias Cormann
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence	The Hon Peter Lindsay MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education	Senator the Hon Brett Mason
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Justice and Public Security	Mr Jason Wood MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader in the Senate	Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells

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Monday, 9 February 2009

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 12 pm, and read prayers.

The SPEAKER—I understand that it would suit the convenience of the House if the House were suspended until 2 pm.

Sitting suspended from 12.01 pm to 2.00 pm

CONDOLENCES

Victorian Bushfire Victims

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Acting Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—I move:

That the House:

- (1) extends its deepest sympathies to families and loved ones of those Australians killed in the weekend's tragic bushfires in Victoria;
- (2) records its deep regret at the human injury, the loss of property and the destruction of communities caused by the weekend's fires;
- (3) praises the work of emergency services, volunteers and community members in assisting friends and neighbours in this time of need; and
- (4) acknowledges the profound impact on those communities affected and the role of governments and the Australian community in assisting their recovery and rebuilding.

I offer the deepest and most sincere condolences of this House and our nation's parliament to those families suffering most, to the communities lost and to a state that will never be the same. It is a tragedy beyond belief, beyond precedent and, really, beyond words. 7 February 2009 will now be remembered as one of the darkest days in Australia's peacetime history. The beautiful towns and hamlets of Kinglake, Marysville and Narbethong are no more. At least 640 homes and their irreplaceable contents, like the photographs of children and the memories of family life, have been destroyed. The week-

end's fires and particularly 7 February 2009 are surely Victoria's blackest time.

Whilst as yet it does not have a tragic name, it is blacker than the human tragedies of Black Friday of 1939 and Ash Wednesday of 1983, and in this dark time there has been a human cost without comparison. 7 February 2009 will be remembered as the day when more than 400 fires burned across the state during the most severe weather conditions ever recorded. It will be a day remembered for the lives lost—107 at last count—and families and communities were changed forever. It will be remembered as the day when the fires raged across the state from Horsham in the west, Bendigo and Beechworth in the north and, in an arc of destruction, from West Gippsland to Kinglake and Kilmore. It will be remembered as a day of tragedy, courage and sheer luck.

Let me share some of the media reports with the House: the tragedy of Rebecca Buchanan, who lost her 15-year-old son, 'Macca' Mackenzie; nine-year-old daughter, Neeve; and her brother Danny Clark, who was 37 years old. Two young girls from down the street also perished inside the house of Rebecca's mother, Jenny Clark. Jenny is seriously injured with burns to 30 per cent of her body after she desperately tried to save her grandchildren. That is perhaps the greatest tragedy of all—that children were involved.

There is the tragedy of Strathewen resident Mary Avola, 67, who told how she lost her husband of four decades, Peter, after the couple fled their home. She said:

We were trying to save our house. We had our cars lined up out the front and he told me to go. He was behind me in another car. He was behind me for a while and we tried to reach the oval but the gates were locked. He just told me to go and that's the last time I saw him. It was just like World War Three. I've never seen anything like it.

There is the courage of Kinglake resident Karen Drenan and her son Jakob. Karen was lying in the bath with her son, neighbour and a dog when she realised the front door was on fire. She then put wet blankets over her 10-year-old son Jakob and told him to run to the other side of the road. His shoes had melted, so he grabbed a pair of high-heeled boots. She said of her son:

He was so brave, he did everything that was screamed at him to do. We called him the high-heel hero.

There is the courage of the stranger who saved Traralgon South resident Eileen Scott and her baby daughter, Lily. Eileen had drawn all the blinds on her home to try and protect herself and her daughter Lily from the searing heat when she heard banging on the door and someone screaming at her to get out. The stranger was Melissa Falzon, who got Ms Scott out of the house and picked up little Lily before the house erupted in flames. Ms Scott yesterday called Ms Falzon her angel.

And there is the story of seven months pregnant Nicole Berry, who nagged her husband Andrew to build a fire bunker behind the water tank because she was worried that sprinklers would not do enough to protect their timber home. Andrew recalled saying to her: 'Stop nagging. I'll build the bloody thing.' It saved their lives and that of their 14-month-old son.

But, while we rejoice in the tales of courage and lives saved, unfortunately it is the tragedy that will collectively remain with us today and tomorrow and beyond. As a Melbourne and a Victorian, the reality of the loss took on a familiar face with the death of Brian Naylor and his wife, Moiree, at their Kinglake West home. I am one of the millions of Victorians who for years only got the news because 'Brian told us'. He was loved and trusted like a reliable uncle. But Brian

and Moiree Naylor are just one set of parents, friends and neighbours lost in these tragic events.

Victorian authorities inform us that 107 people are confirmed as deceased. This total has already outstripped those of Ash Wednesday of 1983 and Black Friday of 1939, and the grisly reality is that the record number of lives lost will continue to rise. More bodies will be found and identified by our emergency services. Burns victims will sadly succumb to their severe injuries despite the intensive efforts of our health professionals. We need to brace ourselves for the increase in fatalities and be mindful of the grief and circumstances of those families and communities. To be clear and frank, it will get worse and Australians need to prepare themselves for more bad news.

In this time of mounting tragedy we need to extend our support to those fighting the remaining fires, particularly in the Beechworth and Yackandandah regions in Victoria's north-east. The stories of commitment by volunteers in these fires have been extraordinary. Jason Webb from Kinglake knows firsthand what a remarkable and heroic job the CFA do. After making sure his wife and children were safe, he spent four hours trying to save his house. One media report stated that, as he hid behind his hot water system pointing a hose towards his neighbour's roof with a wet blanket over his head, Mr Webb thought his home was gone. Then someone ran around the corner and said the CFA were there. This is just one story of many and one volunteer of thousands.

All Australians, whether they are in Victoria or the capital cities and regional and rural communities around our nation, have been hit hard by these events and are at one in supporting our emergency services. To each person who fought these fires we say thank

you. Most importantly, as a nation and as a community we need to extend a helping hand to rebuilding these towns and lives in the weeks and years ahead. The Australian government stands shoulder to shoulder with the Victorian government in this emergency response and rebuilding effort. To the Premier of Victoria and the people of Victoria: we stand with you.

Under the Commonwealth disaster plan, the Australian government has responded to three requests for assistance: the provision of beds for relief centres, heavy equipment for control lines and tents and bedding for accommodation. Emergency payments are being made to help families who have lost their homes get a roof over their heads. Assistance with funeral and medical costs is being provided to families who have lost loved ones or have family members who are seriously injured. These payments are being made through Centrelink and are available from today. The Australian government Victorian fires hotline, 180 2211, has been established to take claims and inquiries. I ask other community members with non-urgent Centrelink business to do us a favour and postpone their calls for a couple of days so we can keep the lines and Centrelink offices free for those who need them in this time of emergency.

The Australian and Victorian governments have established a \$10 million community recovery fund to assist the recovery effort. The fund will cover the immediate costs of clean-up and restoration of community infrastructure. The Victorian bushfire relief fund has also been established and the Australian and Victorian governments have each donated an additional \$2 million. As this emergency unfolds, communities are being identified for assistance under the government's natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements. Through natural disaster relief assistance, the government can help with rebuild-

ing essential infrastructure and providing assistance to local businesses to help them get back on their feet.

The Australian defence forces are ready to further assist the Victorian authorities with the recovery operations. Emergency bedding for firefighters has been arranged so that they can get some well-earned rest, as have bulldozers to help deal with the destruction. The armed forces are also on standby to help, with aerial imagery of fire ravaged areas, chainsaw teams to help clear roads, assistance with search operations and transport and temporary site office buildings to house the recovery effort.

This is only the start of our efforts. The Prime Minister, the cabinet and the government as a whole will do what is required to assist the individuals, families, local organisations, businesses and communities affected by these tragic events. The Prime Minister joined the Victorian Premier yesterday to be briefed on the fires and visited Kangaroo Ground and Whittlesea to talk with displaced residents and emergency service personnel. He visited Alexandra earlier today and remains in Victoria now. The Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs will remain in Melbourne this week to work directly with authorities, our Victorian colleagues and members such as the member for Bendigo. I acknowledge the support of the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite in these efforts, and I know that he and the member for McEwen were in Whittlesea today hearing about the impact of these events firsthand.

The support of employers is also needed to ensure the release of volunteer firefighters and other emergency personnel to attend these efforts. Their continued support is crucial to allow these volunteers to continue their emergency services work. More generally, the community response in the regions

that have felt the full force of these fires has been extraordinary but it is also consistent with our national character. This commitment to helping our neighbours and fellow citizens needs to be a national and ongoing one. I encourage all Australians to make a contribution to the appeals that are underway. The rebuilding of these lives and communities will take months and years rather than days and weeks. Just as the strength of our communities ensured many survived these very devastating events, it will be that strength and resilience of the Australian community that will help our fellow citizens rebuild.

Every one of us here today will do everything that we possibly can to respond, to rebuild and to make certain that, to the extent that we can ever combat nature's might, such tragedies cannot happen again. That will not be easy. There will be a time for analysis when we seek to understand what happened, how it happened and why it happened, but our immediate task is to pull together as a family, to provide comfort and to heal.

Today, on behalf of the Prime Minister, the members of this parliament and the nation, I want to grieve for those we have lost, pay tribute to the victims and praise the courage of those without whose help the death toll and the physical destruction would have been much, much worse. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Leader of the Opposition) (2.15 pm)—It is with a very heavy heart that I rise to support the motion so eloquently moved by the Deputy Prime Minister. We live in a very beautiful country, but surely it has a terrible beauty and we have seen the full terror of that beauty in the last few days. To see it in such a beautiful part of Australia is so awesome. The towns of the Yarra Valley were carved out of the mountains to service the rush to the gold-

fields in the middle of the 19th century. These are beautiful towns that have become so loved by generations since because of their beauty and because of the friendliness and hospitality of their people. It is a rite of passage for Melburnians to drive from the suburbs of their great city into the Yarra Valley, to drive through those mighty forests of towering mountain ash, giant tree ferns and manna gums and on to the alpine regions. Marysville, Kinglake and Narbethong have served as the base for the Lake Mountain ski resort, where many Victorian children get their first taste of the snowfields, build their first snowman and throw their first carefree snowball. In autumn and spring they have offered the beauty of the Mystic Mountains and the glorious Cathedral Range, walks through quiet forest glades, the beauty of spectacular waterfalls and even occasionally the sight of a lyrebird. From the 1920s these towns have become popular tourist resort destinations and loved by people from all over Australia and all over the world.

But at the height of the Australian summer, amidst all of this natural beauty, this serenity, there is a looming menace, because on those hot February days, especially when the northerlies come down like a blast from a foundry and the forests begin to wilt, there is a real menace: truly nature at its most menacing, nature at its most terrible. Last Saturday was such a day. There were freakishly high temperatures and ferocious winds. It was a savage brute of a day, the like of which Victorians have never seen and would hope never to see again. That is the cruel paradox of the land in which we live. Never before have we witnessed fury such as this, havoc and devastation such as this, inflicted on any of our communities. Never before has there been a tragedy on a scale as great as this. This is the terrible side of the beauty of Australia.

