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UP FRONT

OVERCOMING MEDICO LIMBO

A parliamentary report has made 45 recommendations to improve the registration and support processes for overseas trained doctors, following a 14-month inquiry into the issue.

Key recommendations in the *Lost in the labyrinth* report include reviewing the requirement for overseas trained doctors to spend 10 years working in a district of workforce shortage and extending the validity of English language tests from two to four years in some cases.

House of Representatives Health Committee Chair Steve Georganas (Hindmarsh, SA) said the report is aimed at cutting unnecessary red tape

in the process while ensuring that Australia's high clinical standards are maintained.

"One example was an overseas trained specialist who told us he was forced to sit a basic exam again only to find he was the author of the prescribed textbook," Mr Georganas said.

"We need good doctors to be able to get on with the job they came here to do — not stuck doing paperwork for months on end."

To read the report visit www.aph.gov.au/haa and for more information email haa.reps@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4145.



GETTY IMAGES

ON WITH THE JOB: Overseas doctors report wants red tape cut



BETTER CONNECTION: Linking the community with parliament

PARLIAMENT LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

The Australian parliament has a new website at www.aph.gov.au providing improved access to information about the parliament, members and senators, legislation and the work of committees.

The aim of the new website is to support democratic participation by making it easier to find information about and communicate with the parliament, its members and committees.

The website provides plenty of vision with live webcasts of parliamentary sittings and committee hearings along with virtual tours of the building. Recent recordings of Question Time in the House of Representatives can be found on the About the House news page at www.aph.gov.au/ath along with the latest video clips from the

About the House and MPI television programs.

Online versions of the About the House magazine can be found at www.aph.gov.au/athmag and there is also a new web page at www.aph.gov.au/international outlining the parliament's international connections, parliamentary strengthening programs, incoming and outgoing delegations and reports on these overseas visits.



ACQUISITION: Bernard Wright (r) receives historic document from Geoffrey Lindell

HISTORY HANDOVER

The House of Representatives has been given a rare draft constitution from 1898.

Professor Geoffrey Lindell, who was given this bound predecessor to the current Constitution by a former member of parliament Ralph Jacobi (Hawker, SA), presented it to the

Clerk of the House of Representatives Bernard Wright. This 1898 draft constitution was the culmination of the work done during the second convention of delegates from Australia's six colonies.

"It is in large measure the same document that finally became the Constitution," Professor Lindell said. "In substance it is the work of the convention and the work of the Australian people, but in form it is a document that had to be passed by the British parliament itself."

Mr Wright welcomed the historic acquisition. "It's almost exactly the Constitution that we know today," he said. "The department has not had an original document of this kind so it's a greatly appreciated gesture by Professor Lindell to pass this onto the department where it will be treasured."

NAME CHANGE FOR SECOND CHAMBER

The Main Committee of the House of Representatives has been renamed the Federation Chamber.

The Federation Chamber acts as a secondary place of debate where bills can be referred for further discussion without taking up the limited time of the House itself. Members also make constituency statements and discuss committee reports there.

ABOUT THE HOUSE

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FREE AND FAIR: Senator Stephen Parry and Janelle Saffin at a polling booth in Timor-Leste

AUSTRALIAN OBSERVERS PRAISE TIMOR-LESTE POLL

Two Australian parliamentarians have no doubt the recent presidential election in Timor-Leste was free and fair after being invited by the fledgling democracy to act as election observers.

Deputy President of the Australian Senate, Senator Stephen Parry (Tas) and the Member for Page (NSW) Janelle Saffin were both impressed by East Timor's electoral processes and the openness of their voting system.

"No one can dispute in my view the polling booths I went to," Senator Parry said. "No one can dispute the honesty of the ballot. There was no untoward activity — I had full access to observe every aspect of the voting from the opening of the ballot box in the first light of the morning to the closing of the ballot box, to the actual count and then the ballot boxes returning to Dili. I witnessed all those processes and I would be exceptionally confident that the ballot was conducted in the most fairest and honest manner."

Despite poor literacy and even poorer roads, many of East Timor's 600,000 voters were not deterred from voting for their nation's president on

17 March. Current President Jose Ramos-Horta lost his bid for a second term, with voters to choose at another election in April between Taur Matan Ruak and Francisco Lu-Olo Guterres.

While earlier elections have been marred by violence, the Australian parliamentarians were staggered by how patient the Timorese people were, waiting in long queues to receive their ballot paper and either punch a hole through their preferred candidate's picture with a nail or mark it with a cross.

"It's always good to see people voting and particularly in a country where they value the vote — it's not taken for granted because they haven't been voting in elections for all that long a time," Ms Saffin said. "They orderly queue up not complaining and waiting their turn."

The parliamentarians visited a range of polling booths in Dili and in the Liquica district west of Dili to observe the voting and the vote counting afterwards. They were able to ask questions about the process and see how the holes on some ballot papers were disputed.

Hillside

Housing initiative builds pride

THE opening of a new block of units in the Melbourne suburb of Oakleigh was evidence of the many benefits that can be achieved through social housing projects, the Member for Chisholm (Vic) Anna Burke has told the House of Representatives.

Ms Burke said the Oxford Street project, funded through the federal government's Social Housing Initiative, has not only provided attractive housing for vulnerable groups in the local community but has also helped to create local jobs.

"This is not a ghetto environment," Ms Burke said, "this is somewhere you are quite proud to say is your home."

"Numerous residents at the opening invited us into their new homes and were not only proud that they now had somewhere to call home but also proud of the standard of the facility."

The units incorporate six-star energy ratings and environmentally sound features such as underground rainwater tanks and gas-boosted solar hot water units.

The local construction firm which built the development put on several apprentices to work on it.

"It was an amazing win-win all around," Ms Burke said.

More than 16,600 homes across the nation have been completed under the program so far, with \$5.6 billion in federal funding allocated to it. •



BUILDING BLOCKS: Win-win from social housing

PAT CAMPBELL



Mobile phone maze belongs to another century

THE process for choosing a mobile phone plan in Australia has been criticised in federal parliament, with the Member for Fraser (ACT) Andrew Leigh describing the unnecessary complexity as Byzantine.

Dr Leigh said as well as having to choose from a plethora of handsets, it is not easy to figure out how much a call costs.

"With many carriers there is a flag-fall charge meaning that the first minute carries a different price from subsequent minutes. Sometimes it is cheaper to call people whose mobile phones are on the same network. Some carriers have lower off-peak charges," he said.

"Calls to landlines are often priced differently from calls made to other mobiles. For voicemail, some plans

charge for leaving messages, some for retrieving messages and some for neither.

"So, if you want to know how much your month's calls will cost, you need to be thinking about how often you call landlines, how often you call mobiles, which carriers your friends use, what time of day you make your calls and how many voicemail messages you expect to receive. Are you confused? I know I am."

Dr Leigh said the complexity of Australian mobile phone plans most harms people with low levels of financial literacy.

He called on mobile phone companies to recognise their responsibility to customers and start offering a simpler product. •

THINKSTOCK

Hillside

Farmers' year more than a celebration

THE Australian Year of the Farmer in 2012 should not only be about recognising Australian farmers for the work they do, but should also be focused on addressing a number of issues impacting on the agricultural sector, the Member for O'Connor (WA) Tony Crook has told federal parliament.

Mr Crook highlighted the importance of the agricultural sector to the Australian economy, noting that it generates \$41.8 billion each year, with \$31.2 billion of this in the export market.

"Agriculture supports 1.6 million jobs in Australia in farming and related industries, accounting for 17.2 per cent of the national workforce," he said.

Australian farmers produce almost 93 per cent of Australia's daily domestic food supply, while exporting 60 per cent of our total agricultural production.

Mr Crook said live export reforms, ongoing drought, biosecurity risks, skills shortages and supermarket pricing are the significant issues many Australian farmers face day in and day out.

"We must help our farmers so they can continue to remain on the land, driving our economy, protecting our food security and sustaining our regional communities," he said. •



SPOT ON: *CyberKnife delivers targeted radiotherapy treatment*

Remarkable cancer treatment could save lives

FEDERAL MP Alan Tudge (Aston, Vic) has called for a new cancer treatment called CyberKnife to be made available in Australia.

Mr Tudge told the House of Representatives CyberKnife delivers a far more targeted radiotherapy treatment, significantly minimising the damage to non-cancerous parts of the body. It also enables radiotherapy to be delivered to some patients who otherwise could not receive radiotherapy, in particular younger people.

"This is a remarkable technology that has the capacity to save or improve the lives of hundreds of people who are suffering from cancer," he said.

The treatment is available in 26 countries, Mr Tudge said, and should be available here.

Two constituents drew his attention to CyberKnife, after their teenage granddaughter had to travel to India to access the treatment when she was in the late stages of a rare bone cancer.

After writing to the Health Minister about the treatment, Mr Tudge was advised that an application in relation to the technology is currently before the Medical Services Advisory Committee. Approval by the committee is needed for the oncology service to be claimable under Medicare.

"It is clearly not an experimental treatment but one that is widespread elsewhere," Mr Tudge said. "It is time we had it here." •

Roo industry needs a bounce

GREATER effort is needed to develop export markets for kangaroo meat, according to the Member for Maranoa (Qld) Bruce Scott.

Mr Scott told the House of Representatives particular effort should be directed to re-establishing the valuable market in Russia and pursuing a potentially lucrative market in China.

The kangaroo (or macropod) industry provides employment opportunities in many regional communities, both in the harvesting and processing sectors.

"In some of these communities 30 to 40 per cent of the jobs are related to the harvesting of the macropods in that area," Mr Scott said.

With record rainfalls over three consecutive years leading to a massive increase in kangaroo numbers, and a consequential increase in the kangaroo harvest quota, Mr Scott is concerned

there are not enough markets for kangaroo meat, which will ultimately lead to the meat being sold as pet food.

"That is a tragedy because kangaroo meat is better than a pet food industry product," he said. "It is much better and has a place in the human consumption chain."

Mr Scott said he did not want to see a situation where funding was simply provided to cull kangaroos, because kangaroo meat could be a valuable food export product for Australia if markets were developed. •

Insurance 'name and shame' threat

Companies put on notice.



RIISING TIDE: Flood victims' anger leads to rethink on insurance rules

Insurance companies may be forced to comply with a compulsory code of practice and face the prospect of being 'named and shamed' for breaches, if recommendations from a parliamentary inquiry are implemented.

The House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee has released its report into the operation of the insurance industry during disaster events after severe flooding hit several states and Cyclone Yasi devastated parts of north Queensland during 2011.

The committee has made 13 recommendations including beefing up the industry code of practice and making it mandatory.

It also wants the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) to 'name and shame' insurers who breach the code of practice.

Committee chair Graham Perrett (Moreton, Qld) said the changes were designed to "bring in some stick" and give customers more power when trying to have complex and difficult claims finalised.

"During our travels around Australia to regions affected by natural disasters, we found that often the insurance claim process had a detrimental effect on people already devastated by trauma and loss," he said.

"Unfortunately there are no regulations that compel insurance companies to do the right thing by their clients and resolve claims in a timely and satisfactory fashion.

"On the whole we can say that most insurance companies do make an effort however there are some gaps in there and this report has highlighted those gaps."

Members of the committee heard hundreds of stories from homeowners and businesses around the country voicing concerns over how their claim was handled by their insurer.

Many who gave evidence to the inquiry detailed their frustrations in dealing with their insurance companies to get their claim completed while trying to rebuild their lives.

LATEST

THOUSANDS RESPOND TO MARRIAGE SURVEY

An online survey on two same sex marriage bills currently before the House of Representatives has received more than 20,000 responses from the public.

The survey is part of a review of the two marriage amendment bills by the House Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee.

Both the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 seek to repeal the definition of marriage as being only between a man and a woman to allow any two people regardless of sex to marry.

The Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 goes further, specifically allowing any two people, regardless of sex,

sexual orientation or gender identity to marry.

Both bills also seek to repeal Section 88EA of the Marriage Act 1961 to allow same sex marriages solemnised in foreign countries to be recognised in Australia.

Committee chair Graham Perrett (Moreton, Qld) said the committee will hold a public hearing in Sydney in mid-April to discuss the legal implications of the two bills and plans to table its report by 18 June 2012.

The online survey will be open for responses until 20 April 2012, and can be accessed at the committee website. •

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NEWS

THINKSTOCK



LAW ENFORCEMENT POWER AUDIT

The House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee has called for the Attorney-General to audit Australia's law enforcement agencies to justify recent and proposed expansion of their investigative and coercive powers.

The committee made the recommendation as part of its review of the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Powers and Offences) Bill 2011, which contains changes to how DNA evidence can be collected and used, how the Australian Crime Commission operates and matters pertaining to parole, drug importation and investigating corruption.

The committee largely recommended the bill pass unamended, but requested the Attorney-General provide a report by October this year to make it clear to what extent an individual's right to privacy can be abrogated in the course of an investigation.

Other recommendations include changes to the wording on the abolition of automatic parole to ensure the amendments do not apply retrospectively, and for the government to consider establishing a federal parole board.

In a separate inquiry the committee recommended a bill establishing an R18+ rating for video games be passed by the House.

Committee chair Graham Perrett (Moreton, Qld) said the new rating would bring classification of video games into line with the current standards for films.

"The committee considers that the bill aims to make a common sense change to the existing classification system for computer games, and is pleased to present this advisory report in favour of the bill," Mr Perrett said. •

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Several witnesses told the inquiry some people had simply given up on their claims as the process was too complicated. The inquiry also heard complaints of inconsistencies, with some houses in the same street having their claim approved while others were rejected.

Some residents are still waiting for a final outcome of their claim a year on from events which destroyed or severely damaged their homes.

The federal government has already responded to calls for a standard definition of flooding to be used across the industry and legislation is before parliament. It has also pledged to implement the compulsory use of a 'key facts sheet' which outlines to people exactly what they are covered for.

Mr Perrett said he did not believe that the changes would result in significant administration costs for the industry.