Down in Whittlesea today Phil Edmunds and his wife were relieved that they had escaped with their lives. They lived at Kinglake. They had seen the fire 10 kilometres away. Five minutes later it was upon them. It was travelling at 120 kilometres an hour. When we were at Whittlesea today, survivor after survivor told Fran Bailey and me that the fires have been moving at 120 kilometres an hour. Who can outrun—how can you outrun—a menace like that? Phil—or ‘Smiley’, as he is known—escaped. His neighbours were one minute behind him. Later he saw their burnt out car. He does not know for sure whether or not they escaped alive. One minute—was that the difference between life and death, between life and a holocaust of fire and wind of 120 kilometres an hour? Smiley has lost all his possessions but I could see in his eyes, as in those of so many others today, a sense of amazement and wonder: ‘How did I make it and why did I make it when so many of my friends did not?’

We sat last night with Peter McWilliam, who is the president of Fran’s FEC. As are all FEC presidents, all branch presidents and all political parties, he is used to ringing up branch members. Last night he was calling to see who had lived and who had died. What a tally, what a job, what a terrible few days; the capricious brutality of this fire has swept everything before it.

There was another man there, too—a survivor. He and his family were immigrants to this country. They were there, too, reflecting on their survival. The husband said to me, ‘We think we are so smart, with all our science and our plans, and then Mother Nature comes along and stamps upon us.’ There too, sitting quietly against the wall, were two grandparents, their faces racked with a quiet anguish. Their youngest child, their son, lives in Kinglake with his own family. They have not been able to find him. The grand-

mother was sitting there, her hands in her lap, quietly knitting and unknitting her fingers, with an anxiety that spoke more powerfully of her terror than tears or words could ever do.

It is impossible to speak too highly of the courage and commitment of the firefighters, the police and the other emergency workers battling this terror. There are no words that are adequate to convey the praise, the admiration and the support that we owe these men and women. The Country Fire Authority’s volunteers have stood up in the face of the fiercest fires any of them have ever seen. One veteran of 45 years service as a volunteer fireman—he has seen them all—told us late last night that the intensity, the heat and, above all, the speed of the fires was without any precedent. But they were in good heart. Whether they were the men and women at Diamond Creek CFA brigade last night or at Whittlesea today, they were in good spirits. They were tired—they were exhausted. But they knew they had fought a good fight. They knew that there were hundreds of lives and properties that had survived this terrible fire because of their efforts. Some of the volunteers we met had lost their own homes. They had lost their own homes while they were defending the lives and the homes of other Australians. Truly, these men and women embody the very best of the Australian spirit of self-sacrifice in the service of others.

Being country people, many of the survivors are very keen, very acute observers of nature. One man from Humevale noted, and explained at great length, the different speed at which the fire had travelled when it went through ungrazed land at 120 kilometres an hour, like a speeding car, from when it struck land that had been grazed and moved, he said, at only a walking pace. We are only beginning to understand the nature of this horror. There was a quiet young officer from

police forensics there today. He was talking of how people had died when the fireball had sucked all the oxygen out of the air and left them with nothing to breathe but fire itself.

This truly has been a tragedy that has brought out the most terrifying side of nature—the most terrible side of nature—but it has brought out the best in Australians, because confronting the adversity of nature at its fiercest has been part of our national story: Cyclone Tracy, Black Friday, the Maitland floods, Ash Wednesday. And, of course, today, as Victorians grapple with this fire-storm, their fellow Australians in North Queensland face a flood. These are the extremes we face. We are the land, indeed, of ‘drought and flooding rains’ and the land that we love so much; in the words of Dorothea Mackellar, we love ‘her beauty and her terror’. We have always known it and we have always feared it and respected it, but we have always fought back.

Today we extend our heartfelt prayers to the families who have lost their loved ones, and our unstinting admiration to the men and women who have defended the lives of so many Australians in this terrible tragedy. And we cannot hold back anything that is required. The three words that should define our national response to this tragedy must be ‘Whatever it takes’: whatever it takes to put these people back on their feet, to enable them to rebuild their homes, to restock their farms, to recover their lives and to grow again, because they did not deserve this. Nobody deserves a tragedy like this. But they deserve our loyalty and support and they will get it. Soon enough, we will begin the task of recovery and rebuilding. That will demand resilience and resourcefulness. It will demand courage and tenacity and determination. And the communities in Victoria—all of them, right across the state—will require the solidarity and support of their fellow Australians, and they will get it.

But let there be no doubt about the people we have spoken of today, and the people we have visited today—the people of the Yarra Ranges. They are a very hardy lot. I cannot count the number of times I was told by people who had lost everything they owned that they would pick themselves up and start again. We already know of their will to fight, because we have seen it before. Think of this: you only need to make the trip back down through the Black Spur and across the Dandenong Ranges to the town of Cockatoo. Think of the town of Cockatoo. The people of Kinglake know that trip. When the Lakers play the Brookers as part of the annual fixture on the Yarra Valley Mountain District Football League, they make that trip, so they know that town well. On Ash Wednesday, 16 February 1983, Cockatoo was wiped out by fire: 300 homes destroyed, seven lives lost, in a small hillside town. But the people of Cockatoo were not beaten. Passionately, they rebuilt their houses. Out of the ashes, Cockatoo came back. By 1986, the population was over 2,000. By 1991, it was nearly 3,000. And today, more than a quarter of a century after the devastation, Cockatoo has more than doubled in size. With grit and fighting spirit, Cockatoo came back, bigger than ever. So, too, will Marysville, Kinglake and Narbethong, because nothing can wipe these places off the map. They live in the hearts of the brave people we met today, and so many others, and they must live and be rebuilt in our hearts too.

The opposition will give the government all the support that we can. We must do everything we can together, as a parliament and as a nation, to give these people whatever it takes to restore their communities and to build them stronger and safer in the years ahead. This is a terrible country in its terror and its fire. It is a beautiful country in its wonderful nature and gifts. As we deal with that terror, as we respond to the terror of

Australia, so we forge the strength, the resilience, the courage and the determination that is Australian.

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Treasurer) (2.31 pm)—I rise to support this motion. It is one of the saddest motions this House has ever had to debate. It recalls equally sad events, such as the Bali bombing. It is not an easy time for the Australian people.

I also seek to make some remarks on behalf of the member for Jagajaga, the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, about support services that are available to all of those who are affected by this tragedy. We are enduring extremes. At one end of the continent we are facing flood. Yesterday I was in North Queensland, in Ingham, where there has been a metre of rain in only seven days and there is the prospect of more to come. At the other end of the country we have savage fires. It is a stark demonstration of the power of Mother Nature and how harsh and unforgiving our environment can be. The extent of the tragedies is almost too horrible to contemplate. As the Deputy Prime Minister has reported, sadly the death toll in Victoria has risen to 107. Our countryside has been torched. Pretty towns and hamlets which have endured for most of our nation's European history are gone, flattened to embers—their people evacuated, surviving in isolated shelters or even worse.

Country people are pretty much used to such dangers, but this time the fires have threatened and continue to threaten even the boundaries of our large cities, like Melbourne and Bendigo. The consequences of our changing climate are becoming more severe. Bushfires are no longer, if they ever were, a trial for regional Australia. They are a trial for the whole of the country. And the whole of the country is responding with donations, with medical care and, of course,

with courage. That courage is being shown as the fires rage and the floods rise, because the dangers are not over yet. Without that courage, how many more lives would have been lost? What greater measure of courage could there be than the fact that so many were prepared to risk their lives to save the lives of others? This is something that you see as you move around and talk to the volunteers who have put their lives on the line to save the lives of others. We know that many people were fighting the fires knowing that all was lost for some of them—but they went back out to help their friends, to help their neighbours or to help people they did not even know, because they have such a commitment to their community. Many of them may well have returned home to nothing. That is the spirit of Australia.

We owe these people—those who have lost their homes, those who have lost loved ones, especially children—every ounce of energy and help the Commonwealth government is capable of giving them. We in this place frequently disagree about many things. We may disagree about financial crises, and that is proper, but today we all come together to help fight the joint crises of fire and flood that affect the people of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. The Australian government will be providing comprehensive support to those affected by the fires in Victoria. There will be counselling. Centrelink family liaison officers will be made available in relief centres in Victoria to provide counselling. Social workers will be deployed in consultation with the Victorian Department of Human Services. There will be disaster recovery assistance. The Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment will be made available to those people adversely affected by fires. One thousand dollars will be available for eligible adults, with an extra \$400 per child. This payment will be made to those who have been seriously injured and

hospitalised as well as to those who have lost their homes or those whose principal place of residence has been destroyed or seriously damaged as a direct result of the bushfires. The payment will also be made available to an immediate family member of those who lost their lives in the fire. It will be paid through Centrelink and will be available from Monday. Centrelink staff will also be in relief centres today to take claims for the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment.

The Victorian government is also providing some immediate cash assistance through the emergency recovery centres. This will help tide people over until the Centrelink payments are processed tomorrow. The Commonwealth government will be there with information and advice. The Australian Government Victorian Fires Hotline, 180 2211, has been established to take claims and inquiries about the Centrelink services and payments. We do ask members of the public who may be calling Centrelink about matters such as the government's Nation Building and Jobs Plan to hold off, to leave a bit of space and give the Centrelink staff more time to deal with people from Victoria and also people from Queensland who may be seeking to access assistance right now. It is important that the hardworking staff of Centrelink can dedicate as much of their efforts as possible towards helping communities to deal with the unfolding tragedy. At a time like this, Australians pull together, and I am sure this request will be responded to in a very positive way by the public.

Sadly, there will also be funeral assistance. The Australian government will provide funeral assistance for the immediate family of a person who lost their life as a direct result of the fires. This assistance will be up to \$5,000. The armed forces will also play their role in response. The Commonwealth disaster plan has been activated. Un-

der this plan, authorisation has been provided to deploy 12 Army bulldozers and support crews to help fire protection efforts near Yea in north-east Victoria. Defence Force personnel will help build containment lines surrounding the town, which is still seriously threatened with fire. Under the Commonwealth disaster plan, the Australian government is providing 150 portable beds or mattresses to relief centres in West Gippsland. This is to provide emergency workers with facilities to get sufficient rest to continue their tireless work.