But Insurance Council of Australia (ICA) chief executive Rob Whelan said many of the code of practice changes recommended had already been implemented by either industry or the federal government and further regulation from governments or ASIC was not necessary.

"In early February the ICA board agreed to changes to the general insurance code of practice that addresses the concerns of consumer groups relating to claims handling timetables,

external expert reports and a right to claim," he said.

Mr Whelan said the ICA supported a legislated standard definition of flood. However he said the report failed to identify actions governments could take to improve the affordability of insurance and reduce the impact of disasters on at-risk communities. He also defended the industry's response to the overwhelming events of 2011.

"Last year, despite the fact insurers operated in extremely tough conditions and were handling thousands of calls every day, catastrophe claims were finalised on average in 29 days," he said.

"Despite the massive number of claims, much less than one per cent of all catastrophe claims were referred to the independent Financial Ombudsman Service for determination, which proves the effectiveness of both the internal and external dispute resolution process."

Federal parliament would need to pass legislation to make the code of practice compulsory.

The committee also recommended that governments should make additional funds available for mobile legal services to help anyone affected by a natural disaster make an insurance claim. •

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NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH: *Call for better diplomatic representation*

Diplomatic focus needs to shift

Economic growth centres require attention.

Australia's diplomatic network is underfunded, overworked and unable to respond to the challenges of the current global environment, according to international policy think tank the Lowy Institute.

In a report titled *Diplomatic disrepair*, Lowy found Australia had the fewest diplomatic posts of any member of the G20 group of nations, and spent less than \$1 billion annually on diplomacy compared to around \$25 billion on defence.

It called for Australia to open at least another 20 new missions over the next decade, following on from recently opened posts in Peru, Ethiopia and India.

Co-author of the Lowy report Andrew Shearer said the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has been consistently run down in terms of funding and staffing by successive governments over the last 20 years. This is despite DFAT's crucial role in navigating a turbulent international political environment as well as rapidly growing demand for consular services.

"When you add all that up I am absolutely convinced that now is not the time for Australia to be running down the instruments available to government to protect our interests internationally," Mr Shearer said.

"And yet the work that we've done over the last several years I think makes a

very strong case that is exactly what we've been doing."

Federal parliament's Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee recently launched an inquiry into Australia's overseas representation. Foreign Affairs Subcommittee Chair Nick Champion (Wakefield, SA) said the new inquiry was established out of concerns raised during a previous inquiry into Australia's representation in Africa and the review of DFAT's 2009-10 annual report.

"While the committee recommended in the Africa report that Australia's diplomatic representation in Africa be increased, it recognised that a broader review of overseas representation was needed," Mr Champion said.

"In the review of the annual report the committee expressed the view that there was a substantial question in relation to DFAT's future role and the adequacy of the services it provides on behalf of Australia."

Mr Shearer said the new inquiry needs to provide a recasting of Australia's diplomatic focus, which he says is overly directed towards established economies in Europe.

"New posts are needed in emerging centres of influence and economic opportunity, particularly inland China and eastern Indonesia," Mr Shearer said. "The Gulf, Latin America and Central Asia are also priorities."

Mr Shearer warned there could be severe consequences if the inquiry does not produce an ongoing funding boost for DFAT and a bipartisan commitment to increase Australia's diplomatic capacity over the next decade and beyond.

"Diplomacy is the most cost-effective policy instrument to promote and secure our interests in a fast-changing world. Our overseas network has been neglected and run down over decades.

"In an era of increased risk, time may be running out for government to reverse this trend and to take meaningful, sustained action to rebuild Australia's diplomatic infrastructure." •

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NEWS

Forestry proposals welcomed

Industry support for parliamentary committee report.

Forestry industry representatives are hopeful governments will take action to shore up the sector's future viability in the wake of a wide-ranging parliamentary inquiry.

The House of Representatives Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry Committee has made 19 recommendations for reform of the forestry industry following an extensive inquiry.

Among them was the need for a national plan for plantations, as well as consideration of national approaches to forestry and climate change, farm forestry and other issues. It has been 20 years since Australian governments issued the National Forestry Policy Statement.

Committee chair Dick Adams (Lyons, Tas) said the committee did not want to dwell on the environmental conflict that has been a prominent part of the industry's history.

"The recommendations have been carefully couched to give hope to our forest workers, our contractors, sawmillers, pulp and papermakers and our craft and woodworkers," he said.

"Australia wants a sustainable industry in all its facets and we want to ensure that our landscape still reflects the power of the trees."

The report has received the support of industry groups such as the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), particularly the inquiry's recommendation that the generation of electricity by burning of native forest waste products be recognised under the Renewable Energy Target (RET) scheme.

Regulations in the government's carbon tax package have prevented the eligibility of native forest biomass for renewable energy certificates.

However, independent MP Rob Oakeshott (Lyne, NSW) has moved a disallowance motion to overturn the regulation.

AFPA chief executive David Pollard said Mr Oakeshott should be congratulated for his "rational and necessary" action.

However environmentalists who have long campaigned on this issue are outraged by Mr Oakeshott's motion.

Environmentalist and well-known fashion designer Prue Acton said the timber industry needs to be called to account over its environmental claims.

"The timber industry often promotes timber products as environmentally friendly," she said.

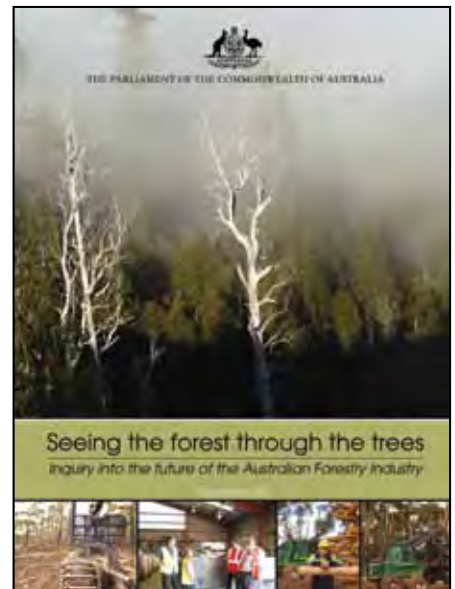
"Certainly timber products may be less environmentally damaging than some plastics, but this does not mean that timber and wood products are environmentally friendly."

In other recommendations the committee has called for changes to the regional forest agreements to give more certainty, a system for quantifying carbon stored in wood products and a national public information campaign to promote the use of wood products as replacements for more energy intensive materials.

Overall the 10-month inquiry found the future of Australian forestry is bright, but acknowledged it was grappling with several challenges such as the impact of the global financial crisis and other market shifts.

"To help the future of the planet, we will need to have wood replace other materials which embody much more energy than non-renewables such as steel or plastic," Dick Adams said.

Mr Pollard said the government now had a number of reports on the forestry industry to consider.



GROWING FUTURE: Forestry report calls for reform

"We are heading down the path in association with the [Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry] of putting them together in some sort of comprehensive report that can provide the basis of a strategy of the industry," he said.

"This report of the committee would be an input to what the final strategic view of the industry's future is."

Mr Pollard said there was also "positive movement" on the formation of a taskforce with industry and government representatives to ensure the committee's report is acted upon.

"AFPA welcomes a number of key recommendations from this inquiry which acknowledge the important role the industry can play in a renewable and sustainable economy." •

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Donation reform recommended

Political parties would need to declare all donations over \$1,000 under a raft of changes recommended by a parliamentary inquiry.

Federal parliament's Electoral Matters Committee has released its report into the funding of political parties and election campaigns, finding Australia's political financing arrangements are in need of reform.

"While there is no evidence that the funding and disclosure system is being abused, the inquiry has provided an opportunity to strengthen and provide more confidence in the system," the report said.

"Transparency and accountability must remain central goals of our financing arrangements."

The committee wants any donations above \$1,000 to be disclosed. At present the current threshold is \$11,900.

It also wants single donations over \$100,000 to be disclosed to the Australian Electoral Commission within 14 days.

The committee has also proposed greater disclosure of political spending, which is currently disclosed as a block sum with no specific details.

A dissenting report from the Coalition members of the committee criticised some of the 30 recommendations, particularly the lowering of the declaration threshold which it said serves the interests of Labor, the Greens and their backers.

"[This] will significantly impact the ability of individuals to give donations to political parties without the potential for intimidation and harassment," it said.

Meanwhile the Greens expressed their disappointment that bans on donations from tobacco and alcohol companies would not be implemented.

"Prohibiting these industries from making political donations would be a first step in combating the corrupting influence of donations in politics," the Greens' report said. •

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DRESSED FOR SUCCESS: Fashion skills helping new migrants

Creativity assists with settlement

New arrivals from war torn countries like Sudan need more help to stay in school or gain meaningful work experience to avoid becoming involved in criminal activity, according to a former teenage refugee.

Nyadol Nyuon, who arrived with her family in Australia in 2005, knows from her own experience that more educational support is needed — especially in regional Australia — to help young people maximise their potential.

She is now an ambassador for The Social Studio in Melbourne which helps mostly African refugees gain hands-on experience in the fashion, retail and hospitality industries.

"A lot of young people from refugee backgrounds struggle when they go to high school, and since young people spend a lot of their time in high school this is an environment where, if more is invested in it, they can get more out of it," Ms Nyuon said.

She told a parliamentary inquiry into multiculturalism that giving more support to young people struggling at school could help them stay engaged and less likely to become involved with gangs and other criminal behaviour.

"So if we invest in schools and the education system we might also be countering some other issues in the community and maybe even stopping other things from happening in the future," she said.

NEWS

Chief executive of The Social Studio, Grace McQuilten said the studio was started as a direct response to a range of settlement issues faced by refugees, including unemployment, isolation and difficulties accessing education and training.

The studio has had success in retaining 90 per cent of its students with a range of strategies such as providing them with access to education and assistance with employment opportunities in retail, hospitality and clothing production. This creates a sense of social inclusion and community engagement through their interaction with customers and other members of the public.

Dr McQuilten said the studio's fashion focus helps. "The most obvious is our focus on creativity through fashion and design, and our flexible training delivery where students access TAFE level training, all of which occurs in a supportive setting at The Social Studio," she said.

"A number of programs are attached to the enterprise to ensure students can access support for issues that impact on their ability to participate, including driving tuition, financial counselling, legal advice, referrals for housing, medical needs and counselling."

Dr McQuilten cited a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission study which supported Ms Nyuon's views on the need for greater educational support for newly arrived refugees.

The study of African Australians found the settlement experience is made difficult by a lack of flexibility at education and training facilities to meet the needs of refugee students. It also highlighted the negative attitudes by some teachers and trainers to the abilities of their refugee students, and their difficulties with the curriculum due to a lack of formal education.

The study found younger refugees can lack confidence in English, which creates significant anxiety and feelings of embarrassment on the part of students and can result in increased absences or dropping out.

"We advocate for increased support systems for refugee students in primary and secondary schools, along with alternative educational programs and vocational training for students who

discontinue schooling," Dr McQuilten said.

"Supportive workplace based training and work experience programs greatly enhance the employability of newly arrived migrants from refugee backgrounds. We have found that with increased confidence, self-esteem and English language skills young people form the building blocks for subsequent employment."

Ms Nyuon told MPs at the hearing that when it comes to community awareness of multiculturalism, she thinks more has to be done from within communities such as her own Sudanese community.

"We need to do more to reach out to the mainstream Australian community," she said. "Also, more needs to be done by government officials in making sure that the idea of multiculturalism does not look like something that the ethnic community or people who look ethnic do and the rest sort of watch. Maybe we as a community are not demonstrating very well how multiculturalism benefits our society."

"If we put more emphasis on that, maybe people could see that it is part of an Australian identity, not something that belongs to certain people."

Ms Nyuon highlighted the media's role in how certain communities are being perceived in Australia.

"Particularly the Sudanese communities we deal with have had very bad media coverage — the notions of Sudanese gangs, which is really disproportionate to what is happening in the community."

"It does not assist in the process of settlement, it does not assist in making better communities; it just makes communities scared. We become scared of each other because we are made to feel like our neighbour is a bad person who may attack us."

"That is another thing that needs to be combated. More action needs to be taken. More and more young people feel that if they try to reach out for an Australian identity, it is almost as though they are being told 'You're not Australian enough in some ways'." •

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GETTY IMAGES

THE DOCTOR IS OUT: *Concerns over mobile medics*

FLY-IN MEDICINE SECOND BEST

Rural health advocates have urged federal MPs to ensure the work of local health professionals is not undermined with the use of fly-in fly-out medical staff.

Concerns about the provision of rural health services have been highlighted by the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) to the House of Representatives Regional Australia Committee's inquiry into fly-in fly-out (FIFO) and drive-in drive-out (DIDO) workers.

NRHA told the committee policies and programs are needed to effectively balance the use of temporary staff and permanent workers in providing the best care possible to patients.

Executive director Gordon Gregory said feedback received from rural communities is that the use of FIFO health services is a "necessary second best".

"For the people of rural Australia, FIFO and DIDO services are part of a necessary compromise between the tyranny of distance and the justified expectation of [people's] access to services," he said.

The NRHA emphasised in its submission to the inquiry that despite the potential for some problems, FIFO workers make a significant contribution

to rural and remote health in areas of shortage and in some communities there is no other choice.

But it said the design and operation of FIFO health services must provide support to healthcare workers already on the ground rather than contribute to the closure of existing health and aged care services.

“The dismantling or deterioration of existing health infrastructure and shrinkage of the local resident health workforce makes it even harder for the community to retain its existing health professionals or to attract a new workforce — even a visiting one,” the submission said.

While advocating for its own members, NRHA has also raised concerns about the health of the growing number of FIFO workers it sometimes ends up treating, such as mining staff. It has recommended that there should be research into the impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing of FIFO workers and their families.

The Australian Medical Association’s Western Australia branch agrees. AMA WA president David Mountain told the inquiry there is a “noticeable dearth” of research and evidence into the full impact of FIFO practices on health, communities and small business.

“Recent reports have shown significant health concerns around FIFO workers, ranging from diabetes, to obesity, mental health and heart issues, and it is important that any review involves this key area,” Dr Mountain said.

In its submission to the inquiry the Royal Flying Doctor Service emphasised the importance of using FIFO staff to supplement local services. It also raised concerns about the impacts on its budget and ability to deliver services of increasing numbers of FIFO workers.

“If the FIFO workforce continues to grow the strain on RFDS health services is likely to increase,” it said. •

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Ghost town warning

Soaring insurance costs hit unit owners.



GETTY IMAGES

HIGH RISE: *Complaints about insurance hikes for units*

The north Queensland town of Airlie Beach, renowned as a base from which to explore the Whitsundays, could become a ghost town because of massive increases in insurance costs.

At a community forum on residential strata title insurance, the House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee heard that an increasing number of unit owners are finding themselves in arrears and in some instances forced to sell, as they face massive increases in levies brought on by insurance premium hikes.

These unit owners — often retirees — do not have the option of increasing the rents they charge to help cover their costs because there are already so many vacant units in the small town.

Airlie Beach unit owner Saro Kelly told the committee about the stress she is experiencing after her body corporate insurance increased more than 400 per cent in one year.

“I am the chair of the body corporate for a group of eight units. I have owned my unit there for almost

nine years. We have had no insurance claims over that period at all. As of just over 12 months ago, we were with Zurich Insurance and we were paying — this is for body corporate insurance — \$3,500 per annum. We went to renew that policy and they came back to us with a renewal amount of \$18,283.42,” she said.

“We then started, after having a bit of a moment, to look around at other insurers. There were two things upsetting at that point. One was that there were only a handful of insurers that were offering body corporate insurance. The second was that the best offer we could find ended up being through one of our local brokers, Oceanic Insurance — the policy was from AMP — and was for \$7,877.”

She said her unit has become unaffordable and she is going backwards financially.

“I cannot put the rent up. I have had to give my tenant a rent reduction because there are so many vacant units in our area. I am lucky to actually have a tenant and I am grateful for that.

NEWS

But the financial hardship out of the situation has been extreme.”

Anthony O’Rourke, chairman of a body corporate of nine units in Airlie Beach, told the committee insurance premiums had risen 225 per cent in one year.

“In 2009-10 our insurance was \$4,500. That increased in the following year, 2010-11, to \$14,500. Then last year, 2011-12, it went up to \$32,500. It was actually \$35,000 but I managed to get our broker to waive his fee, so we made a saving there.”

He said there was a glimmer of hope with an increasing number of miners coming to the town looking for places to rent.

While Airlie Beach appears to have been particularly badly affected, the financial difficulties caused by insurance hikes are affecting towns right along the coast, including Mackay and Proserpine.

Mackay resident and treasurer of a 20 unit body corporate, Mark Faulkner said their insurance costs went from around \$25,000 to \$102,000 in just a year.

“Our research has shown that if you have a stand-alone, four bedroom, split level house, your average insurance costs for that sort of dwelling are around \$2,000 to \$2,500, depending on your provider. On our calculations, we are paying in excess of \$5,000 per unit for having our insurance cover,” he said.

Mackay body corporate manager, Susan Seymour, said the insurance increases are impacting coastal areas.

“I am a branch manager for Body Corporate Services in Mackay. We look after over 120 buildings in Mackay, Moranbah, Emerald, Airlie Beach, Yeppoon and Rockhampton. The increase in insurance is coastal. You can get insurance for the inland and it has remained fairly stable. Airlie Beach has been hit significantly harder than any other region on the coast,” she said.

“Airlie will become a ghost town with empty units.”

The committee’s report was released in March. •

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Strike fighter may fall short

Concerns raised over combat capabilities.



DEFENCE DIGITAL MEDIA

DOG FIGHT: *Aircraft performance questioned*

Aviation experts have warned federal parliament’s Defence Committee that Australia’s multi-billion dollar Joint Strike Fighter program looms as an expensive failure due to the jet fighter’s limited stealth ability to avoid radar and weapons systems.

Peter Goon from the aviation think tank Air Power Australia told the committee he believes the F35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters, due for delivery in 2015, will struggle in combat against more stealthy fighters being developed by both China and Russia. He said the F35 was developed to complement the faster, more agile F22A Raptor, which the United States government will not sell to its allies.

“The Joint Strike Fighter is now more expensive than the larger and over three times more capable F22A Raptor,” Mr Goon said.

“Russia and China are now well advanced in their production of advanced stealth fighters specifically intended to be competitive with the superior United States F22A Raptor. The inferior Joint Strike Fighter, defined in aerodynamic performance and stealth only to attack lightly defended battlefield ground targets, has no prospect of ever successfully competing against these larger, more agile, higher flying and

much faster foreign stealth fighters, which also happen to be better armed.”

Mr Goon said the very limited stealth capabilities of the Joint Strike Fighter were inadequate for avoiding and surviving from threats such as advanced long range surface-to-air missiles and modern counter-stealth sensors and detection systems.

Air Power Australia’s Dr Carlo Kopp queried the limitations in modern warfare of an aircraft with only enough stealth to evade attack from battlefield surface-to-air missile systems. He claimed the JSF’s joint operational requirements document set very low expectations for the aircraft’s speed, turning performance and agility and also for its stealth performance.

Dr Kopp told MPs that of the current range of stealth aircraft out there, the only ones that are difficult to see from nearly all directions and by a wide range of radars are the B2 batwing bomber and the F22 Raptor. He believed the JSF was really only stealthy in performance from the direction over the aircraft’s nose, meaning it is only hard for radars to detect from the front, but can be seen from the sides, behind and below.

“That has big implications in combat, because if you are going up against a 1980s Soviet air defence system

NEWS

of the type that we saw destroyed very effectively in Libya 12 months ago, a Joint Strike Fighter would be reasonably effective in that environment, because these older Soviet radars would not see it,” Dr Kopp said.

“But if you are putting it up against the newer generation of much, much more powerful Russian radars and some of the newer Chinese radars, the aircraft is quite detectable, especially from behind and from the lower sides.”

Defence simulations expert and former air force fighter pilot Christopher Mills, who works for RepSim, showed the committee computer simulations of a hypothetical air battle in 2018 between either 240 F35s, 240 F22 Raptors or 240 Super Hornets against an equivalent number of Chinese Sukhoi Su-35s off the northern coast of Taiwan. The hypothetical scenario proved devastating for the JSFs and complete annihilation for the Super Hornets.

“We sent out 240 F35As against the Su-35s, and 30 came back — out of 240,” Mr Mills said. “We sent out 240 Hornets and not a single Hornet came back. We sent out 240 F22s — 139 came back, and only 33 Sukhois came back. You would not expect an F35 to be able to take on an advanced fighter like the C35. It is an attack aircraft. To reinvent it as an air superiority weapon is a complete mistake. It is not.”

The managing director of RepSim Michael Price explained the simulations were done for global policy think tank RAND Corporation under a hypothetical scenario that by 2018 China would have developed high frequency over-the-horizon radar which would defeat the stealth characteristics of both the F22 and the F35. He was particularly damning of the upgraded Super Hornets that Defence hope will cover any delays in delivery of the JSF.

“The Super Hornet has got no stealth at all,” Mr Price said. “At the end of the day, it is a technological lemon

for a modern air-to-air combat aircraft. It has got one speed, so it will fall out of the sky as soon as you shoot it.”

When asked by MPs, neither Air Power Australia nor RepSim were able to provide the committee with any alternative jet fighter to purchase instead of the JSF. At previous hearings Air Power Australia had suggested keeping F111s operational for longer. They implied at this hearing that more pressure should be placed on the United States government to change its longstanding policy of not selling F22 Raptors overseas and then acquiring them for the Royal Australian Air Force.

The Defence Department and Lockheed Martin, which makes the JSF, are both expected to answer these criticisms at later hearings. •

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Wine quality may decline

Tasmania’s rich biodiversity and agricultural production are under threat from rising temperatures and falling rainfall, according to new climate change research.

Detailed climate modelling conducted by the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre shows average temperatures will rise by 2.9 degrees by the end of the century.

While significantly below the predicted global rise of 3.5 degrees over the same period, research centre CEO Dr Anthony Press told a House of Representatives committee inquiry into biodiversity that such a rise would still be enough to change the face of Tasmanian agriculture.

“The example we use a lot to demonstrate just how significant this might be is that Tasmania’s reputation as a pinot noir growing region will change significantly,” Dr Press said.

By the end of the century areas that grow pinot noir at the moment will be

far too warm to grow good pinot noir, he said.

The research also points to changes in rainfall patterns across the state, with the east and northeast receiving more rain while the southwest wilderness becomes drier, particularly in summer and autumn.

“Those kinds of changes to rainfall, rainfall patterns and temperature have the potential to significantly impact biodiversity,” Dr Press said. “There will be some species that will not be able to exist in the range that they are in at the moment.”

One example is Tasmania’s famous Miena cider gums, which exude a sweet drinkable sap in spring and are endemic to the region. The species is already facing extinction due to recent drought, and the projections made in the research do not point to a promising future.

Droughts, floods and bushfires are all predicted to increase in frequency and severity, which would be potentially devastating for Tasmania’s fragile wilderness ecosystems. •



WINE DECLINE: Climate change may affect vintages

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The HUR



Lifelong problems are resulting from mothers who drink during pregnancy. A parliamentary committee draws attention to an issue too long hidden from public debate. Story: [Emma O'Sullivan](#)

Anne Russell will never forget the moment she realised her drinking habits during pregnancy were the cause of complex and traumatic problems plaguing both her sons.

She describes her feelings of devastation in a book she has written about her experiences: "My addiction had physically harmed my child! I knew I had to find out more, but just then I was paralysed with a sorrow so powerful there are no words to describe it."

Ms Russell, a former alcoholic, is talking about Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). While most people in Australia are generally aware that drinking alcohol during pregnancy is not recommended, many are unclear about the consequences.

If a child has FASD, they may suffer from a range of physical, behavioural,

mental and cognitive disorders because they have a brain injury.

Diagnosis is tricky, finding appropriate support is complex and the prognosis for adulthood is uncertain.

"There's not enough attention given to the fact that alcohol is a toxin."

Australia also stands accused of ignoring the issue over the past three decades, something federal MP Sharman Stone (Murray, Vic) is seeking to rectify.

Dr Stone was a key player in the formation of a bipartisan parliamentary group established to raise awareness of FASD. She is also on the House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee which is holding an inquiry into prevention strategies,



It's inside

intervention measures and management of FASD.

"This problem is too big to play politics," she says. "It's about getting rid of our culture of denial in Australia and literally making sure that not one more child is born with this incurable, permanent, lifelong brain damage when the mother could have changed her use of alcohol if she knew better."

FASD children and teens are likely to be grappling with a complicated cocktail of overlapping issues such as learning difficulties, memory problems, suicidal thoughts and poor physical and mental health.

Without intensive support they may go on to struggle in adulthood with substance abuse, homelessness, unemployment and brushes with the law.

All these fears are still very real and ongoing for Anne Russell, who can't remember exactly how much she drank in each pregnancy while living in a north Queensland mining town.

She says she was never warned about the harms of drinking. Nor was she asked by her doctor if she had a drinking problem during her second pregnancy with her son, Seth, when her first child, Mick, was already displaying problems.

While most people in Australia are generally aware that drinking alcohol during pregnancy is not recommended, many are unclear about the consequences.

"My youngest son has a significant disability. He can't live independently, he can't manage his money. Unfortunately what people see are the behaviours and until about 12 months ago he was just suicidal because he just couldn't seem to fit in.

"When he was growing up he would have birthday parties, give out lots and lots of invitations but nobody would turn up.

"[Mick] has temporal lobe epilepsy and he's very small for his genetic heritage. But he can live fairly normally and I'm very lucky that he's not as significantly disabled as my second son."

Over the years Ms Russell has watched both her sons suffer. While Mick's problems have been more physical, Seth has struggled with drug abuse, a patchy job record and trouble at school.

When they were young both were hard to handle at various times, but to her frustration she could never work out why. At one point Seth was diagnosed with ADHD, a common misdiagnosis among FASD sufferers.

Ms Russell has now set up the Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Association in the hope of educating more women about the dangers of

“Many people just cannot face the fact that their behaviour is directly behind their child’s problems.”

drinking during pregnancy and to find ways of supporting those already affected. But her quest for answers has not been easy.

Once she made the connection between her drinking and her children’s symptoms, securing an official diagnosis was difficult. According to Ms Russell, one doctor even asked her: “Why are you doing this to yourself?”

“I’ve heard this called an emerging problem but it’s not an emerging problem — it’s something that we’ve only just realised is a problem,” she says.

While countries like the US and Canada appear to be making inroads with FASD, critics here believe not enough is being done to get a national diagnostic tool up and running, establish more accessible intervention programs and better pinpoint its prevalence.

Recent research suggests the incidence of FASD could be up to 0.68 per 1,000 live births, however some say this number is underestimated. It is known that FASD is more prevalent in Indigenous communities with the incidence at somewhere between 2.76 and 4.7 per 1,000 births.

It is generally recognised that FASD is the commonest preventable cause of non-genetic intellectual disability, yet it does not have official disability status.

The implications of this are summed up by the National Council of Intellectual Disability (NCID) in its submission to the parliamentary inquiry: “It is of great concern to NCID that people with FASD are the single largest most undiagnosed, unrecognised cause of disability in the community which attracts no funding and no support or assistance.”

For many of the children community paediatrician Sue Packer sees, FASD is also not their only problem.

“This group of children is the group of children that are more prone to neglect, the parents take other substances as well as alcohol, there’s often malnutrition, there’s often domestic violence,” she says.

“All these things can interfere with a child’s development. So we’re not saying you take alcohol, it affects the foetus and this is the outcome — we’re saying you add alcohol to a very unsatisfactory mix, you’ve got a bad outcome and alcohol is one factor in that outcome.”

On top of these issues is how medical professionals and caregivers themselves handle the perceived stigma attached to FASD.

“It’s very, very hard when you think it is something being in your lifestyle which has caused your child’s problem,” Dr Packer says.