The federal government and the state governments are working closely together to ensure that the people and emergency workers in Victoria have all the support they require during this difficult time. We are helping begin rebuilding through the Commonwealth Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements. This includes a range of assistance measures, such as partial reimbursement to the Victorian government to provide assistance such as grants for food, clothing, accommodation and emergency housing repairs and expenditure on public infrastructure and restoration. We are joining with the Victorian government to channel community support to where it can make the most positive impact. The Australian government has agreed with the Victorian government to establish a \$10-million Community Recovery Fund to assist the recovery effort in affected communities. The Community Recovery Fund will cover immediate costs of clean-up and removal of debris. It will also cover the restoration of community infrastructure damaged or destroyed in the fires above and beyond the replacement of essential public assets.

The public can make tax-deductible donations to the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund. The Australian and Victorian governments have also donated an additional \$2 million each to this fund. The NAB, ANZ Bank,

Commonwealth Bank and Bunnings have made their respective branches and stores donation points for Australians who wish to make a contribution to the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund. Today, a number of large corporates have also made very sizeable donations to that fund, and that is a tremendous indication of support from those organisations. Individuals and organisations wishing to make a donation to the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund can go to www.redcross.org.au or call the toll-free number: 1800811700. It is very important that we get the maximum community support behind that appeal. The Australian Red Cross is accepting blood donations especially to help with burns victims. I urge Australians to donate if they possibly can. People who need additional information and Commonwealth help can get it by phoning the Victorian bushfire hotline: 1800240667. The Centrelink assistance information line is 1802211. The Australian government website relating to the bushfires is www.disasterassist.gov.au.

It is fair to say that people all over Australia are shaking their heads in disbelief and asking: 'What can I do? How can I help?' There is so much that everyone can do to help—whether it is donations or joining the voluntary effort. I am sure all Australians will give generously to these appeals and those who are in a position to help on the ground will do so. I am certain all Australians will open their hearts. In times like this, we pull together to make us a stronger community. An event like this does not have a great deal of precedent in our history, but we know that at times like these Australians are at their finest. It is times like these when the Australian spirit and the Australian character really come through. Amid the charred landscapes and rubble, lie a lifetime of memories—memories of past lives taken by the full force of this inferno. We are all changed by that but, in the ruins of hundreds of

homes and in the deaths of dozens and dozens of our people, we summon the strength to rebuild, to renew and to emerge from this tragedy. It is hard to imagine that day now, but rest assured that day will come.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (2.42 pm)—Each and every summer, Australians brace themselves for the extreme weather conditions that occur across this vast continent—dramatic storms and floods, drought, bushfires, scorching heat, ferocious winds, followed by gentle rain and calm. The contrast is profound. For people in the Northern Hemisphere, more particularly in smaller countries with temperate climates, it is difficult to fathom the colossal scale of the disasters that can occur in an Australian summer—the loss of life, with hundreds of thousands of hectares of countryside and entire townships devastated by bushfires in the south while floodwaters threaten towns and communities to the north. Only a small proportion of our population has had direct exposure to the floods of Northern Queensland or the bushfires in Victoria but, through the immediacy of media reporting and the dramatic visual imagery on our TV screens, we all feel it deeply and we are all affected. But we did not experience what so many people experienced last weekend—the agonising wait as fire approached our homes or the sheer terror of confronting rolling walls of fire or fighting for breath as the fireball sucked out the oxygen such that the air felt alight. Nor did we experience the loss of family, relatives, friends or colleagues or see homes, property, livestock, wildlife and habitats engulfed in fire.

As so many of our parliamentary colleagues know, across the nation people are reaching out to the thousands of Victorians whose lives have been so dramatically affected by these dreadful fires. We say to all those affected, while we cannot share your

experience, we can provide support to you and try to comfort you as you start to rebuild your lives. For many people life will never be the same—the loss too great, the scars too deep. For many communities the task of rebuilding will take years, not weeks or months; decades even. For some it will take a generation or more.

I grew up in the Adelaide Hills in South Australia where the threat of bushfires was ever present—it was always with us. The year before I was born, a bushfire known as Black Sunday swept through the Hills with incredible ferocity. I am told it was so quick and so furious that it was over in a matter of hours. While very few lives were lost, the damage to property, services and business was incalculable—our orchard was razed to the ground; pine plantations ready for harvest and livestock were burned. It was 20 years or more before it returned a profit. Whole Hills communities were devastated and our lives were divided into two: life before Black Sunday and life after Black Sunday.

At my local primary school, the compulsory reading list in the mid-sixties included *February Dragon*, Colin Thiele's story of the everyday lives of people in a township halfway between Melbourne and Adelaide, where the fearful February dragon, a bushfire, is unleashed through stupidity and carelessness with tragic consequences for the whole town. We all related to this story for it reflected our own community's experience of a relatively simple and uncomplicated life before Black Sunday with the harsh and complex realities of life after Black Sunday. That is how it was until Ash Wednesday in 1983, when we experienced something more horrific than we had experienced before. It was a terrifying ordeal for South Australians and Victorians. Seventy-five lives were lost in fire-storm conditions over 12 hours or more—sudden and violent wind changes

engulfing all in its path. As people once more set about picking up the pieces, they again divided their lives into life before Ash Wednesday and life after Ash Wednesday. That is how it will be for the family and friends of those who died last weekend in the Victorian bushfires.

We must reassure those who have lost their families, their homes, their belongings, their treasures, their businesses and their livelihoods that the Australian people understand that it will take time to heal the communities and that we are prepared for that. We must all appreciate and recognise that it takes time to re-establish lives, homes, farms, businesses and services. So our support must be ongoing. Our compassion for their plight must continue for as long as it is needed. Times of tragedy remind us of the fundamental, the essential and the enduring elements of human life—the bonds of family and friends and the bonds of communities—as people care for each other and look out for each other. This is exemplified by the heroic efforts of our emergency workers, particularly our firefighters. Many of them are volunteers, who put their lives at risk to save others. The whole nation thanks them for their selfless actions. At this time, we also think of the families of the emergency workers and the firefighters and understand and know what they go through during these terrible times as their loved ones leave their own homes to defend the lives and property of others.

My father was a volunteer firefighter for over 50 years. I can recall so vividly the sound of the siren at the local fire station during the summer months as it would wail out across the valley. I recall that sinking feeling as my father would head off to fight a fire, often to an unknown destination. Sometimes it would be days before we heard from him. All the while we would try to keep calm, trusting that he would return in time

should our home be threatened by fire. So while we acknowledge the courage of our emergency workers and firefighters, we also remember their families, who are anxiously waiting for their safe return, knowing the dangerous and unpredictable circumstances that they face no matter how experienced or seasoned they may be.

Over many years Australia has battled to gain a better understanding of the nature of bushfires and the complex environmental, economic and social impact. A more nationally coordinated approach to bushfire research was boosted in 2003 with the formation of the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre, which combines the efforts of more than 30 research, fire and land management agencies in Australia and New Zealand. As its press release of 12 January said:

Better resourcing, technology, community understanding, communications, acceptance of fire as a natural occurrence and the sharing of risk between property owners and fire agencies are just some of the lessons still being learnt through experience and rigorous scientific research.

After a civil disaster of this magnitude, it is hard to fathom the loss of life or quantify the emotional and economic cost, including the irreplaceable resources, to individuals and communities. But there are lessons to be learned and through research we must hold the hope that such disasters can be mitigated in the future. Australians are a resilient and optimistic people. While the prospect of rebuilding shattered lives may seem daunting, even insurmountable, today, it will be undertaken, it must be undertaken, with all the support that the Australian people, individually and through their governments, can offer and for however long it takes. I join with colleagues in offering our deepest condolences to the people of Victoria.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (2.52 pm)—I commend the previous speakers and of course the motion. This

is unquestionably Australia's worst natural disaster. On current count, 107 lives have been lost but, as the Deputy Prime Minister indicated, regrettably that figure is likely to go higher. While it is truly a national disaster, it is unquestionably a personal tragedy for so many Australians.

My family, like that of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, was affected by bushfire, in my case in 1994. As for so many Australians, I would think, these events have rekindled memories of the distress of that occasion. I can remember the fire moving literally at the speed of the wind across the Georges River. I can remember the young police officer trundling around—and sprinting around at the later stages—to get people out of their homes. I can remember returning home, with the lack of knowledge as to whether the house had survived, and seeing a neighbour whom I had never met before and have never seen since tipping buckets of water from the neighbour's pool over fire surrounding the house. Unquestionably, that neighbour saved our home. Quite clearly, there are thousands and thousands of that neighbour around Australia and their experiences have been told and will be told.

As the Deputy Leader of the Opposition also indicated, many, many lives will never be the same again, particularly for those who have suffered the loss of a loved one. While we in this parliament can only acknowledge and identify with as best we can the suffering that has occurred, what we can do is commit to working together to assist the thousands of people and their families and communities to rebuild. As the Leader of the Opposition said, whatever it takes is what we are committed to.

Could I acknowledge the many messages of condolence from governments overseas and offers of assistance. The Victorian people should be aware of the intensity and

depth of support for them. I also indicate our support and appreciation for the professionals in our volunteer services and, obviously, the volunteers themselves.

The government has taken immediate steps, as any government would, by establishing a \$10 million emergency relief fund. But, as has been indicated, there will be much work to do in the rehabilitation ahead. The federal and state governments have also donated \$4 million towards the official Victorian disaster relief appeal and, as has been indicated, Australians wanting to contribute to that appeal can do so by contacting the Red Cross. It has also been acknowledged by the Treasurer that there are private funds, notably from the National Australia Bank and the Bendigo Bank, that people are also able to contribute to.

In addition to the payments that were outlined by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Treasurer, there are payments available for individuals and businesses, including farms, that have been affected by the disaster, as well as assistance for emergency accommodation. That is available on the same contact number that was provided by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Treasurer.

The work of organisations such as the Red Cross and the Salvation Army is outstanding, and the government has provided some additional assistance to enable them to continue that excellent work. As has also been acknowledged during the debate, the work of volunteer organisations around the state has been outstanding. The government has brought forward funding of some \$2.6 million to assist those 160, at our count, emergency relief organisations who may need assistance in the short term, and they should not hesitate to call upon that.

Also in distress are the numbers of people who have not yet been able to make contact with their loved ones. In that context we

would encourage all those who have been displaced to either contact the emergency relief agencies that are on the ground or phone 1800 727 033. Equally, anyone wanting to know the whereabouts of a friend or loved one is entitled to contact that number.

As has been pointed out, while we are obviously already focusing on the relief and recovery arrangements, the fires are still being fought by dedicated professionals and volunteers. We acknowledge their courage and tirelessness and appropriately, as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition indicated, the support that they have from their families. They have quite clearly prioritised the safety of the community over and above their own personal circumstances. Indeed, one of the more tragic stories is of volunteer fire-fighters who, on at least two occasions, have unfortunately lost loved ones who were left behind.

Details of the Victorian Country Fire Authority and numbers for contacting the authority should anyone be concerned about further developments or ongoing fire risks have already been given, and I will not repeat those.

I would, as I indicated the other day, express tremendous appreciation and admiration for the work of Emergency Management Australia. They are one of those organisations who are not to the forefront but behind the scenes. The Leader of the Opposition also received a briefing from them yesterday. They are doing an outstanding job in coordinating a whole-of-government response within federal agencies and across state agencies.

Appreciation has appropriately been expressed to the Australian defence forces, who have had representatives embedded in that structure. The fact that we have been able to obtain so many resources from the Australian defence forces has meant that we have

not experienced the delay of acquiring those resources from private sources. In addition, the defence forces have contributed permanent personnel and a great number of reservists to assist in erecting tents and setting up stretchers and the like.

As has also been indicated today, the Australian defence forces have contributed expertise in search and rescue capability. Those soldiers will be self-contained. They will be able to travel far and wide to more remote communities to search for any person who may need assistance or, regrettably, to find if someone has lost their lives. As well, the fact that we are able to use defence aircraft for imagery will enable work to commence quickly on the rehabilitation of critical infrastructure that will be very important for getting the states on the road.

I should again also indicate our appreciation. Necessarily, an event such as this calls on the first responders, who are essentially state agencies, but it also demonstrates that this is truly a national crisis. It has been received as such, and I commend those volunteers who have come in from other states to support Victorian firefighters. While this is unquestionably a national disaster, it is a personal tragedy for so many Victorians, our fellow Australians, and I acknowledge that it is being treated as such by the authorities nationally and in the state.

I commend the Victorian Police Commissioner, who is clearly treating each individual loss of life with dignity, respect and resolve. She has indicated that she is regarding each fire as a potential crime scheme and that she will ensure that the full weight of the law is brought down on those who may have been responsible for deliberately lighting those fires. I also express our appreciation to the Australian Federal Police, who have contributed some 90 experts in victim identification and forensics to assist in that law enforce-

ment operation. On a serious note, I say—and I know this is heartfelt across the chamber—that anyone who lights fires deliberately, with reckless disregard for the safety of their fellow Australians, in our view, establishes the requisite criminal intent that would sustain a charge of murder.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

Mr McCLELLAND—I note in fact that the Prime Minister has referred to such people as murderers. We would point out again that the same criminal principles in respect of accomplices apply, and we would strongly recommend anyone who has information about the deliberate lighting of fires to approach the authorities to provide that information.

We recognise and praise, as all speakers have done, the dedication and professionalism of those involved in fighting these fires, and we are full of admiration. But equally, as all speakers have indicated, there are lessons to be learned. While we support, salute and encourage them, we will obtain the debriefings, we will analyse, we will research, as has been said, and we will ensure that we learn all available lessons to, as best we can, prevent these events from ever occurring again.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (3.02 pm)—I rise to support this condolence motion with the same feelings of shock, sadness and horror that are undoubtedly shared with everyone in this House and indeed all Australians. Even Dorothea Mackellar, the woman who captured the contrasting nature of rural Australia as no-one has done before or since, would most likely have been lost for words today as she tried to explain the horror that has struck her country, my country, our country over these last few days. Amidst the beauty and the wonder of our country, it can also be harsh and cruel.

How can the idyllic landscapes also become killing fields?

No-one expected the horror of Victoria's Black Friday in 1939. No-one thought it could happen again until Ash Wednesday struck with greater ferocity and death in 1983. 'Never again,' people said on that occasion. But, of course, tragically, we now know that it can happen again with greater power and loss of life—and in fact it has. This is the worst natural disaster in Australia's recorded history in terms of lives lost and dwarfs any other peacetime disaster in its sheer scale and heartbreak. It came upon the communities with frightening speed. It crept up on the nation without warning. Earlier reports on Saturday suggested there may not have been any loss of life, but as the evening wore on we all fervently hoped that the rising death toll would be contained at levels that were already far too high. Today, with Victoria still burning and destroyed homes, businesses, cars and bushland still to be explored, we still do not know what the final loss of life will be. I am told the latest report as of a few minutes ago is that the death toll is now confirmed to be 128, and there may in fact be more.

One thing that I do know today is that Australian resilience will again come to the fore. The towns like Kinglake, Marysville, Narbethong, Callignee and Corinella will be rebuilt. Buildings can of course rise again and, as earlier speakers have said, can be rebuilt even with greater grandeur. Those who survived the weekend were born and bred in these places or they were born elsewhere and chose to live there and have grown to love these beautiful towns and communities. Most will want to stay and build their homes in spite of the heartbreak and the hardship and their businesses and their lives will be resumed.

As our population has drifted over the past decades to the cities and to the coast, Australians have retained our love, our attachment and our admiration for the bush and we cling to it wherever we can. What I think many of us in this place do not always understand is the attachment to the land that is felt by many country Australians. What they will do and what hardships they will endure to maintain that link are a precious part of Australia's heritage. There might be some in the coming days who will ask why people live in areas that are bushfire prone. I say in reply: they are doing things that are important—important for them and important for their country. It is not bloody-mindedness; these are their homes. That is what is important to them and to their family—and, if it is important to them and them and their family, it is important to our nation.

The first priority is of course to extinguish the fires that still seriously threaten lives and buildings. Hopefully, the change of weather will mean that the worst is behind us. But, for the survivors, a new struggle is already on. I strongly support the measures announced today, and any other existing government measures, to ensure that the people in fire-ravaged Victoria can rebuild. We must stand ready to offer any further measures that may be needed to ensure that, at the appropriate time, after the mourning, reconstruction can start promptly. The short-term assistance that the government has offered will need to stretch into long-term assistance. I am sure that the three levels of government will do whatever is needed and that, once again, the generosity of the Australian people will come to the fore.

The federal member for Gippsland, Darren Chester, has remained in his electorate today to offer whatever support he can to the people in his communities. I spoke to him just an hour or so ago—and 21 of the confirmed deaths are in the Gippsland area.

Whilst there has been quite a lot of media attention given to the fires around Churchill, in the plantation timber forests and in other areas, it is the little hamlets of Calignee and Corinella that have been particularly harshly hit. These little communities, near Traralgon, still have fires burning around them. He reminded me also of the people of Boolarra, where 30 homes were destroyed in a much less reported fire just last week. Last Friday the local radio station launched an appeal and raised \$100,000 locally for the people of Boolarra. Many of the people who gave to that appeal now need much more themselves. We think very much, and with gratitude, of those people who are working hard to maintain the spirit of the local communities and to start planning for rebuilding.

The member for Gippsland told me some miraculous stories of people who have survived, and of others who seemed to be well-prepared but were just overwhelmed. He spoke of people standing in front of their destroyed homes, their lost businesses, their lost possessions, in shock and disbelief, but saying: 'We're the lucky ones; we're alive.' He also spoke—and I refer to the matters raised by the Attorney-General—of a building anger if reports that these fires were deliberately lit prove to be true. How could there be any Australian who would do such a thing? The whole nation has every right to rise in horror at the actions of people who respond in this way. The member for Gippsland also mentioned the emergency crews, the community workers and the councils, who are doing all they possibly can to ensure that the immediate needs of the people are being met.

Through the work of so many people on the ground helping the victims today, they can be assured that all Australians are thinking of them. At times like these they are not alone. The rest of Australia has begun to respond and help financially. The official ap-

peals have begun and members of parliament are launching their own appeals. I am sure that this is one way in which we can all demonstrate our commitment to our fellow Australians at this time—those who are suffering a particular difficulty. The horror that these people have been through cannot in any full sense be shared with others, but we can offer them our loyalty, our support, our love, our care and our commitment for the future. We think especially of the injured—and many of them are seriously injured. We think of the doctors and nurses who are caring for them. We think of the loss of property. We think of the firefighters, the emergency workers, the police and the armed forces, who are doing so much to provide assistance at this vital time. We think of the counsellors and the people providing moral courage and support to so many in need. I stand with the others who have spoken before me, and with those who will speak afterwards and those who will not have an opportunity to speak today but feel the same things in their hearts. Fellow Australians who have been dreadfully struck by these events: you are not alone. All Australians are with you and we will help you in the years ahead.

Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (3.11 pm)—I too rise in support of this condolence motion. No matter how good the news reporter, no matter how skilled the photographer, no matter how brave the cameraman, it is impossible for most of us to appreciate from media reports just what it is like to experience a horrific bushfire. When you speak to people who have been through these horrors, you hear firsthand about the towering flames and the unbelievable speed with which they engulf everything before them. You hear about the unbearable heat that burns your skin, blisters paint and melts solid objects before your very eyes. You hear about the dense, acrid smoke that makes it impossible to see more than a couple of feet around you—

smoke that chokes and burns your airways as you try to breathe and irritates your eyes, making it even harder for you to see. You hear about the noise—the roar of the flames, the wailing of the sirens, the beating rotors of water-bombing helicopters and the intermittent explosions as the heat ignites gas cylinders. You hear about the guts and determination to save family members, pets and livestock, family homes and lifetimes of possessions. You hear about successful efforts to defeat the flames against all odds, and you hear about the despair when the flames win the unequal battle and devour homes and memories. And of course you hear about the loss of life—of family, friends, neighbours, pets, livestock and native wildlife.

Last weekend was one of the darkest in Victoria's history. We knew it was coming. Weather forecasters had been telling us for weeks that the conditions were going to be deadly, the worst since Ash Wednesday 1983. Temperatures soared all around the state, and more than a month without rain compounded the effects of more than a decade of drought. The emergency services had been issuing warnings for days. Ten days earlier my electorate had a foretaste of what we could expect, when smaller fires threatened the townships of Malmsbury and Tara-dale. Many rural residents around my electorate heeded this warning and reviewed their personal fire-management plans. Fire-fighting equipment was checked and checked again. Protective clothing was at the ready. Last Saturday morning dawned bright and clear. Within hours the mercury was climbing as the temperature broke new records. The wind speed increased until it resembled some gigantic fan heater. Many people in Bendigo had been out early to do their shopping and had retreated to the comfort of their air conditioners to sit out the day. The day seemed to be passing quietly—until mid-afternoon.

Then, as the Prime Minister has said, 'Hell in all its fury visited the good people of Victoria.' It visited Bendigo in the form of a firestorm in the inner suburb of Maiden Gully. Within minutes 15-metre high flames raced through the tinder dry undergrowth towards the suburbs of West Bendigo, California Gully, Long Gully and Eaglehawk. Despite the warnings, a fire in the middle of the city came as a complete surprise to most of the residents. 'I never thought I'd see this happen here,' one told the local newspaper.

In the ensuing hours, the fire consumed homes, sheds, tractors and cars as it roared across the west of Bendigo. Three hundred firefighters tackled the inferno and countless residents battled to save their homes. Some succeeded; some did not. The area is now littered with burnt timbers and corrugated iron. Scorched brick chimney stacks stand like tombstones to the memory of the houses of which they were once part.