“It’s devastating. Many people just cannot face the fact that their behaviour is directly behind their child’s problems.”

While Anne Russell’s children are fortunate to have ongoing support and commitment from her, other children



CULTURE OF DENIAL:
Facing up to the effects of alcohol during pregnancy

from troubled backgrounds often find themselves in the care of the state.

In her submission to the inquiry, child protection manager Prue Walker details some of the startling results from studies conducted in the US and Canada, where she spent time researching FASD. She says research shows that children in care are 10 to 15 times more likely to have FASD than other children, stay in care longer and require greater attention.

Several foster carers have detailed to the inquiry the difficulties they have endured while caring for children with FASD.

“From the beginning, this child was in a too-hard basket — medically, socially, educationally and in every context imaginable,” writes one anonymous carer in a submission.



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“He had major learning disabilities, poor impulse control, poor memory and concentration, inability to understand or learn social mores and consequences, no empathy, poor gross and fine motor skills.

“The education system ascertained him as merely having a speech impairment, allocating a laughable two hours teacher aide time per week.”

Louise Voigt is CEO of foster care organisation Barnardos. She says those with FASD are hard to place and need a lot more time and attention from carers. Because they are such hard work, some families just cannot cope with the placement.

“People think, ‘if I love this child that will be good enough’, and it’s not,” she says. “It takes years and extremely skilled assistance to learn how to help the child to the maximum.”

Despite the lack of attention to FASD in recent decades, some believe progress is being made, such as paediatrician and clinical academic Elizabeth Elliott. She was part of a team invited to the Fitzroy Valley in the Kimberley region of Western Australia to map the prevalence of FASD and help the community progress a strategy for prevention and

management. The study is the first of its kind in Australia.

In 2010 she spent a year working in around 50 remote communities where she studied children born in 2002 and 2003. She also got a detailed history from their mothers about their drinking.

“What we were able to do was to come up with each of these children a list of strengths and weaknesses and we were able to develop a management plan for every child and to feed that back immediately to the parents, the health professionals involved in the care of that child and their school teachers,” she says.

“We came out of that project feeling that this sort of multi-disciplinary approach is a very good approach to be used in remote communities to get a very good baseline assessment of health and developmental problems.”

She is now analysing the data collected and hopes this work will contribute to a better understanding of how prevalent FASD is, especially in remote Indigenous communities.

Professor Elliott is also involved in the development of a diagnostic and screening tool which is being funded by the federal government.

“I guess what we need to do now is to make a decision nationally about what approach we’re going to take to diagnosis and how we’re going to enable access to diagnostic clinics for all children,” she says.

Establishing prevalence is one thing, but how do you go about a widespread social and community change that would work towards better preventing FASD cases in the first place? And why in this day and age, when pregnant women have access to more information than ever, are children still being born with FASD?

Sharman Stone believes Australia’s attitude to drinking certainly doesn’t help.

“We have alcohol in every element of our society,” she says. “We talk about it as a relaxant, we talk about it as a celebratory drink. We associate it with sophistication and having fun.”

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare around 80 per cent of Australians over 14 drink alcohol. Figures also show that one in

**BITTER
EXPERIENCE:**
*Better information is
needed on alcohol effects
says Anne Russell*



five Australians drank at levels that put them at harm over their lifetime.

“Alcohol in our society is a huge problem,” says Dr Packer. “If you don’t drink at all you’re a wowser and we’re not very keen on wowsers.

“There’s not enough attention given to the fact that alcohol is a toxin.”

Dr Packer, Professor Elliot and Anne Russell all agree there needs to be a coordinated national media and

education campaign about alcohol and pregnancy.

“Even though the National Health and Medical Research Council has stated that no alcohol is safest, medical professionals are still not giving that as a consistent message,” Ms Russell says. “It must be very difficult for people now to know exactly what’s right and what’s not.”



“Blanket warnings and recommendations for total abstinence by pregnant women serve little purpose other than to inflict fear or guilt in pregnant women.”

was thought to have some intellectual problem when he was six months old. If the doctor had asked me at that point whether I'd been drinking my young son may not have been affected.”

She and others in the field also support the use of warning labels on the packaging of alcoholic drinks as part of a coordinated campaign. However the issue is controversial for several reasons.

Voluntary consumer labels are being rolled out on various products over the next two years. They were launched last July as part of a broader campaign through the organisation DrinkWise, which is an independent body funded by industry.

The labels read ‘It is safest not to drink while pregnant’ and there is also an image of a pregnant woman, drink in hand, with a line drawn through it.

For some advocates and health professionals, however, this action is not enough. Groups such as the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) are in favour of more explicit warnings such as: ‘Drinking any alcohol can harm your unborn baby.’

FARE says the current labels do not describe the potential harms that can result from alcohol misuse and contain “ambiguous” and “weak” messages.

However industry is opposed to anything mandatory and argues while labelling may raise awareness it ultimately does not change behaviour.

“Blanket warnings and recommendations for total abstinence by pregnant women serve little purpose other than to inflict fear or guilt in pregnant women,” the Winemakers Federation of Australia says in its submission to the inquiry.

“The current effort and energies being expended by governments and

NGOs on population-wide responses would be [better] directed to address specific and targeted education through GPs, obstetricians, paediatricians and community health centres which will ultimately enable the women to make informed choices based on the best available evidence.”

While that prevention fight goes on, what is the prognosis for those who are already suffering? According to Dr Packer, that depends on what your other life circumstances are like.

Those most likely to thrive will have an extended support network, good health care and plenty of early intervention therapy. But without that, the story is very different.

“If they continue to live in an abusive, violent, chaotic, unpredictable, poorly nourished environment they are going to do very, very badly,” she says. •

Current labels do not describe the potential harms that can result from alcohol misuse

FOR MORE INFORMATION on the inquiry by the House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee into the incidence and prevention of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, visit www.aph.gov.au/spla or email spla.reps@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 2358.

Professor Elliott also points out that health professionals have a bigger role to play early on.

“I think early recognition is the key so GPs particularly, but also obstetricians, gynaecologists, need to be aware of whether or not the woman they're seeing either prior to or during pregnancy has a problem with drinking.”

It's a point Anne Russell agrees with from bitter experience. “My eldest son

An underwater photograph showing a large, dark, spiny sea urchin in the foreground, resting on a sandy and rocky seabed. In the background, there is a large, dark, leafy structure, possibly a kelp or seaweed, and a bright light source creating a strong glare on the right side of the image. The water is clear and blue.

INVASION OF THE DEEP

BARREN PARADISE:
*Urchin migration puts
biodiversity at risk.*
Photo: Scott Ling



EVIDENCE ABOUT A BIODIVERSITY SHIFT IS EMERGING FROM AUSTRALIA'S OCEAN FLOOR.

Story: **Simon Grose**

In the waters off the east coast of Tasmania, an invasion has taken place.

Sea urchins have moved in en masse to occupy a marine habitat that some 50 years ago had never seen these creatures.

And while urchins are a favourite food of rock lobsters, which should now be enjoying their abundant seafloor buffet, lobster numbers are dwindling.

Scientists point to the combined effects of climate change and fishing activity to explain this apparent contradiction. It's an early example of how the physical and biological dynamics of our seas are being altered and how climate change is jeopardising levels of marine biodiversity.

Data on this urchin migration was published by researchers from the University of Tasmania, the Australian National University and CSIRO in the *Journal of Experimental Marine Biology and Ecology*. They note the first signs of urchin movement southwards from their usual home in the coastal waters of New South Wales were recorded in the 1960s, when individual urchins were discovered in the waters of the Bass Strait islands. By 1978 urchins were being found off northeast Tasmania, but that was just a portent of the mass migration that was to follow.

"Surveys conducted between 2000 and 2002 at locations along the entire east coast of Tasmania demonstrate subsequent expansion of populations to the urchin's current status as a common and, in some places, dominant invertebrate on shallow subtidal rocky reefs," the scientists report.

According to one of the paper's authors, Dr Gretta Peccl of the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies at the University of Tasmania, sea urchins are part of a veritable Sydney-to-Hobart fleet of underwater migrants.

Sea urchins are part
of a veritable Sydney-
to-Hobart fleet of
underwater migrants.

"That's one example of several dozen species that were not recorded in Tasmania 30 to 40 years ago that are now common in Tasmanian waters," Dr Peccl says.

This invasion has been driven by a southwards extension of the East Australian Current (EAC), a change attributed to global warming. The EAC is strongest in summer and now peters out around 350km further south than it did in the middle of last century.

It has carried sea urchin spawn and juveniles across Bass Strait and down Tasmania's coast where it has also caused a rise in ocean temperatures, which suits sea urchins.

Once established the urchins have prospered on rocky seafloors where they feed on algae and other seafloor denizens which are also food for lobsters

and black-lip abalone. They prosper so well that they create 'barrens' which they have denuded of up to 150 species of seafloor flora and fauna, causing the numbers of lobsters and abalone in those areas to fall. Sea urchins, however, can survive on their barrens by feeding on microalgae and other lower-order food sources.

The story of their Tasmanian invasion is analogous to the first human inhabitants of Australia who found a bounty of protein in the form of herbivorous marsupial 'megafauna'. They plundered this abundant food source, contributing to the eventual extinction of the megafauna, and then adapted to survive on what was left.

So why don't big rock lobsters march into these new Tasmanian barrens and feast on sea urchins, bringing the seafloor communities back towards a new balance? Because humans like eating rock lobsters and the only ones they are allowed to harvest are the big ones.

Dr Peccl writes there are not enough large lobsters left in the area to stop the invasion of sea urchins and the creation of barrens habitats, which in turn further reduces lobster numbers and weakens the natural protection they provide.

"The climate-driven establishment of sea urchins in eastern Tasmania provides the first documented example for Southern Hemisphere temperate reef systems of cascading ecological effects stemming, at least in part, from oceanographic change.

"Coupled with potential effects on population parameters of key commercial species such as abalone and





rock lobsters dependent on reef ecosystems, the combined influence of climate change on eastern Tasmanian rocky reefs, and the humans that depend on them, is already manifestly large.”

Public understanding of the challenges to Australia’s biodiversity arising from global warming is generally based on media reports that are most likely to focus on what is happening, and predicted to happen, on land. The eruption of sea urchin populations on Tasmania’s east coast is a reminder that the effect of global warming is just as powerful in our seas, a phenomenon that has come to the fore in evidence supplied to the House of Representatives Climate Change Committee for its inquiry into Australia’s biodiversity in a changing climate.



In its submission to the inquiry, the Australian Marine Sciences Association (AMSA) says global warming will cause changes in the ranges of individual species, the elimination of some species from their current geographic habitats, and the total extinction of some species.

It notes Australia’s temperate marine environments have a very high proportion of species that are endemic — they occur nowhere else. Their options to move southwards to survive are limited by the fact that the Southern Ocean is deep and wide, offering no coastal shelves as potential new habitats.

“As the ocean warms, these species will increasingly be restricted to a smaller portion of Australian waters, and range shifts will be limited by the southern extent of our coastline,” AMSA’s submission says.

“The same is true of marine species within Australia’s Antarctic Territory that are living close to their physiological limits and for which habitats are disappearing.

“Many Australian endemic marine species are predicted to become endangered and some will become extinct, including many species of commercial and recreational importance.

“This represents a major challenge for Australia in the area of biodiversity conservation.”



UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA



ISTOCK

BIGGER IS BETTER:
*Large lobsters needed to
 fight invasion*

AMSA also points out that as most marine species are cold-blooded, rising ocean temperatures will cause their metabolisms to speed up.

“Increased metabolism will decrease the duration of larval stages, and will likely decrease the geographic scale of population connectivity of marine species,” it says.

“Increased metabolism will also increase the requirement for food per unit time: food may become limiting, and vulnerable life history stages may starve or lose condition, making them more vulnerable to disease and predation and less likely to disperse successfully.”

How this heightened vulnerability could lead to extinction was highlighted in evidence to the committee at a hearing in Perth by Dr Jane Fromont, Head of the Department of Aquatic Zoology at the Western Australian Museum.



UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

**“We were catching species that
 we would not normally catch
 south of Exmouth”**

“You will get a recruitment on a strong, warm, southward-flowing current, but that does not necessarily mean you have a population established at the new site that can now start self-recruiting to that area,” Dr Fromont told the committee.

“The fact that you might see different species there does not necessarily mean that they are now stably in that environment — a few cold cycles may mean that those adults die off and that is the end of it.

“So I am not sure that these species are going to be able to keep in front of climate change as much as we would hope that they could.”

Deputy chair of the committee, Dr Mal Washer (Moore, WA), provided anecdotal evidence of the southwards movement of species off the WA coast from a recent ocean fishing excursion.

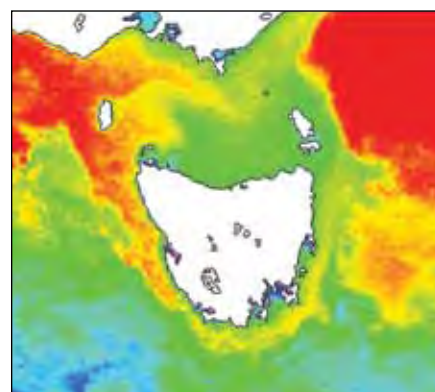
“We were catching species that we would not normally catch south of Exmouth — coral trout and fish like that,” Dr Washer said.