The final property toll is still not certain. This morning it appears that 20 homes have been confirmed as destroyed, and this figure could rise as high as 50 as the investigation teams continued to carry out their work. Sadly, it has been confirmed that at least one person has lost his life and there are reports of a possible second casualty that is yet to be confirmed. The confirmed fatality was a 48-year-old man who was confined to a wheelchair and could not escape from his burning home. Our thoughts and condolences go to his family and his friends at this difficult time.

At the same time that Bendigo was going through its own hell, another blaze at Redesdale, to the south-west of the city, was burning through 10,000 hectares of farmland and bush. Seven homes have been confirmed as destroyed, and this figure could reach 15 once the investigations have concluded. Fortunately, there appears to have been no loss

of life in human form from this fire, but livestock and wildlife losses are expected to be significant.

Naturally, we offer our condolences to those who lose loved ones in tragedies such as this, but our thoughts must also be with those who have escaped with their lives but have lost their homes and livelihoods. It is, of course, true that houses can be rebuilt and furniture, televisions, carpets and curtains can all be replaced. So can important documents such as passports and drivers licences. But many other possessions lost in fires are irreplaceable. Photographs, old school reports, letters, childhood toys and family heirlooms are all part of who we are. When we lose these precious mementos we lose a part of ourselves. The scars of losing them can run deep indeed. So our thoughts are also with those who have survived this ordeal but lost their homes and precious possessions.

This morning the Bendigo fire is under control and the people affected are now in the recovery phase. Firefighters expect to have the fire at Redesdale contained later today. We must, of course, pay tribute to our emergency service workers. During the fires in my electorate there were countless heroic efforts to save people and possessions, and we must not forget that similar efforts are still being made in other parts of Victoria even as we speak today. Many of our firefighters are volunteers. They readily give up their spare time to protect our communities and they work tirelessly when called out to a fire. It is surely no exaggeration to say that we could not survive without them.

Our thanks also go to our police officers and medical emergency workers, whose efforts were indispensable. I would also like to thank the workers from the various organisations that are now helping the Bendigo and Redesdale communities recover from their ordeal—the officers and councillors from the

Macedon Ranges Shire Council, other councils around Victoria and, in particular, the staff, officers and councillors of the City of Greater Bendigo, who have demonstrated superb organisational skills when implementing their long established disaster management system. This has been a huge help for those directly affected by this tragedy, and everyone in Bendigo should be extremely proud of the way they have carried out their roles and responsibilities.

State, federal and local government assistance is now available, and offers of help from the community and community organisations have been overwhelming. In a macabre way, Bendigo was fortunate last weekend. Other communities around Victoria have already suffered much greater loss of life and homes, and the danger continues while fires remain out of control. Our thoughts are with all those Victorians who are still battling the worst bushfire disaster in our history and with those who are starting the long road to recovery from its horrendous effects.

I would also like to thank all members of this House who have sent messages of goodwill and encouragement over the last couple of days—they were much appreciated.

Dr STONE (Murray) (3.20 pm)—In supporting this motion, which is describing one of the worst disasters in Australian history, I also represent my electoral neighbours, Fran Bailey, member for McEwen, and Sophie Mirabella, member for Indi. As I speak they are both with their communities, doing all they can to assist as the fires in those parts of Victoria still rage through the central highlands in the north-east and the beautiful Yarra Valley areas.

I was speaking to the member for McEwen about an hour ago. Fran Bailey has some clothes and family photos in her car.

She is travelling from location to location, from one emergency centre to another. She did not go home last night—her Healesville home is in a vulnerable place and she is prepared to find it gone when she returns, perhaps tonight. But, like all members of this House in similar circumstances, with electorates threatened like hers, she will do all she can for as long as she can.

Sophie Mirabella, member for Indi, wants me to say on her behalf that she joins with her north-east residents in concern for the individuals and families affected by the fires, not only in her electorate, where fires still rage, but right across Victoria. Of course, we join with her in those sentiments, but how selfless of her to be thinking of others right now, with some of the most historic and still affluent parts of her electorate under direct threat.

Murray electorate, my electorate, criss-crossed by irrigation channels, has been spared all but two fires so far. But every available CFA volunteer and our police and emergency services are at the fire fronts. Our hospitals are taking burn victims and we stand ready to do all that is humanly possible to help save our neighbours. Now, and as they rebuild their lives and their communities in the weeks, months and years to come, they will need all of us. A donated truck from Shepparton is already loaded with donated goods and heading for the emergency centres in the regions beside us. And this is from the Murray region, which has been devastated by 10 years of drought and where there is no spare cash. But that is what Australians do, and that is what Australians, I am sure, will do in the days and weeks to come.

The death toll, as we have just heard, has now risen to 126. There is no doubt that, as the hours and days go past, that death toll will rise. Over 750 houses are gone. In whole towns, once renowned for their tourist attrac-

tions and their history—where Ned Kelly was jailed; where the first wines were grown—those houses are ash; those towns are ash. Water catchments and farmland are burnt out. Livestock and wildlife are destroyed. Victoria's great Central Highlands mountain ash forests are burning. Northern and Central Victoria's water supplies are already diminished through a decade of drought but, as these catchments burn, we will all face even greater hardship in the decades to come. It takes some 40 years for catchments to recover from fires like this, and so it will take a generation to recover from nature's worst. In the years to come the legacy of these fires will be great, but we know that the human spirit is also great. We have seen historic old gold towns such as Bendigo burn—towns that have survived over 150 years of droughts, heat, high winds and lightning. But it seems that Victorians have never had to face conditions like those on the weekend: 48-degree-heat, 100-kilometre-an-hour winds and the north of the state, of course, tinder dry after years of drought.

I know all Australians are deeply shocked and are reaching out in heartfelt sympathy and with compassion to those wiped out or who remain in the path of the fires. The victims are traumatised and they are homeless. Hundreds of families and businesses have lost everything and they need our urgent support. I have no doubt that this aid will be forthcoming as ordinary men and women donate what they can. And, as you heard from the Leader of the Opposition, the coalition will support the government in everything they do. The \$10 million mentioned so far, of course, will just be the beginning and, as the Leader of the Opposition said, whatever it takes is what we will be prepared to support.

I want to remind all Australians that most of the firefighters are volunteers—using

equipment that their communities have fund-raised to supply, training year in, year out in their own time and educating their own communities about the risk of fire. The men and women of the CFAs across the country are working across a life-threatening fire front in Victoria. Some know that, as they fight fires to save other people's properties, their own homes and their own families may suddenly come into the fire path. But they do not hang back. They are fighting these fires with raw courage and in conditions no-one in the rest of Australia could possibly imagine. Two firefighters have already had the tragic news that, while they were on their community duty, their own families have lost their lives. One firefighter is also now reported as dead. Australia needs to acknowledge and never forget this extraordinary, magnificent effort—this love of country and consideration of others that drive volunteers, neighbours and our professional services to give their all in the face of such a disaster.

We often and rightly remind ourselves of the defining characteristics and values of Australians, which, we commonly say, were forged on the battlefields—in World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War and wherever we have been peacekeepers. But perhaps these characteristics were not forged on the battlefields under enemy fire, but were carried into the campaigns by ordinary men and women who had battled with natural disasters back home. Sophie, Fran and I want to thank all who are making a superhuman effort in and from our electorates. We want to acknowledge all Victorians who right now are worried about their parents, their brothers and sisters, their children and their neighbours and who are hoping and praying that they do survive.

As well, we want to acknowledge the interstate and international offers of help—for example, the 100 firefighters from New Zealand, the banks and other businesses which

are already organising donations and the Red Cross and other organisations which are making their usual huge contribution. I also want to commend and thank the ABC, particularly station 774, which has, since this disaster began, made sure around the clock that they transmit excellent communication about the fire fronts, the road closures and road dangers, where to go and where not to go and carry community messages. I commend the ABC for this effort. I think it has helped to make a difference.

The impacts of these fires will be felt for decades. The deaths of the men, women and children caught in the inferno, however, will remain a tragedy always. We grieve with the families and mourn their loss. And, in the years to come, we must remember them and learn how to better deal with fires in our great but awful country. I commend this motion to the House.

Ms KING (Ballarat) (3.27 pm)—It is fitting that our nation's parliament, the one place in which all of Australia is represented, sends a message of condolence for the terrible loss of life and property that occurred over the weekend in Victoria. I think we are all in a state of shock as the overwhelming reality of what occurred sinks in; such terrible devastation, such terrible loss of life, such pain for many—and it is not over yet. Words cannot express the grief, loss, fear and sheer terror that the people who have been in the front of these fires have experienced. The thoughts and prayers of this parliament are with those who have lost their families and those who are yet to find out their fate. Some 126 have been confirmed dead and, heart-breakingly, some of them were very young children. We grieve for every one of them.

From the people of Ballarat, we grieve for all those affected, but I particularly want to send a strong message of support to the people of Bendigo. Sometimes we have a

healthy rivalry, but in this we are your neighbours and we will do everything we can to assist you. I want to also send a message to our emergency services, including their volunteers, who are working tirelessly in the midst of this tragedy. CFA Region 15 firefighters from my own electorate, like all firefighters from our state, have been tackling these ferocious fires over the last three days. Nine strike teams from my district are currently supporting the fight against the Maiden Gully, Redesdale, Kilmore East and Bunyip fires. These strike teams include some 250 firefighters, and the local DSE have also contributed some 100 people to the efforts. This number is replicated across the state by CFA volunteers and also by the metropolitan fire brigade and the DSE. I also want to acknowledge the efforts of interstate brigades.

As a CFA volunteer not able to be on active duty at present, I know the loss of life will be felt keenly by all members. I know how hard you have fought to protect people and their homes in the face of what has been an overwhelming fire. I know that, because of the loss of life, morale will be pretty low. But I want to send a strong message from this parliament to our CFA volunteers: thank God you were there. How much worse would it have been had you not been? Thank God you were there.

I also want to acknowledge other personnel who were at staging areas across the state, feeding and supporting firefighters and devastated communities: the Salvation Army, the Red Cross and our many other welfare organisations, medical staff across Victoria's hospitals dealing with terrible burns and the members of Victoria Police who will be critical in helping communities recover and in catching the perpetrators of this terrible act. I also thank the families, many of them anxiously waiting at home, and employers of

emergency service volunteers for supporting the men and women and their efforts.

Many people want to know what they can do to help, and of most practical assistance today is donating blood through the Red Cross and donating money to the Victorian bushfire relief fund. I asked the Region 15 brigade what message they wanted to get out today and, overwhelmingly, they want this parliament and the people listening to this broadcast to know that many fires are still out of control and that the potential for dangerous fires in other areas, including my own, still exists and will continue for some time, especially in the absence of significant rainfall. People need to be vigilant, ensure their bushfire plans are in place and recognise that this fire season has a long way to run yet.