THINKSTOCK

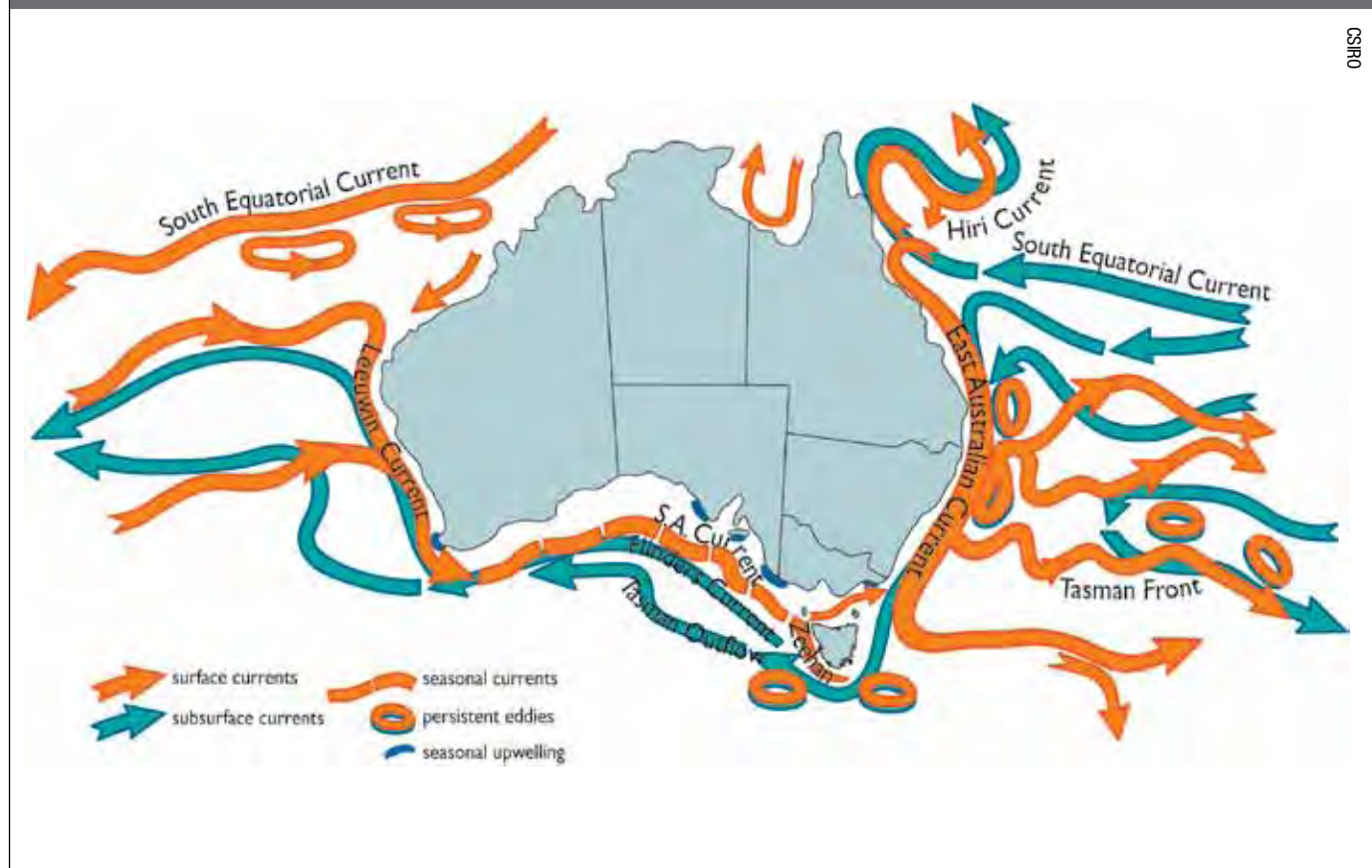
“It doesn’t take Einstein to figure out that there are already major changes happening”

GO WITH THE FLOW:
Ocean currents shaping the underwater battle for dominance



CSIRO

AUSTRALIAN OCEAN CURRENTS



CSIRO



“There were things like mud crabs, which you would never find much south of Carnarvon, now going as far as Bunbury and Bussellton.”

Unlike the southwards migration on the east coast, this phenomenon on the west coast is not being driven by an extension of the Leeuwin current which is showing signs of weakening as the waters warm.

Gretta Peccl says sealife are moving south to keep pace with the southwards shift of their preferred temperature ranges.

“In some species it’s the adults that are moving very actively and spawning, in other species the larvae are moving into an environment and it’s a survival-mediated process.

“The fact that we are getting so many species in different systems all shifting in the way that we would predict with climate change is very strong evidence that they are being affected by climate change.”

In his evidence to the committee at a hearing in Canberra, Climate Commissioner Professor Will Steffen said failure to reduce global fossil fuel emissions compared to business-as-usual trends over this century would result in atmospheric temperatures

“There is a lot about how the ecosystem works that we don’t fully understand”

TIPPING POINT:

Major changes predicted for the ocean floor



rising by at least four degrees Celsius between 2000 and 2100.

Gretta Peccl says there would be “winners and losers” in our oceans if that were to occur. Most likely to survive and prosper would be “generalist” species that are not too choosy about what they eat. Squid and octopus are generalist front runners.

“A squid will eat anything that moves,” Dr Peccl says. But how much biodiversity will be moving around for squid to eat?

“A temperature change of that magnitude would have a very large impact on our marine life.

“There is a lot about how the ecosystem works that we don’t fully understand so it’s hard to predict with accuracy what the exact impacts will be — but it doesn’t take Einstein to figure out that there are already major changes happening.” •

FOR MORE INFORMATION on the House of Representatives Climate Change Committee’s inquiry into Australia’s biodiversity in a changing climate, visit www.aph.gov.au/ccea or email ccea.reps@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4580.

STORY:
GEOFFREY MASLEN

It can take just one mistake to get scammed out of your life savings. With older Australians making up the fastest growing group of internet users in the nation, they have become a particular target for cybercriminals.

The next time your phone rings it may not be the call you are expecting and, if you are not careful, it could lead to all sorts of trouble.

Internet scams that start with a call to a landline or mobile are the latest tool in the arsenal of cybercriminals, and often it's older Australians in their sights.

A typical phone scam involves a caller claiming to be from a large telecommunications or computer company such as Telstra, Big Pond or Microsoft. Victims are led to believe their computer has a virus and they need to provide the caller with personal details and even remote computer access so the problem can be fixed.

Cybercriminals can then access bank accounts, credit cards or even superannuation information, or use personal details to establish false identities that can take years to be erased.

According to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) reports of scams delivered by phone soared from just over 2,000 in 2009 to more than 14,000 in 2010.

Some scammers claim to be representatives of government departments such as the Department of Veterans' Affairs or the non-existent Government Grants Department, offering fake government grants, false energy rebates or bogus refunds for overpaid taxes.

There was even a scam offering to list a consumer's phone number on the Australian government's (free) Do Not Call register for a fee.

Older Australians are particularly vulnerable to these types of tricks, according to Val French, president of the advocacy group Older People Speak Out (OPSO).

"Most elderly people are more trusting and they can easily be beguiled into providing financial information that unscrupulous scammers can use to steal their money," Mrs French says.

"Being robbed online is probably the most dangerous form of abuse of the elderly."

The Australian Crime Commission (ACC) is urging retirees to protect themselves against this growing threat and is working with law enforcement agencies to stop criminals getting their hands on Australia's extensive retirement and superannuation savings.

The commission estimates that more than 2,400 people, 800 companies and 51 superannuation funds have lost a total of \$93 million so far this year because of the scams. The cost to each scammed individual averages around \$1,000, but can be as high as \$4 million.

"Being robbed online is probably the most dangerous form of abuse of the elderly."

The fraudsters use highly sophisticated websites to trick investors into thinking their offers are legitimate. Typically based offshore, the ACC warns the scammers are also operating locally, for example on Queensland's Gold Coast, where police recently swooped on a fraudulent investment company known as West Trade or Atlas Lead Generation and closed it down.

"There are a significant number of offshore operations still active and thousands of Australians are still at risk," says ACC official Carey Stent.

"I urge potential investors to carefully consider all investment opportunities and seek professional advice before making investment decisions," he says.

Federal parliament is also taking the issue seriously. Following an inquiry into cybersafety and the young which reported last June, the Joint Select Committee on

BA





Cyber-Safety has begun an investigation aimed at making the cybersphere a safer place for older people.

After all, older Australians have become the most rapidly expanding group of internet users. The Australian Communications and Media Authority found that nearly half those aged 65-plus had used the internet in an average week in June 2010 compared with just over a quarter five years earlier.

The parliamentary committee is looking at ways to keep senior Australians safe while still encouraging them to get online, arguing that online activity can enrich and simplify the lives of older people by removing barriers of time, distance and physical limitation.

Dating and romance scams are a particular field of online fraud the committee is interested in investigating. These are causing significant harm and embarrassment to Australian consumers, with people from all walks of life, education, background and age groups targeted — but especially those in the 65-plus bracket.

“Often older Australians have more money than younger people and they are more vulnerable to being approached by these sorts of scams,” says committee chair, Senator Catryna Bilyk (Tas).

“Many use the internet for friendship and companionship and that’s when concerns about scamming come in. Online dating and romance schemes are the number one consumer fraud according to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.”

D CALL

Between January and October last year, more than 1,600 complaints and more than \$17 million in losses were reported to the ACCC, compared with \$15 million in 2010.

According to the commission, dating scams typically involve a genuine user of a website being contacted by an ‘admirer’ who is a scammer in disguise. After forming a relationship with the victim, the scammer plays on emotional triggers to get the victim to provide money, gifts or personal details.

In response, the ACCC has released guidelines to help dating websites protect their users from scams. The guidelines were developed by a working group chaired by the ACCC and including representatives from a number of dating websites.

Senator Bilyk hopes the parliamentary inquiry can help deliver a positive message about safety on the internet so as to increase the number of seniors who go online.

“The committee will seek out best practice measures to build consumer confidence, increase skills, as well as to reduce online risks,” she says.

“The underlying message will be equity of access while addressing the particular challenges facing the frail elderly, aged migrants and refugees, and Indigenous people.”

A recent study into older Australians and the internet notes that the main barriers to older people taking to the internet are lack of knowledge and skills, confusion about the technology, and concerns about security and viruses. More than 40 per cent of participants also identified cost as a barrier.

Principal researcher for the study, Dr Sandra Haukka, proposes a national action plan, similar to the European Commission’s ‘Plan for ageing well in the information society’. She says Australia could follow the commission’s plan to break down barriers to online use by raising awareness, building consensus, overcoming technical and regulatory barriers, accelerating take-up and boosting research and development.

“A plan for Australia would include targets to reduce the gap in internet usage between the Australian population [in general] and older people, along with indicators of digital literacy and competence,” Dr Haukka says. “The plan would offer strategies and initiatives to improve digital literacy based on the types of support and services preferred by older people. It could also include incentives to encourage internet use by older Australians who have ‘nil’ or ‘low’ interest.”

With researchers finding that 38 per cent of older Australians who use the internet are highly or extremely concerned about information security when logging on to the web, compared with 28 per cent of all users surveyed, any plan would also need to address those concerns.

As the parliamentary committee begins gathering its evidence, all Australians, including seniors, would be well advised to heed the simple warning from the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC): if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

ASIC advises Australians to always check the business register on the ASIC website to see if a company or individual selling a product is licensed or authorised to



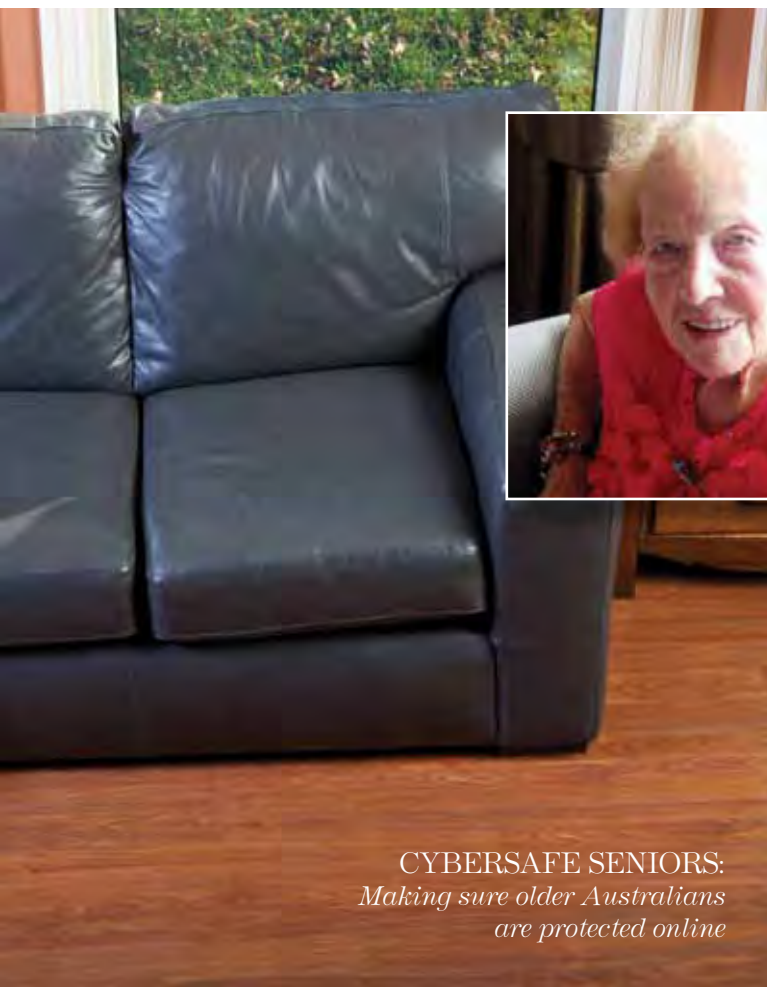
**More than 2,400 people,
800 companies and
51 superannuation funds
have lost a total of \$93
million so far this year.**

do so. It also advises to call the company back using the details on the ASIC register to verify its identity.

“These fraudsters operate without Australian financial services licences and use false addresses and phone lines often routed to another address,” ASIC commissioner Peter Kell says.

“The moment you receive a cold call, ask yourself, where did they get my number, how did they get my name, and why are they contacting me.” •

FOR MORE INFORMATION on the inquiry into cybersafety for senior Australians, visit www.aph.gov.au/jscc or email jscc@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4202.