Even once the final embers have been extinguished, the effects of these fires will long continue. Communities, families and friends will mourn for loved ones lost. Those who have seen their homes destroyed will be faced with the task of re-establishing their lives. Entire communities will take some time to rebuild. Firefighters who have been face to face with the fires and the devastating loss of life will continue to grieve and deal with the devastation they have witnessed. On behalf of the people of my electorate I offer my condolences, but more importantly we offer our support as people make their way through this crisis and slowly rebuild their lives. The thoughts of this parliament are with all Victorians today.

Mr HAWKER (Wannon) (3.32 pm)— Speaking in support of the motion moved by the Deputy Prime Minister and supported by all other speakers, I would like to start by saying it is very hard to know where to start. You look at the headlines in today's papers and take a small snapshot: 'Hell and its fury'; 'Disaster beyond belief'; 'From the

air, it's like Armageddon'. We hear the latest figures: the death toll 126; 750 houses lost; many others injured. But I am warned by my colleagues, like the member for McEwen, Fran Bailey, that those losses will increase.

It is certainly worse than Ash Wednesday in 1983, when 75 lost their lives, or Black Friday in 1939, when 71 lost their lives. I think it is impossible to imagine the terrifying last moments of those 126 and others we are yet to hear of. Maybe the article written by Gary Hughes of his own experience in today's *Australian* captures just some of the magnitude of this enormous disaster for individuals. As a former Country Fire Authority captain myself at the time of the Ash Wednesday fires, I have never seen anything like last Saturday's fires. I cannot even pretend to fully appreciate the courage of our volunteers.

There were two what I would call relatively minor fires in Wannon, but I would like to particularly empathise with my colleagues the member for McEwen, Fran Bailey, and the member for McMillan, Russell Broadbent, who has had five fires in his area—and they are still going. I also empathise with the member for Indi, Sophie Mirabella; the member for Bendigo, Steve Gibbons; the member for Gippsland, Darren Chester; and my neighbour, the member for Mallee, John Forrest, who had a particularly nasty fire at Horsham. Like all members, I am shocked, I am saddened and I am horrified, but I admire the community support and know that it is times like these that communities really pull together.

As the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Victorian Premier and everyone else who has spoken today, including the Leader of the Opposition, have said, the fact that the federal and state governments have moved quickly is something that we know is truly Australian, and they will certainly give

generous support. I know that all members of this parliament will support that. I know that all Australians will be very generous and they will give to the different appeals and help in so many ways. In an act that may typify something we hope to see repeated, one of my constituents from Heywood rang today to say that his family would donate the \$950 from the government's new package to the Red Cross. I hope his example will inspire many others to follow.

The local losses in my electorate of Wannon, unlike those in the Ash Wednesday fires, were relatively minor compared to others. On the outskirts of the town of Cole-raine, 800 hectares burnt. In Camperdown, 1,300 hectares burnt and it would appear that both those fires were not deliberately lit. But I cannot say the same about the Horsham fire in my neighbour's electorate of Mallee. Eight houses and the Horsham golf club are gone, and the feeling is that the fire was deliberately lit. I think the anger towards such behaviour, as it has been displayed throughout Victoria, is only just starting to rise to the surface, and I am sure we will hear much more about that. Frankly, I find what goes through the head of a firebug incomprehensible.

Again, I support the comments of all other members. Like them, I am thinking of those directly involved in the bushfires. I admire the extraordinary efforts of volunteers and express my deep and sincere condolences to those who have been directly affected and to those whose families have been affected. We remain conscious that the full magnitude of this disaster is yet to be realised. We know that fires are still burning and hope that volunteers' extraordinary efforts will enable those fires to be brought under control sooner rather than later. I support the motion.

The SPEAKER (3.37 pm)—Through this motion the House expresses its deepest con-

dolences to family, friends, work colleagues and acquaintances of those who have lost their lives in these tragic bushfires. The motion expresses sympathy and compassion for those who have lost property, whether it be buildings, livestock or pets. The motion expresses our gratitude to professional and, importantly, volunteer members of emergency and health services and community support agencies for their expertise, diligence and courage.

The electorate of Scullin was only vaguely affected by these fires, with a small fire in Plenty Gorge. However, there are four major north-south roads that traverse fortress Scullin and, if you travel along them for five to 20 kilometres, each ends in tragedy. If you go up the Hume Highway towards Kilmore you get to Wandong. High Street and Epping Road also end up in Wandong. If you travel along Plenty Road you go through the township of Whittlesea and end up in Kinglake West and Kinglake. Yan Yean Road becomes Coombs Road, Kinglake.

As a product of the northern suburbs, I feel that many of the places that have been mentioned in this debate should not be places of such sadness. Kinglake, St Andrews, Kinglake West, Steels Creek, Flowerdale, Wandong, Humevale, Strathewen and Arthurs Creek are places that should not be on a list of death and destruction. They are places of picnics and weddings. They are places to collect wood with grandparents for slow combustion stoves. They are places to get lost on Scout hikes. They are places to sit on the pub veranda accompanied by a cool ale or a glass of Australian wine. One of the things that we know about these places is that they are people's homes. These are places that are people's livelihoods.

Through this debate one of the sentiments that has been expressed is that of resilience, and other characteristics of Australia have

also been mentioned. Yesterday afternoon I briefly visited the Whittlesea Community Activity Centre, which was spoken about by the Leader of the Opposition. It was very hard to witness people coming down the hill, mostly from Kinglake, to register their names and to seek information from the Red Cross about missing family members, but the sense of collective action was something that I was encouraged by.

When I was travelling along Plenty Road on the first part of my journey back to this place, I was heartened to see an SES vehicle from a suburb in the southern part of Melbourne and to pass a convoy of CFA trucks from Geelong, the Bellarine Peninsula, the Surf Coast and Aireys Inlet, a place that has suffered so much over time through bushfire. The sense of collective action and mateship is very important. Many of the things that we see on TV quite correctly expose us to the tragedy of these events and it is sometimes hard to understand what it all means. But I think we should understand that there is a great resolve to tackle the things that confront us.

A sense of place is not just about physical structures; it is really about people themselves. As has been said in this debate, communities will rebuild because of the resilience of their people. We must give them our love and support and lend them our shoulders. We must first lend them our shoulders to cry on so that they may grieve and gain closure. Then, hopefully, we can put our shoulders to the wheel and support these communities and individuals in the rebuilding that will be required. When we do so, these communities will return. They will be places that we can visit—where we can picnic, get lost on hikes and have a quiet ale in a beer garden. I know that members of the House are as one in expressing our sympathy and support for fellow Australians in the affected communities. We will do all we can

with all our resolve. As a mark of respect, I invite honourable members to rise in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The SPEAKER—I thank the House.

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

QUEENSLAND FLOODS

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Treasurer) (3.44 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a few remarks, on indulgence, about the floods in Queensland and to talk about the assistance that is available and being provided. The events in North Queensland and north-western Queensland are a catastrophe. Something like 60 per cent of the state, an area around the size of South Australia, is now flood affected. The irony is that something like 40 per cent of the state is drought affected and some areas are both. That is the cruel extreme of what is going on.

Ingham, where I was yesterday with the member for Kennedy, Mr Katter, is where the full force is being felt at the moment, along with what is occurring in the gulf. In the gulf people have been flooded in for weeks and weeks and weeks. The point has to be made that there are probably another couple of months to go in this wet season. What we are dealing with, particularly in Ingham, is a flood which, at its height, was 12 metres and is now at 11.7 metres. It has receded somewhat. The problem is that the tropical monsoon which is sitting off the coast could move back in. If it does, there will be further problems in the Ingham area and perhaps elsewhere in North Queensland or Far North Queensland. I know the member for Leichhardt is keeping a very close eye on what is going on. There was some very heavy rain in Cairns a night or two ago and further south and to the north of Townsville there is a huge mass of water. When it

comes to Ingham alone there are something like 3,000 houses that are flood affected. A massive emergency relief operation is going on, with helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft and boats—you name it. Fortunately, we have not seen the loss of life that we have seen in Victoria. So far, the damage is to property and to the local economy. But, if the floodwaters remain, the social impact will also be great over time. After all, if people have been stuck in their houses for a week and flooded in, it begins to have an impact on the nature of the community.

Fortunately, these are pretty stoic folk. They are North Queenslanders and they like a joke, they like a beer and they like a good time. It is great to see—and I saw it there yesterday in Ingham and in talking to the emergency service workers and so on—a great sense of community; people are out there helping each other. Even members of the emergency services from my electorate in Brisbane are already on the ground up there, and a state-wide operation is happening. Plenty of local volunteers and volunteers from elsewhere in the state are coming in to lend a hand. It may go on for some weeks.

But consider the plight of the communities in the gulf who have now been cut off for five weeks and who may have to endure being cut off for another six to eight weeks. To all those who are working up there in these difficult conditions—all the volunteers across the local communities and those who have come from elsewhere to help—I want to express the admiration of the House. In Ingham they are fortunate to have a local mayor, the chair of the Hinchinbrook Regional Council, who likes to be called Pino by his mates and the people he represents. Pino has been very, very effective up there on the ground. He is doing a terrific job. I first met him down here at the end of last year when he was at the local government conference organised by the Minister for

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. He is a great organiser, so we are seeing a great effort from the Hinchinbrook Regional Council and all volunteers on the ground.

Yesterday I called in to the recovery centre, where there were a number of elderly people and young families who have no homes to go to at the moment, and I ran into an older lady who looked me in the eye—her home is flooded and she was hanging around the centre—and said, ‘This is like being in a resort.’ She was having a good time, and she was busily organising all the other people there and making the most of it. North Queenslanders, particularly, have become used to floods over the years, but this is one that, by historical proportions, is certainly big. I want to repeat what I said on the ground yesterday in Ingham and on ABC radio in North Queensland: that the full support of the Commonwealth government, the state government and local authorities is there and, as time goes on and the waters recede, there will be a requirement for an even bigger effort.

I will also follow up on a point that was made earlier in the debate. ABC radio are up there doing a fantastic job. They have a mobile unit they bring in, from which they can broadcast to the affected areas and get information out really quickly. They are doing a superb job, as is the Queensland Department of Emergency Services and the Queensland Department of Communities. There is a flood hotline—1802222—which should be utilised, and the special payments that the government has announced for those affected in North Queensland and Victoria are being taken up. There have been something like 300 applications since the announcement on Saturday afternoon, because a lot of people are trapped, a lot of people cannot go to work and a lot of people cannot get access to

any money at all, so those organisations are playing a very important role.