CYBERSAFE SENIORS:
*Making sure older Australians
are protected online*

Seniors in the cyber world

- Just over half of all Australians aged 65 and over have used the internet compared with almost 90 per cent for all age groups; less than half have a home internet connection compared with an average of almost 80 per cent for other age groups, and fewer than one in three have a broadband connection.
- A mere four per cent of those aged 65 or more who have never used the internet say they are likely to use it in the future compared with 15 per cent of those aged between 14 and 49. Only three per cent of the 65-plus age group say they are likely to connect to the internet in the next six months compared with 20 per cent of those aged between 14 and 34.
- Older people are significantly less likely to use emerging online communication technologies such as user-generated content and instant messaging or chat rooms. They are also less likely to use the internet for entertainment purposes such as downloading music or videos and playing games online.

SOURCE: Australian Communications and Media Authority

Google granny

Growing up in Toowoomba in the first half of last century, Eva Woodrow (pictured left) used to ride her horse to school and go to silent movies for a treat.

Now five children, 11 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren later, this Google-loving granny enjoys surfing the net and is quite possibly Australia's oldest Facebook user.

From 1910 when she was born to her 101st birthday in December, Eva Woodrow has seen some incredible changes.

She has lived through two world wars and two depressions, and remembers listening to her first radio as a 16-year-old and being amazed to hear Big Ben strike the time in London.

Today she lives in a residential home in Nambour where she plays the piano for "the old people" and uses her laptop to write a newsletter, check emails, internet bank and keep in touch with family and friends.

"Years ago when my children were overseas it would take two weeks for an aerogram to reach them. I like the instant communication," she says.

"One granddaughter is an opera singer in Germany, one is a professor of Russian history in London, one is a doctor in Sydney, a grandson is a lawyer in Perth and one granddaughter is a high-flying businesswoman in Kenya. Her baby is just a year old and she posts videos of her first steps."

It was her granddaughter Jodie's idea to sign her up for Facebook, and they almost immediately hit a snag when the drop down menu to enter the year of her birth didn't go back as far as 1910.

"I had to just pick a random year to join up, but my granddaughter sorted it out later with a phone call," she says.

"I don't think many people my age — or even half my age — use Facebook," she says.

Not too concerned about security and privacy — "I have a virus protector and privacy settings" — Eva Woodrow encourages all ages to embrace the information superhighway.

"I use Google a lot, if I just want to look up a poem or something and I know a few words, I put them into Google and the whole poem comes up," she says. "It's like having a library at your fingertips and it keeps you informed and in touch."

"Just do it," she says. "You can always ask your grandchildren for help."

THE LAW

Outworkers are in for rights

Reforms tackle exploitation concerns.

Contract outworkers in the textile, clothing and footwear (TCF) industry across Australia will be given the same rights as direct employees under amendments to the Fair Work Act.

Outworkers are generally subcontractors for small factories who are in turn contracted by other larger manufacturers or fashion houses to produce clothing and other goods. They are known as 'outworkers' because they work outside of standard business premises, generally in their own homes.

Introducing the amendments into the Senate, Manager of Government Business, Senator Joe Ludwig said there was widespread concern these arrangements often lead to exploitation.

"Most recently, a report by the Brotherhood of St Laurence in 2007 found that outworkers experience poor working conditions and are frequently underpaid, sometimes as little as two or three dollars per hour," Senator Ludwig said.

"These reviews have found, and the government accepts, that outworkers in the TCF industry suffer from unique vulnerabilities as a result of their engagement or employment in non-business premises.

"These vulnerabilities are made worse by the fact that outworkers are often migrants with poor English language skills, a lack of knowledge about the Australian legal system and low levels of union membership."

Under the amendments contract outworkers will be deemed to be employees of the company which

directly engages them and entitled to all relevant award conditions, such as rates of pay and superannuation. The amendments also strengthen protections for outworkers who are not paid by their employers, allowing them to claim payment from other entities in the supply chain who they work for indirectly.

The normal 24 hour notice period for union entry to a workplace will also be waived in most cases, giving unions more power to monitor conditions in the broader TCF industry.

"This recognises that poor practices in the TCF industry are not confined to work conducted in people's homes, but also take place in conventional workplaces operating under sweatshop conditions," Senator Ludwig said.

"The government believes that strong action on this issue is required, as reports continue of people working in sweatshops in the TCF industry."

While the changes have been supported by unions and community groups, they have faced strong criticism from businesses working in the sector. The Australian Industry Group labelled the amendments unfair and warned the changes would threaten the future of the entire industry.

"It is not legitimate or fair to deem contractors to be employees in circumstances where parties have agreed to enter into a contractor arrangement," the group said in a submission.

"It is not legitimate or fair to apply different right of entry regulations to employers in the TCF sector merely because they are employers in the TCF sector.

"It is not legitimate or fair to hold businesses accountable for the actions of others when they have no control or knowledge of those actions and indeed may never have any contractual relationship with that other party.

"Ai Group has a substantial membership in the TCF sector and is concerned that not only do these proposals assume that all operators in the TCF sector operate illegitimately but furthermore the terms of this bill may dramatically and adversely affect decisions regarding the engagement of outworkers and the ongoing viability of the TCF sector in Australia."

"It is not legitimate or fair to hold businesses accountable for the actions of others"

Christine Metcalfe, director of The Ark Clothing Co, said in a submission the amendments will harm the very people they are designed to protect by failing to recognise they are independent contractors rather than employees.

"Many outworkers run successful businesses and have done so for many years," Ms Metcalfe said. "The current regulatory framework is proving inflexible and does not cater for those outworker businesses that are successful and profitable.

"In some cases, the need for those outworker businesses to begin receiving employment-like benefits poses a risk to the continuing operation of their businesses."

However the Australian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Alliance said that in many cases the only reason outworkers are employed on a contract basis is to avoid employment obligations.

"AIRWA is gravely concerned about the ongoing exploitation of outworkers in the Australian clothing industry," AIRWA said in its submission.

"Outworkers have little or no control over their working conditions and pay, so to suggest they are contractors with freedom to negotiate their contracts does not reflect the reality."

"Outworkers experience poor working conditions and are frequently underpaid"

THE LAW

TACKLING EXPLOITATION: Award conditions for garment workers



“Strong action on this issue is required”

Senator Ludwig acknowledged business concerns with the amendments, but said they were merely a national extension of similar legislation already in force in many states and territories.

“If a business already complies with the outworker provisions

in the TCF award and relevant state legislation, then these amendments should have limited impact,” Senator Ludwig said.

“Only those that flout existing laws — by exploiting outworkers, by forcing employees to work in sweatshop conditions, and by taking advantage of the vulnerable position of migrant workers — should be concerned.” •

HEALTH

Health e-records equal healthy treatment

System to save lives and costs.

New e-health legislation passed by the House of Representatives will allow patients to access their medical history at any health practitioner in Australia.

Patients will be able to register for an e-health record of their medical information, which will be both accessible by the individual and available when they see a new doctor or other provider.

Former Health Minister and current Attorney-General Nicola Roxon told parliament the new system will improve consistency in treatment, helping to avoid unnecessary duplication of procedures and potentially serious medication errors.

“Medication errors currently account for 190,000 admissions to hospitals each year,” Ms Roxon said. “Up to 18 per cent of medical errors are attributed to inadequate patient information.”

Despite expressing concerns about the potential long-term costs of the project, the opposition supported the Personally Controlled Electronic Health Records Bill 2011, ensuring its passage through the House.

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare Dr Andrew Southcott said a properly implemented e-health system could save both time and lives.

“The government’s own projections show that electronic health records alone will have a net economic benefit of \$1.5 billion up to 2025,” Dr Southcott said.

“In addition, forecasts by Booz and Co have shown that a comprehensive e-health platform, of which electronic records are a significant part, could save up to 5,000 deaths annually once fully operational.”

Registrations for the new system are set to begin from 1 July 2012. •

THE LAW



NO FORM NEEDED: Automatic enrolments under electoral reforms

ELECTORAL MATTERS

Electoral reforms to allow automatic enrolments

Move to boost number of enrolled voters.

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) will be able to directly enrol people and automatically update their address under major changes to the Electoral Act currently being considered by federal parliament.

For enrolment and change of address, the AEC will be able to use trusted third party information from sources such as Centrelink and roads and traffic authorities.

Currently people must fill out and sign a voter enrolment form to become eligible to vote, and need to inform the AEC when they move address to avoid being removed from the roll. An estimated 1.5 million eligible Australians are not enrolled to vote.

After reviewing the legislation, federal parliament's Electoral Matters Committee supported the reforms. Committee member Daryl Melham (Banks, NSW) said using trusted information to add people to the roll makes sense, given it is already used to

remove people from the roll who have failed to update their address details.

"If we trust this data to disenfranchise Australians by removing them from the roll, then surely the AEC should also have the flexibility to use this data to enfranchise eligible electors," Mr Melham said.

However opposition members of the committee have criticised the amendments, which they claim will undermine the integrity of the electoral roll.

"The bottom line is that under the Electoral Act there is an obligation on an elector to enrol," Bronwyn Bishop (Mackellar, NSW) said. "If people are not on the roll, it is because they have failed to meet that obligation."

The changes will also give the AEC discretion to consider further any provisional votes cast at elections by people not currently on the electoral roll, allowing more of those votes to be counted. •

BROADCASTING

Summer break for local content

Greater flexibility for regional radio.

Legislative amendments passed by parliament will loosen requirements for regional commercial radio stations to broadcast local content.

Reforms in 2006 required regional commercial radio stations to broadcast a minimum of three hours of local content per working day.

Radio stations are also required to permanently maintain local content and staffing levels in the event of a licence being sold or transferred or a new cross media group being formed.

The Broadcasting Services Amendment (Regional Commercial Radio) Bill 2011 will allow licensees to alter staffing and content levels two years after a licence has changed hands.

The local content requirements will also be lifted for five weeks per year over summer, while remote area and regional racing broadcasters will be exempted from the requirements entirely.

Manager of Government Business in the Senate Joe Ludwig said the 2006 reforms have not allowed the industry the flexibility to survive while still providing a local presence.

A review in 2010 showed the requirement to maintain staffing levels and use of facilities in perpetuity after the transfer of a licence has been of particular concern for the industry.

"With many regional commercial radio licensees already struggling to maintain profitability, these onerous requirements — as well as the administrative reporting burden associated with them — significantly reduce the ability of licensees to adapt their business to deal with new or changed market conditions," Senator Ludwig said.

However the review also showed opposition to reducing the

THE LAW

THINKSTOCK



OFF THE AIR: Local content requirements relaxed

local content requirement from the community radio sector.

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBA) said the government should require regional commercial broadcasters to produce more local content, not less.

“Greater flexibility for regional radio broadcasters is hardly the pressing need to be addressed,” the CBA said in its submission to the review.

“The opportunities for coverage of local weekend issues and events in regional and remote Australia are too obvious and numerous to mention.”

But Senator Ludwig said the amendments strike the right balance between local content and flexibility for the industry.

“This bill eases the regulatory burden on regional commercial radio broadcasters which has arisen as a result of the operation of provisions introduced in the former government’s 2006 media reforms,” Senator Ludwig said.

“It provides greater flexibility to the regional radio industry while maintaining the government’s commitment to local content for regional audiences.” •

INSURANCE

Defining moment for flood insurance

Measures to reduce consumer confusion.

In a bid to reduce the number of disputes over flood insurance, the federal government has moved a step closer to introducing a standard definition of flood with the Insurance Contracts Amendment Bill 2011 passing parliament.

The bill is an attempt to address the problem faced by many flood victims who think they are covered but are not. The House Economics Committee described this as a devastating discovery.

The committee said the tragedy of lives lost and property destroyed in the 2010-11 summer of floods was only made worse when many people found they were underinsured or their insurance policies did not provide cover.

In many cases, people thought they were insured only to be advised that their policies did not provide for the types of floods that occurred. The discovery that homes were not adequately insured against the floods was devastating for families.

While the actual definition of flood is not included in this bill — it will be in the regulations to follow — the insurance industry and consumer groups have welcomed the legislation as a step in the right direction towards clearing up the ongoing confusion over what is and what is not covered.

The bill also introduces a requirement that insurers provide consumers with a key facts sheet to highlight the important points of their home building and home contents insurance policies. It is hoped this will help consumers understand their policy better, will make it easier to compare policies, and will lead to more effective and informed decision making.

Speaking in the House of Representatives, then Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation, Bill

Shorten said confusion over flood cover has lingered long enough.

“A standard definition of flood will reduce consumer confusion regarding what is and is not included in insurance contracts. It will also avoid situations where neighbouring properties in the same street, affected by the same flood event, receive different claims assessments because the policies covering them use different definitions of flood,” Mr Shorten said.

At an insurance industry roundtable organised by the House Economics Committee as part of its inquiry into the bill, participants welcomed the measures, although several MPs expressed frustration that without the regulations the bill provides no clarification for thousands of consumers.

“My understanding based on the evidence that we have heard from the Insurance Council and others is that this framework is absolutely nothing other than skeletal in the sense that it provides the coat hanger upon which all meaningful and substantive aspects and impacts of this are yet to be rolled out, yet to be consulted on and yet to be informative in any way, shape or form to the general public as well as to the industry,” House Economics Committee Deputy Chair, Steven Ciobo (Moncrieff, Qld) said.

Treasury told the public hearing draft regulations on the standard definition of flood are currently out for public consultation, and a discussion paper relating to the key facts sheet will be released shortly.

In the committee’s report on the bill, Mr Ciobo and two other committee members expressed concern that these regulations could in fact make matters worse rather than better, and therefore their support for the bill was on a principles only basis. •

Of the people?

The face of Australia has changed over the years, but to what extent can and should the new faces of Australia be seen in our House of Representatives?
Story: Jeremy Kennett

Australia is seen as one of the most multicultural societies in the world. Nearly half of all Australians were either born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas, and people with heritage of more than 250 nations are present in all facets of Australian life. All facets that is, except for one of the most important.

While much has changed since the first federal parliament met after Federation, the House of Representatives as it sits today would not have looked too out of place representing the new nation 111 years ago.

Pino Migliorino, chair of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA), says it's clear the Australian parliament is failing when it comes to representing people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

"The first and obvious answer is no there's not enough, because if you look at the disparity between who makes up parliament and who makes up the community they are very, very different," Mr Migliorino says.