To conclude, I know that Mr Katter, the member for Kennedy, would wish to be here but he is in his electorate in Queensland working with locals. I also know that the member for Leichhardt has been in constant contact with his local authorities to the north. We in the Australian government stand ready to do everything we possibly can to assist the people in the north, as we will in Victoria. Whether it is fire in the south or flood in the north, we have to summon all our national strength and all our compassion to assist people to deal with these terrible challenges.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (3.51 pm)—On indulgence: I thank the Treasurer for his update and report on events in North Queensland. He rightly refers to the enormous contrasts in our country. That we could have such heat, fire and tragedy in the south and then extensive flooding in the north is quite extraordinary. If I may refine slightly the figures that the Treasurer quoted, my understanding is that close to two-thirds of Queensland is flood declared, around half is drought declared and a quarter does not have any declaration at all, so clearly there is a significant part of the state of Queensland that has endured all of the contrasts of weather in a very short period of time.

I am reminded also that many of these people in North Queensland who are seriously affected now by flooding are the same who endured the effects of a cyclone not all that long ago—the cyclone that will be remembered, I think, by all Australians because it brought on the great banana drought, which helped us to appreciate how much we enjoy bananas as a part of our lifestyle in this country.

There are people enduring many weeks of flood inundation, especially in the Gulf of

Carpentaria. There will be many months that these people will be cut off from the outside world. I referred, when this matter was discussed last week, to the loss of stock and the loss of property throughout that area. These people are used to wet times, and they are set up to deal with them. But sometimes this goes on a little too long for even the bravest of friendships not to be tested.

I welcome the government's commitment to provide support and assistance. We particularly think today of the families of the three people who are feared lost in these floods, especially the family of the five-year-old boy who, it seems, may have been taken by a crocodile. These are especial tragedies that add to the misery and the grief that are being endured by the whole community.

I compliment the government on sending Brisbane based minister Craig Emerson to North Queensland to keep a direct eye on what is happening in that regard. I thank him also for taking the member for Herbert with him on his aircraft. Senator Macdonald and the member for Herbert are North Queenslanders and they have geared up their offices to provide direct care and assistance and a pipeline to people who are in need. But I am aware also that the emergency services, the local councils and the various government agencies have moved quickly into action to provide assistance wherever they can.

Again, another major reconstruction effort will be required in North Queensland, and again it will be ongoing. It will take quite some time. One of the issues that arose out of the cyclone was a commitment to upgrade a substantial part of the road system north of Townsville, and some of that work is underway. But, then again, floods can sometimes be so big that even the new roads go under water, and I hope that this experience will demonstrate again to all Australians that we do need to have an all-weather road system

in Far North Queensland and to commit to that kind of construction effort, as well as to restoring the property, the livelihoods and the wellbeing of those people who are affected by this flooding. In some parts of Australia we have streets in ashes—in other parts, streets covered by water. And we need to help all of those people as best we can.

The SPEAKER—I call the member for New England, on indulgence, as the member representing the member for Kennedy.

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (3.55 pm)—I seek the indulgence of the House to read a statement from the member for Kennedy. I think everybody would be aware of the passion that he holds for the people in his seat. Obviously he is not in the chamber today. I will do my best to impersonate him!

Honourable member—You'll have to start laughing!

The SPEAKER—That is not necessary.

Mr WINDSOR—The member for Kennedy's statement reads:

In my absence, occasioned by me remaining in the flood areas, I have asked the member for New England to read a statement on behalf of the people in these disaster zones.

North Queensland has suffered not the worst floods, but definitely the most widespread serious flooding in recent history. The flood zone extends across much of Northern and Central Queensland, covering the entire electorate of Kennedy from our western border with the Northern Territory, across the Gulf and mid-west plains to the coastal towns of Gordonvale, Innisfail, Tully, Ingham and many others.

We have reportedly suffered the loss of three lives so far. This is in spite of the gallant efforts of many of our volunteer SES, who at Ingham alone had reportedly recorded 42 rescues in the first two days of flooding.

What is deeply troubling is that we are only halfway through our wet season. Any further monsoonal or cyclonic rain influence will have the most serious consequences. Mass evacuation

of communities has never taken place before, but some have been very near run-in things.

Some inconveniences are small, and some are not. I am informed that yesterday Charters Towers ran out of chicken as the supply van could not cross the flooded Burdekin River. This situation applies to a number of similar suppliers that have not been able to reach the 50,000 people living in Charters Towers, Mount Isa and the other mid-west towns of North Queensland.

In Ingham yesterday I spoke to Carol Mackee, the local chairman of the Cane Farmers Association. Carol said that some farmers in her area will record a 50 per cent loss of this year's cane crop. It must be noted that every farmer I spoke to pointed out that without the cane there would be potentially a massive loss of topsoil.

Prior to cane, this area was covered by a tree canopy which left the ground bare of grass cover. Without going into specifics, this bare land resulted in a kilometre of land at Lucinda Point simply vanishing in one giant flood. Cane has bound the soil and minimised some of the potentially catastrophic impacts of the flooding.

The Gulf communities from Georgetown west have been cut off now for over two weeks. The very hardworking and excellently performing mayor of Georgetown, Warren Devlin, has said that a bridge over the Einsleigh River—

I think that is it. The Treasurer might take note. My pronunciation has been corrected—costing only \$15 million, would have at least enabled road access to the towns of Georgetown, Croydon and Normanton for most of this period. These towns and Karumba, Burketown, Doomadgee and Mornington Island have not been serviced, except by very expensive air drops, since a week ago when regular air services were terminated.

Karumba, the only natural port in the 1,500-kilometre Australian Gulf coastline south of Weipa, could be operating if the government were to invest in a \$40 million road, a \$15 million bridge and a \$15 million harbour facility. This town is now all but surrounded by 15 kilometres of raging, crocodile-infested floodwaters. Unless one wants to traverse these waters at night in a three-hour trip in a very small boat, then one can-

not get out of Karumba to the all-weather landing strip at Normanton. It may be that there will be a loss of life if someone in Karumba were to break a leg or experience a heart-attack.

It does not reflect well on the powers that be that they could not place a small casualty evacuation helicopter on standby at Karumba or Normanton that is night-rated and able to facilitate casualty evacuation. I would plead—

and I think members have heard the member for Kennedy plead the interests of his people before—

with state authorities to:

- borrow one of the hundreds of helicopter CASvac stretchers at army bases such as Townsville;
- put a retainer on to keep a helicopter at Normanton. One is presently based there doing Ergon and Telstra jobs; and
- secure clear cut approval from CASA for this helicopter to do night emergency evacuations.

The perilous situation at Karumba, with water still lapping at the edges of houses throughout the town, is not expected to abate for another 6 to 9 weeks. That is assuming that the Norman River catchment receives no further rain.

We are in the unhappy situation of knowing that the Gulf, the Burdekin, the mid-west and the Herbert River catchments have all suffered the second worst flood in recorded history, and Ingham has suffered its third worst flood in recorded history. But the bad news for us old hands is that we are only half way through our normal wet season, with February being our wettest month.

The region is one of the few parts of Australia with a large expanse of land and reliable, big annual rainfall. Irrigated land in this region supply a significant part of Australia's lychees, mangos, bananas, pineapples, avocados, pawpaws and potatoes.

At the time of speaking there is some \$8-10 million worth of fresh fruit and vegetables in cold rooms and sheds in the cut-off coastal areas. Many of these goods have been there for over a week and their shelf life is ending. From today

onwards they will bit by bit have to be thrown out.

It is with great bitterness—

and I wish I could impersonate the member for Kennedy at this part, but I am sure members will see through my veneer—

and very considerable anger that my request for an airlift for these fruit and vegetables, made Thursday last week, has still not been answered. Not a single kilogram of these goods has been moved. All I have at this point in time is what I had on Thursday afternoon—assurances that the matter is being addressed and that there are legal and technical difficulties in using army planes sitting at Townsville airport. To quote my late father the then Minister for the Army “every month those planes have to fly as part of meeting maintenance, training and readiness programs”. Such flying time can be very useful if put into emergency assistance to bunny hop these fruit and vegetables the very short distance from Tully or Innisfail to Townsville.

People have spoken to me with great anger that these facilities have been provided to the South Pacific Island and Asian Nations in times of need. Again I repeat with great bitterness and anger, I counted 4 Caribou aircraft at Townsville Airport yesterday doing nothing. These aircraft are ready, and able to provide much needed assistance to the farmers of the Far North.

I wish to thank the Commonwealth Treasurer for visiting Ingham yesterday to survey the impact of the floods. I will greatly appreciate his action in providing emergency fruit and vegetable transportation over the next 2 to 3 days. After this time, it is expected that inland and some coastal routes to Townsville might reopen.

I appreciate the recent Government announcement of immediate financial assistance of \$1,000 for flood-affected families. However, we require immediate fodder drops and longer-term financial assistance is also sought in the form of subsidised interest rates and some government grants. Development banks were established for addressing these situations. However, they have been sold off and their effectiveness, and I must emphasise PROFITABLE operations, are sorely missed.

In the long-term, road access could be considerably improved with Government investment in road works at Gairlock between Ingham and Cardwell and some upgrading of the Atherton-Charter Towers alternative route.

I thank the House for its consideration and, on behalf of the people of the Kennedy electorate, we send our deepest sympathies to the people of Victoria whose plight has been even more life-threatening than ours.

Mr Speaker, on one further personal indulgence: I support the comments of the member for Murray in relation to the ABC and the invaluable role it has played both in Queensland and in Victoria.

On a personal level, I think we all reflect on our own families at these times. Our eldest son is, as we speak, in a helicopter dumping water on fires in New South Wales. He spoke to his mother the other night and told her with a great degree of pride that they had just saved a house in the Hunter Valley that had been well manicured in terms of fire protection. The people at work, the volunteers and, in his case, a helicopter were able to stop the fire only metres from the house.

On behalf of the Independents, including the member for Kennedy, who is not with us today, I say that we would like to associate ourselves with the comments that were made earlier in terms of both these tragedies.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (4.06 pm)—As a mark of respect to the victims of the disasters, I move:

That the House do now adjourn.

Question agreed to.

House adjourned at 4.07 pm

QUESTIONS IN WRITING**Kimberley Coastal Region****(Question No. 359)**

Mr Tuckey asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 14 October 2008:

- (1) Does the Government recognise the: (a) existence of Australia's largest electrical energy production resource that resides in the Kimberley coastal region; and (b) capacity of existing global and domestic transmission technology to distribute this energy throughout Australia to consumers near and far.
- (2) Is the Government aware of international evidence supporting tidal energy generation and identifying Australia's potential for producing it; if so, why does the Government propose to quarantine this resource and all of the other industrial opportunities of this kind from development by adding the Kimberley coastal region to the World Heritage Listing.