"I think Australia has very few first generation migrants in parliamentary positions or representative positions at any tier of government across Australia."

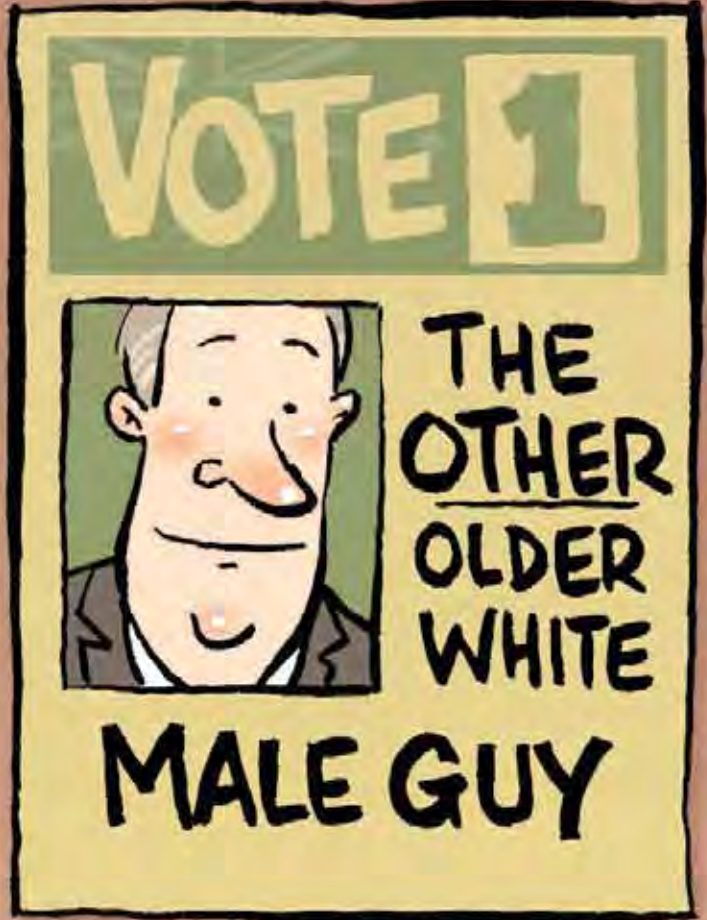
This could be explained by the time needed to become familiar with local political systems and language, but Mr Migliorino says that doesn't tell the whole story.

"People are making choices in terms of where they can best manifest their own ambitions."

"If that is the case then you would expect we'd have far more politicians from say a Chinese background or even a Vietnamese background or Turkish or any number of those communities which came to Australia in the 1970s and 80s, who would have now a second generation actually moving through. And that's not the case."

Part of the problem could lie in perception. Mr Migliorino says when many second and third generation migrants are choosing a career path, politics is not seen as a viable option.







"I think it's really interesting, you turn on the TV and all of the political reporting and all the actual parliamentarians are from a predominantly English background.

"And then the financial advisers and the bank commentators and the accounting houses are all from the second generation Greek, Italian or Middle Eastern background.

"I think the reality is people are making choices in terms of where they can best manifest their own ambitions and what they would like for their lives, and they're choosing avenues which aren't political.

"I think that has got a lot to do with the barriers they actually foresee."

For some people from diverse backgrounds the key barrier may be perception, but others face a disconnection that stretches back centuries.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians carry a long history of little or no representation in all of Australia's parliaments, but most particularly in the federal House of Representatives.

It wasn't until 1962 that the right to vote and stand for election in the Commonwealth parliament was confirmed for all Indigenous Australians, more than 100 years after

"There is no substitute for direct representation"

HOW REPRESENTATIVE:

Is there enough diversity in the House?

voting rights had been granted in most Australian states.

When Ken Wyatt won the seat of Hasluck in Western Australia, he became just the third Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander to be elected to the Australian parliament, and the first in the lower house.

Federal MP Melissa Parke (Fremantle, WA) says this lack of Indigenous representation continues to be a real concern.

"That's been it for the history of our federal parliament," Ms Parke says. "I think a democratic parliament should reflect the social diversity of the population and it should ensure that all its citizens are able to participate equally."

A global perspective on the issue was brought home to Ms Parke when

she attended an Inter-Parliamentary Union conference on improving political representation for indigenous people and minorities.

The conference was held in Chiapas, Mexico, which has the highest number of indigenous people and the most severe poverty of any state in that country.

"For Australia, there was international applause for the national apology to Indigenous Australians in 2008, for Australia's endorsement of the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous persons, for the government's implementation of the indigenous electoral participation program, and for the proposed discussion about constitutional representation of indigenous peoples," Ms Parke says.

"But at the same time it was recognised that Aboriginal Australians are vastly overrepresented in the criminal justice system and that they have significantly poorer health, education and employment outcomes than non-Aboriginal Australians.

"We then looked at the Australian parliament and there was a general view that not just the Australian parliament but parliaments across the world need to be more active in trying to increase the participation of

AAPONE

**DIVERSITY:**

Are the many faces of Australia reflected in the parliament?

“Parliaments across the world need to be more active in trying to increase the participation of minorities and indigenous peoples”

minorities and indigenous peoples in these parliaments.”

Not having a representative in parliament can mean certain communities don’t have a say when laws and policies that affect them are discussed.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda says while politicians are getting better at communicating with diverse groups, there is no substitute for direct representation.

“In 1989 when the debates were happening around whether there should be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, there wasn’t one Aboriginal person in parliament,” Mr Gooda says. “When ATSIC was finally abolished, there wasn’t one Aboriginal person in parliament.

“So the creation and abolition of our peak body didn’t have any input in parliament from Aboriginal people.

“And I think that’s what we end up with without a voice in parliament — those sorts of things happen without involvement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.”

While there is broad acceptance across the political spectrum that the Australian parliament would benefit from greater diversity, what is less clear is how that can be accomplished. The

AAPONE



structure of the Australian political system itself may be making it difficult for people from diverse groups to get their start in politics.

The House of Representatives is based on electorates, where candidates must secure an absolute majority on a preferential basis of the votes of the people within their electorate. For candidates from culturally and linguistically diverse communities this almost certainly means securing the majority of votes from people who do not share their diverse background, and may not be comfortable being represented by someone from a different background.

Mr Migliorino says the dominance of the political landscape by the major parties means they themselves need to take direct responsibility for improving diversity in parliament.

“If we’re looking at fundamental change we actually need to open these up a bit more,” he says. “We need to look at how our parties work, how they’re recruiting, who they’re recruiting and on what basis.”

Mr Migliorino says both parties are failing to take a long-term view when it comes to supporting candidates from diverse backgrounds.

“Over time their lack of representation will be extremely important because our constituencies, our communities are looking for people who actually understand them.”

Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council volunteer Nayuka Gorrie agrees, saying the dearth of Indigenous role models among Australia’s political leaders is pushing young Indigenous people away from politics.

As a politics student who is active in her community and engaged with the political process, Ms Gorrie would seem to be a likely candidate for a future in parliament. But she says she has never really considered a career in politics, at least partly because of a perceived lack of interest from either government or opposition parties.

“I’m not sure if there’s ever been a huge membership drive for either of the major parties for Indigenous people,” Ms Gorrie says. “It’s not something maybe that people aspire to; I haven’t met a young Indigenous person who’s



said ‘my goal is to become an MP in the federal parliament’.

“In saying that though there are people I know who do really care about issues and if opportunities were presented to them that might be an avenue they would go down.

“I think it’s about the opportunities that are available to people.”

Australia’s first Indigenous member of the House of Representatives Ken Wyatt says all parties have a responsibility to do more to reach out to the diverse

backgrounds of the communities they represent. But he says there is only so much that parties can do if individuals aren’t willing to put themselves forward and commit to the process.

“In fairness to them, people don’t join political parties, and so if you don’t join you are not going to be known,” Mr Wyatt says. “You can’t come off the street and say ‘I want to be a contender for the next election representing your party’.



ROLE MODEL:
*Australia's first
 Indigenous member of the
 House of Representatives*
 Ken Wyatt

"In order to be part of the process for consideration you're going to have to make a concerted effort and join, because it's only when you're inside any political party that you have the opportunity of demonstrating that your skills are equal to anybody else's."

"Our constituencies, our communities are looking for people who actually understand them"

Mr Wyatt says he never saw being an Indigenous Australian as being a barrier to his political career, recalling the support he received from Opposition Leader Tony Abbott when he was preselected as the Liberal candidate for the seat of Hasluck.

"His message was 'Mate this is terrific, this is great for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'.

"Throughout my life I've not seen my indigeneity as being a barrier. I've seen it as a rich asset within my own life. On my day of preselection, the first words I uttered were 'I want you to understand that I am of Noongar, Wongi and Yamatji heritage on both my mother and father's side'.

"And by putting that up front that didn't then serve as a barrier, people in fact responded well to it."

Mr Wyatt says he hopes his success in being elected can act as a positive example for young Indigenous Australians who may be considering getting in to politics.

"If my presence here in the House of Representatives serves as an opportunity to encourage younger people to become involved then I think that is one of the greatest outcomes that I can contribute to Australian political life and to our own communities."

Melissa Parke is also working to encourage greater diversity in parliament, putting together a motion to debate the situation of minorities and Indigenous people in Australia and to adopt a plan of action on equal participation and non-discrimination.

Ms Parke says all members have a role to play in improving diversity in both political parties and the parliament.

"I don't think indigenous or minority issues should be just a matter for indigenous or members of minority groups," she says.

"They concern us all, they affect the quality of our democracy, the inclusiveness of our democracy and I think that's really important."

Mr Wyatt says he hopes as time goes on more people from diverse backgrounds will realise they have the opportunity to make a difference in how the country is run.

"I just hope over the years that we will see more people from culturally and linguistically diverse groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders putting their hands up saying: 'I want to be part of an important institution of this country. I want to contribute to the debates at the national level or state and territory level and I want to be somebody who helps develop this nation in the direction that it needs to go to be prosperous within a global society'."

Mick Gooda says the young Indigenous people he meets through his work at the Human Rights Commission give him hope that this is already happening.

"I'm seeing an emergence of younger people now who are really interested in joining parties. I'm seeing more and more young people considering that as a career option."

"I can see an emergence of these things happening and it's across the range of parties as well which is really exciting." •



SEEKING SUPPORT:
*Melissa Foreman
organised a petition to
help children like her
son Sebastian*

One small step

A MOTHER'S QUEST TO GET HELP FOR HER DISABLED CHILD HAS RESULTED IN A PETITION TO FEDERAL PARLIAMENT.

Story: Georgie Oakeshott Photography: Iain Bond

Three year old Sebastian is learning to talk, walk and recognise colours but it's harder for him than most other children.

Born with intrauterine growth restriction and a severely obstructed airway requiring a tracheostomy, Sebastian spent the first four months of his life in intensive care. He has had multiple operations and more tests and procedures than most people experience in a lifetime.

A happy, easy-going little boy, he is still very weak, is fed with a tube and has been diagnosed with a long list of problems including global development delay.

But day by day, little by little and thanks to a rigorous schedule of treatments and therapies, hard working Sebastian is making progress.

He can't walk or crawl yet, but he recently learnt to pull himself up from sitting to standing much to the amazement of his proud and patient mother Melissa.

Since bringing him home from the babies ward one month shy of his first birthday, Melissa Foreman has focused on maximising Sebastian's opportunities for learning and development. A trained nurse, she knows these early years

represent an all-too-brief window of opportunity to develop potentially life-changing skills.

Determined to do everything she can for her young son, Melissa's weeks are spent on an exhausting round of hydrotherapy, physiotherapy, speech therapy and conductive education sessions, which at one point were costing her \$400 per week.

"Because he was never given a label he misses out"

"Parents in my shoes will do anything and try anything for their child if it means even the tiniest step forward," she says.

This determination has led her to the federal parliament, with a petition she organised calling for an end to the uneven funding arrangements currently in place for children with disabilities.

Melissa's petition with 2,261 signatures calls for urgent reform to the government's Better Start program, which provides assistance for early intervention treatments and therapies — but only for Australia's estimated 9,000 children with cerebral palsy,

Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome and sight or hearing impairments.

Introduced in July last year, the Better Start initiative gives children in these five categories up to \$12,000 to help pay for treatments and therapies widely recognised as playing an important role preparing these children for school, reducing their need for special education, improving IQ and reducing behavioural difficulties.

Melissa's petition asks the House of Representatives to take all the necessary steps to act urgently and effectively to amend the Better Start policy so there is no longer inequality of access. It asks that the current eligibility criteria be revised and replaced with a needs based model where eligibility is determined by the functional aspects of a child's disability, the level of impairment and how the impairment affects the child.

"Sebastian has all the same mobility and learning difficulties as children who are eligible for funding, but because he was never given a label he misses out. I remember sitting in a room with all these children and their parents and they were so excited about the \$12,000 they were going to receive — and there I was, the only single parent and the only one not getting the funding. I felt isolated."

Despite feeling segregated, she's definitely not alone. Her petition gives voice to the concerns of hundreds of other parents calling for a needs based model. With a Facebook page and a video on You Tube they criticise the current eligibility criteria as "representing exclusion".

"It infuriates me that the government can say in the promotional material for Better Start that 'every child deserves a better start' yet only invest in those that they deem worthy or cost-effective," Melissa says. "It makes me feel very sad and ashamed as a mother because all you want to do is protect your child from this kind of discrimination."

Despite an initial reluctance to organise a petition because of the limits on her time, Melissa decided it was a good way to try to bring about change so that all children with disability receive the financial assistance they need and deserve. But any changes will probably be too late for Sebastian.

"He's three years old now and you must catch these things early," she says. "By the time he's five it will be too late. All the literature shows that regardless of the diagnosis, even for a normal child, early exposure to treatments and therapies is the key to bringing the best outcomes."

"In our case that's physiotherapy, hydrotherapy and conductive education [CE] — which is a holistic therapy focused on walking, standing, sitting and even learning colours and shapes. It incorporates speech, music and singing, so it's really enjoyable for the child but they're also working really hard."