Mr Rudd—I am advised that the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) (a) The Australian Government is aware that the north of Australia has some of the largest tidal ranges in the world. Barrage tidal power systems have been proposed in the Kimberley region of Western Australia since the 1960s. The Australian Government has contributed funding to several studies that have examined this potential. (b) Although the cost of high voltage transmission lines has reduced, the enormous distance is such that it is not at present cost effective to transport electricity from a Kimberley tidal power plant to Australia's main electricity grid in the south east of the country. The International Energy Agency's (IEA) Energy Technologies Perspectives (2008) publication reports that overhead transmission lines cost about \$600 million per thousand kilometres. In addition, it notes that transportation of electricity entails significant losses.

A study of possible tidal energy options in the Derby region commissioned by the Western Australian Government in 2001 concluded the project was not cost effective. Gas was considered the more competitive option and along with the significant geographical challenges and environmental concerns of the project, tidal energy was considered unfeasible.

The National Hydrogen Study completed in 2003 also specifically examined the potential to use the tidal resources in the Kimberley and concluded that cost of transmission to energy markets in Western Australia or the eastern states would be prohibitively expensive.

- (2) The Australian Government is aware of one large scale tidal barrage energy plant currently operating in the world, in La Rance in France, plus two relatively small-scale projects. While other plant proposals have been considered technically feasible, projects in Canada and the United States were not followed through due to cost and the impact on the environment. In its 2008 publication Energy Technologies Perspectives the IEA noted "The environmental impacts of dammed tidal energy projects are often unacceptable."

The Australian Government is not pursuing a World Heritage nomination of the Kimberley coast region at this time. The Kimberley's national and international heritage values are being examined, however, as part of the 'Strategic Assessment relating to the impacts of actions under the Plan for the Browse Basin Common User Liquefied Natural Gas Hub Precinct and associated activities' (Strategic Assessment). The Australian and Western Australian Governments agreed in February 2008 to undertake this Strategic Assessment. In June 2008, the Australian Heritage Council (the Council) commenced a National Heritage assessment of the west Kimberley region. The Council is due to provide its assessment by June 2010.

Infrastructure: Kununurra**(Question No. 360)**

Mr Tuckey asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 14 October 2008:

Does the Government propose allocating adequate funding from its infrastructure fund to deliver irrigation water for additional land development at Kununurra for food production; if so, will it use the considerable water storage capacity of Lake Argyle.

Mr Rudd—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Commonwealth Government will invest up to \$195 million over 2008-09 and 2009-10 to support economic development in the East Kimberley region, under the Government's \$4.7 billion Nation Building initiative. The investment is conditional on a joint assessment of the most effective infrastructure investments to meet the social and economic development needs of the region.

The Commonwealth Government's investment will focus on social and common-use infrastructure such as, social services facilities, roads, ports and power. These infrastructure investments will increase the productive capacity of the region and build the long-term sustainability of region.

Renewable Energy**(Question No. 361)**

Mr Tuckey asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 14 October 2008:

Given the climate change crisis, what priority does the Government give to harnessing Tasmania's water resource for generating renewable energy for use there and on the mainland?

Mr Rudd—I am advised that the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Australian Government places a high priority on addressing climate change and has a multi-faceted strategy that recognises that there is no single solution to this challenge. Along with the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, energy efficiency and carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology, renewable energy is one of the four key areas of activity in the Government's climate change emissions reduction strategy.

The Government is supporting the expansion of renewable energy through the Renewable Energy Target, which will provide for 20 per cent of Australia's electricity to be generated from renewable sources by 2020. While this will provide encouragement to investment in renewable generation, including hydro-electric projects, final decisions as to the appropriate choice of generation options is a matter for the commercial judgement of the sector.

Kakadu National Park**(Question No. 405)**

Mr Ciobo asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, in writing, on 24 November 2008:

In respect of the Government's decision to reintroduce an entrance fee for visitors to Kakadu National Park—

- (1) What advice did he, his personal staff, or his department seek prior to the Government's decision.
- (2) From how many individuals (including those representing organisations or government departments) did he, his personal staff, or his department seek this advice, and how many of them recommended: (a) reintroduction of the entrance fee; and (b) a minimum entrance fee of \$25.

- (3) Of those individuals from whom he, his personal staff or his department sought advice, how many were representatives of the tourism industry and did their advice differ from that given by individuals outside their industry; if so, how.
- (4) What analysis, modelling or advice did he or his personal staff seek from his department to examine the effect the reintroduced entrance fee would have on the number of visitors to the Park; and did his department assess the elasticity of demand for Park visitations.
- (5) How many people visited Kakadu National Park in the calendar year: (a) 2004; (b) 2005; (c) 2006; (d) 2007; and (e) 2008 (to 24 November); what methodology is used for counting the number of visitors; and has this methodology changed between 1 January 2004 and the present date.
- (6) What is the total revenue expected from the reintroduced entrance fee for the fiscal year: (a) 2008-09; (b) 2009-10; (c) 2010-11; and 2011-12.
- (7) What was the maintenance, conservation and management budget for the Kakadu National Park for the calendar year: (a) 2004; (b) 2005; (c) 2006; (d) 2007; and (e) 2008 (to 24 November); and what is the same budget forecast for the fiscal year: (a) 2008-09; (b) 2009-10; (c) 2010-11; and (d) 2011-12.
- (8) Has the maintenance, conservation and management budget for the Kakadu National Park been adjusted as a result of the reintroduced entrance fee.
- (9) What was the tourist promotion, or similar, budget for the Kakadu National Park for the calendar year: (a) 2004; (b) 2005; (c) 2006; (d) 2007; and (e) 2008 (to the present date); and what is the same budget forecast for the fiscal years: (a) 2008-09; (b) 2009-10; (c) 2010-11; and (d) 2011-12.
- (10) Is the entrance fee for the Kakadu National Park fixed at \$25; if not, how frequently and by how much will it rise, and will it be adjusted for inflation.

Mr Garrett—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) I approved a proposal from the Director of National Parks seeking the re-introduction of a park use fee for Kakadu National Park at \$25 per adult, with residents of the Northern Territory exempt, and an implementation date of 1 April 2010. The Director's submission advised of resolutions of the Kakadu Board of Management supporting the re-introduction of a park use fee at this level, consultations with the Kakadu Board's Tourism Consultative Committee, and the assessment of the Director that \$25 was an appropriate level for a Kakadu park use fee. The submission also considered alternative revenue stream options for the park, given the Government's statement in the 2008 Budget that alternative income stream options for Kakadu would be considered. Comparable data from other national parks and visitor attractions was also provided.
- (2) The Kakadu Tourism Consultative Committee comprises representatives of the tourism industry and was established by the Kakadu Board of Management to provide direct communication with the tourism industry working in the park. The reintroduction of a park use fee was discussed at two meetings of the Tourism Consultative Committee in 2008 where there was general acceptance of the need to re-introduce a park use fee, that \$25 was a reasonable level for such a fee, and that an adequate lead time was required so the industry could adjust rates and marketing materials. Some members suggested that NT residents should be exempt from the fee. The Director also consulted the Departments of Finance and Deregulation and Resources, Energy and Tourism before finalising his recommendations. My staff consulted with representatives of the Northern Territory Government, as well as the offices of Federal Government Members and Government Senators from the Northern Territory. All expressed concern about the reintroduction of the entrance fee, particularly if it was to apply to Northern Territory residents.
- (3) see (2).
- (4) Research on the price elasticity of demand for fees to Kakadu was considered as well as more general research from the CRC for Sustainable Tourism. This research showed that international visi-

tors are the least price elastic to park fees, interstate visitors are slightly more elastic and local visitors are the most elastic. This is largely attributable to the proportion of the fee as part of the overall trip cost for each segment of traveller. As the majority of visitors to the park (approximately 85 per cent) are international or interstate visitors, it was considered that the impact of the fee on visitor numbers would be negligible.

- (5) (a) In 2004, 131,181 park use tickets were sold, but this does not include visitors under 16 years old. A calibrated pedestrian counter at the Bowali visitor centre indicated that 169,955 visitors passed through the Visitor Centre in 2004; however not all visitors stop at the Visitor Centre;
- (b) In 2005, following the abolition of fees, ticket sales were no longer a measure of visitor numbers, and a new vehicle monitoring system was introduced, recording vehicles entering the park, with quarterly calibration surveys to determine vehicle occupancy and purpose of visit. This methodology indicated that 202,507 people visited the park that year;
- (c) in 2006, 209,506 visitors;
- (d) in 2007, 225,576 visitors;
- (e) in 2008, 222,165 (to 30 November).
- (6) (a) in 2008-09 nil, as the measure is being introduced on 1 April 2010
- (b) in 2009-10 \$1.169m exclusive of GST;
- (c) in 2010-11 \$3.897m exclusive of GST;
- (d) in 2011-12. \$3.897m exclusive of GST
- (7) (a) to (e) Budgets are not defined by calendar year. Financial data for Kakadu is provided annually in the Director of National Parks' Annual Reports for the preceding financial year. The budget forecast for Kakadu in 2008-09 is \$22.019 million. Forecasts for subsequent years have not yet been defined.
- (8) The budget for Kakadu for 2009-10 has not yet been defined. It will be developed between May and June 2009 and will take into consideration the reintroduction of the park use fee as well as any outcomes from the 2009-10 budget process.
- (9) The budget for Kakadu did not include an allocation for tourist promotion in 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008 or 2008-09. In March 2005 the Australian Government provided \$500,000 in supplementary funding for a cooperative marketing campaign for Kakadu with the Northern Territory Government in response to the release of the Kakadu A Shared Vision for Tourism report. Budget forecasts have not yet been defined at the park level for 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12.
- (10) There are no plans to increase the entrance fee. The Director of National Parks will periodically review the fee and other park revenue streams to ensure that visitors and other park users provide an appropriate contribution to the running costs of the park.

Fuel Prices

(Question No. 427)

Mr Hartsuyker asked the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, in writing, on 26 November 2008:

- (1) Will the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission (ACCC) return its 2008-09 budget appropriation for the FuelWatch measure to Budget, following the defeat of the FuelWatch legislation.
- (2) Have estimates of expenditure in the outyears for FuelWatch been removed from the forward estimates following the defeat of the FuelWatch legislation.

Mr Tanner—The answer to the honourable Member's question is as follows:

- (1) The Australian Consumer and Competition Commission (ACCC) will be returning its unspent 2008-09 budget appropriations for implementing FuelWatch.
- (2) The 2008-09 Mid-Year Economic and Financial Outlook estimates included expenditure on FuelWatch. This estimate of expenditure and the relevant forward estimates will be excluded from the 2009-10 Budget estimates following the defeat of the FuelWatch legislation.

Immigration and Citizenship: Overseas Posts

(Question No. 428)

Dr Stone asked the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 27 November 2008:

How many Department of Immigration and Citizenship staff have been withdrawn from overseas posts.

Mr McClelland—The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

Fifteen DIAC staff have been withdrawn from overseas posts in 2008.