"Sebastian really responds to CE. I've seen an amazing difference. Initially he wasn't able to sit or stand, but now he can pull himself up from sitting to standing. I've noticed he learns more quickly when I sing to him and I've seen an amazing improvement in his motor skills, and his cognitive skills are improving as well."

A single parent on a carer's pension, Melissa has had to accept there's a limit to how much therapy she can afford. Sixty dollars for a physio session plus another \$60 for a hydro session plus \$100 for CE and \$140 for speech therapy quickly adds up.

"We had to cut back to just one session of CE each week, which was a difficult decision because he really enjoys it and it's where we have seen the most improvement. That's what I would've used the Better Start funding for."

Along with the other benefits such as preparing a child for school, early intervention may also reduce a child's dependence on costly specialist services later in life. According to one early intervention organisation, for every dollar spent in early intervention there is a saving of \$700 to the community.

"Sebastian has so much potential. I hope one day he will learn to walk and control his weak muscles. I hope that he will learn his own way of preferred communication, whether that be signing, picture cards or even talking," Melissa says.

"I hope that one day he will be able to say 'Mummy' — that would be a dream come true. All the firsts people take for granted are what I will cherish whenever Sebastian chooses to make them."

"Early exposure to treatments and therapies is the key to bringing the best outcomes"



EQUAL CHANCE:
*Some disabled children
are missing out*

A government response to Melissa's petition was tabled in the House of Representatives by the chair of the Petitions Committee, John Murphy (Reid, NSW) in February.

The response, from Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers, Senator Jan McLucas said the government recognises there are other conditions which may benefit from early intervention and highlighted the work being done towards the development of a National Disability Insurance Scheme. Senator McLucas also referred to a government commissioned KPMG report which



recently recommended expanding the Better Start program to include children with eight chromosomal conditions and microcephaly.

Melissa says this would be great news for those families, but would still leave Sebastian excluded.

“The KPMG report refers to eight chromosomal disorders and microcephaly as being the conditions that will ‘cost the least, in terms of their incremental impact on Better Start’ which irks me no end when speaking of any child’s future and worthiness,” she says.

When her petition was tabled by her local member, Kate Ellis (Adelaide SA), who is also Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare, Ms Ellis acknowledged the need for reform.

“Australia needs a disability services system that provides care and support based on people’s needs, not a lottery of what kind of disability they have, how they acquired it or where they happen to live,” she told the House.

“We understand the current system for caring for and supporting people with disability is not working for everyone. Sometimes we just have to face up and admit that. I know that for many people with disability and their carers, providing care and support is a challenge.

“I am pleased to be able to provide a voice for a local mother in the electorate of Adelaide, which I am lucky enough to represent in this place — Melissa — who is dealing with this challenge on a day to day basis. I want to place on the



For every dollar spent in early intervention there is a saving of \$700 to the community

record my absolute admiration for the work that Melissa does in providing care for her son, Sebastian.

“Melissa is also a passionate advocate for ensuring that all Australian children with disability receive access to effective treatment and early intervention services. She has been incredibly hard at work collecting signatures right across Adelaide, in the suburbs and all of the streets.

“We know that people with disability and their carers deserve the same opportunities, and I am pleased that our government is working hard to deliver real outcomes in this area. We know that there is more work to do but we also know that for every story like Melissa’s — the incredible courage she displays day in and day out — there are thousands of families just like hers right across Australia. I am pleased to table this petition on their behalf.” •

For more information on petitions to the House of Representatives visit www.aph.gov.au/petitions or email petitions.committee@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 2152.

THE People's KINGDOM

The South Pacific's last monarchy embraces democracy. **Story and photos: Andrew Dawson**



Every Sunday morning before church in the small Tongan village of Vaotu'u, a dozen well-dressed men gather around a large carved wooden bowl in the rather ramshackle community hall drinking kava.

The men look at ease sharing the latest news on village life mixed in with prayers and a few quips about the Tongan 'Coca-Cola' — the gently narcotic, muddy water, made from the roots of a kava bush, which they drink from halved coconut shells.

Sitting amongst them is their new democratically elected member of parliament Aisake Eke, who many locals voted for in the historic 2010 Tongan Legislative Assembly election. That election saw for the first time a majority of Tonga's parliamentarians directly elected by the people.

Previous parliaments were dominated by hereditary nobles chosen by a council of prominent landholders, and by cabinet ministers handpicked by the King of Tonga.

Before the last election, King George Tupou V (who passed away recently) agreed to relinquish his power to appoint governments without reference to the parliament. As part of the political reform process, the King also supported increasing the number of people's representatives in the legislative assembly from nine to 17. Previously the nine people's representatives enjoyed little say in a larger 32-seat parliament.

These 17 democratically-elected MPs now sit alongside only nine nobles. Together they decide who runs the government of this small South Pacific nation of 176 islands and 100,000 people, which has been a constitutional monarchy since 1875.

"If we have everybody elected by the people then we can feel that we will really own the government"

FOR THE FUTURE:
Giving people a say in Tonga



It's been a big step towards democracy and Aisake Eke hopes the next big step to a fully-elected parliament happens soon.

"I think that is the direction where we are going — for a fully democratic system where all the people in the House are to be elected by the people," he says.

"Now it is a question of timing and when. I myself think that for the next election all the members of parliament need to be elected by the people. I think that is a realistic ambition."

Despite high rates of literacy and the highest number of PhDs per capita in the world, Tonga faces many challenges. Its largest source of income is from the many thousands of Tongans living abroad in Australia, New Zealand and America who send money home. Foreign development assistance also supports the economy, particularly by funding infrastructure projects. Beyond

the dusty streets of the bustling capital Nuku'alofa, many rural Tongans make a modest living off subsistence farming of root crops such as taro, cassava and yams, mixed in with work on coconut and banana plantations or fishing.

Previous parliaments were dominated by hereditary nobles

Leading pro-democracy campaigner and longest serving MP Akilisi Pohiva welcomed 2010 as a significant milestone because for the first time it was the 26 members of parliament and not the monarchy who chose Tonga's prime minister.

Jailed twice, Mr Pohiva says it has been a long road to achieve democratic reform in Tonga. He believes the public campaign eventually convinced

the monarchy to embrace greater democracy.

"I recall when it first started that the members of the nobility, and the monarchy as well, they did not really support the idea," he says. "But we have been struggling so hard since we started at the end of the 1980s up to now. We have been able to convince His Majesty to endorse what we have been struggling for."

While in 2010 his Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands won 12 of the 17 popularly elected seats in the 26 seat chamber, Mr Pohiva was unable to muster enough support to be elected prime minister ahead of the nobility's candidate Lord Tu'ivankano. The nine nobles swayed five newly-elected MPs to side with them to form government.

The presence of those nine nobles in the small assembly remains a sticking point for Mr Pohiva and other pro-democracy campaigners.



"We still have a small group of nine nobles who are not democratically elected," Mr Pohiva says.

"They are not accountable to the people unless we have a fully elected government. From now on until that time, we will continue to face problems especially during the deliberation and discussion in the House because the nine nobles always take sides with the cabinet ministers.

"Now we have a half democratic form of government so there is still halfway to go. His Majesty has already surrendered his executive power to cabinet and to parliament — that is the most significant aspect of the political reform."

In such a deeply religious nation as Tonga, where nearly everyone attends church on a Sunday and the constant sound of bells and hymns wafts across the islands, it comes as no surprise that the first chairman of the pro-democracy movement in 1991 was a Catholic priest, Father Seluini Akau'ola. While welcoming the latest reforms, he suspects it may take decades before Tongans accept a fully elected parliament.

"I think it will be almost the same length of time since we started in 1991. At the moment we do not elect the nobles' representatives — but we are moving towards that," he says.

Father Akau'ola says the nobility will always remain very influential in Tongan life because they are the owners of so much land and because in Tongan culture it is so ingrained to respect them as their leaders.

"If you remove the nobles from parliament you also remove that link to the land," he says. "Also there is a social

setting where people would take them fresh fruits and look up to the hierarchy. It is inbuilt in the Tongan people.

"So to remove that — you can't just replace them with anyone there on the hierarchical level to be the person that people will look up to on a social level. It was the King who finally said 'yes I want the change, we must have this', and then the parliament agreed to it.

"To remove power from certain levels is not easy. It can be a threat. But at the same time it can be a happy ending with a peaceful solution and better for the whole country."

It was looking far from being a peaceful transition in late 2006, when much of downtown Nuku'alofa went up in flames and eight people died during riots that followed street protests calling for more democratic representation. Hundreds were arrested for looting and five pro-democracy MPs including Akilisi Pohiva were charged with sedition, but were later acquitted.

The tragic loss of life and \$100 million in damage to the CBD seemed to focus the government's attention on political reform, which until then had stalled.

One of the new people's representatives Dr Viliami Latu, elected in 2010 from the island of Vava'u, says it was an easy decision for him to align with other independents and nobles to support the nobility's candidate for prime minister. Dr Latu subsequently became the Minister for Tourism in the new government.

"While I was campaigning I explained to the people that Tonga was not ready yet for party politics," he says. "When I was the clerk of parliament I

"A lot of people would think the reform process is over in terms of political reform but in my view it is an on-going process."

A PEOPLE'S HOUSE: (clockwise from top left) Tonga's parliament building; a Kava ceremony; Deputy Speaker Lord Tu'i'afitu; reformer Father Akau'ola; and Democratic Party MP Akilisi Pohiva

understood that the party system was not incorporated into our constitution and was not fully considered when the political reforms were debated in the House.

"So straight after the election the decision I made was simple. There wasn't any official political party so I chose to be an independent. I aligned with those independent candidates to form the current government."

Dr Latu is adamant Tonga will need to develop some fully fledged political parties first before embracing further democratic reforms.

"I think Tonga is ready to achieve full democracy," he says. "But it is up to the current parliament and government to decide which kind of democracy Tonga is having.

"If we take for example the current structure of parliament, even though the Democratic Party of the Friendly



Islands claims to be a political party, this isn't officially incorporated into our constitution, or into our political structure. And that is the kind of thing that we should address in our transition to democracy."

Deputy Speaker and noble Lord Tu'i'afitu suspects further democratic reforms may take more than a decade to be realised.

"That is the move we are doing at the moment — first we start at the constituency level and that will help make the people more understanding of the new government and the reforms like political parties," Lord Tu'i'afitu says.

"At the moment Tonga does not have political parties. I think after these four years, with reform of parliament, we will have political parties. The full election will come in 10 years time or three terms from now."

The current Clerk of the Legislative Assembly Sione Tekiteki admits the future election of nobles to the assembly is one of a raft of issues yet to be resolved.

"A lot of people would think the reform process is over in terms of political reform but in my view it is an on-going process," he says.

"There is a lot of reform we are trying to do in the parliamentary secretariat and I am sure the government is trying to do a lot of internal reforms within the government itself and I am sure these reforms will be on-going. In terms of political reform there has been a little discussion in the House about the election of the nobles by the people. I don't know when that will take place but these sorts of issues are being discussed."

According to Aisake Eke, democracy is all about a government being fully accountable to its people.

"That is the expectation from the movement towards a more democratic system — for more accountability. For people to be accountable for the money paid to government in the form of tax and also fees. Our role is basically to accomplish that purpose.

"It is not only good for the people to know what is going on and how government is spending money but also to make the government conscious of being scrutinised and being accountable for this. The government needs to always have at the back of their mind that they will be reviewed and scrutinised to make sure they do things, the right things in the right way and get the right outcomes."

Akilisi Pohiva agrees, saying accountability and transparency are the most important things. "In the past the government did not really respond to the people. That is why we want a new democratic form of government — a government that is accountable and is transparent. These are the two significant aspects of democratic forms of government. Another related aspect is for the people to participate and have a say in running the government — that was not the case in the past.

"We may not be able to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our economic development unless we have a fully elected government."

Dr Latu insists the new government is already more accountable to the people of Tonga because it needs to respond to

criticism by non-government MPs and also various parliamentary committees.

"I do support the idea that in a healthy democratic form of government that there is a need for a very lively and very strong opposition party and that is what is currently happening here in Tonga," he says.

"I can say the current government is accountable to the people through different aspects of the work we are trying to do in Tonga. People are now realising the importance of working together with the government and we do believe at this stage we have done a very good job so far. We still receive criticisms from the opposition but that is the reality of democracy."

Father Akau'ola says all people in parliament should be elected on merit and not because of privilege.

"If we have everybody elected by the people then we can feel that we will really own the government and so the government will be accountable to the people and we feel then that we are part of the whole political situation and then people can say what they want to say and be free to say what they want to say."

Aisake Eke sees Tonga's move towards full democracy as inevitable.

"Once we have that system in place then all our interests, all our focus and all our purpose is basically all down to what is best for the country." •

"The government needs to always have at the back of their mind that they will be reviewed and scrutinised"

Andrew Dawson, media adviser in the Australian parliament, visited Tonga to assist the Tongan Legislative Assembly develop its community outreach program, to help connect Tonga's people with their parliament. The project is part of a broader parliamentary strengthening program, called Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships, being coordinated for six Pacific parliaments by Australia's federal, state and territory parliaments in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and with funding from AusAID.



A design for the times

As we approach the centenary of Australia's capital, federal parliamentarians are keen to recognise an important milestone along the way.

One hundred and one years ago two honeymooning American architects heard about a competition which was to change their lives and shape a nation.

Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony entered the design competition for Australia's national capital in 1911 without ever having visited the rolling hills of the sheep-station site.

In 1912 their design was announced as the winning entry ahead of 136 others and May this year marks the 100th anniversary of that announcement. It is a milestone which several members of the House of Representatives would like to see given due recognition.

In a private member's motion in the House, Kevin Andrews (Menzies, Vic) called on the National Capital Authority and the Intergovernmental Working Group for the Centenary of Canberra to work with parliament to arrange an appropriate celebration of the centenary.

"It is appropriate that the Australian parliament recognises and celebrates

the centenary of the city which was designed as its home and which in the decades since has become a thriving, modern symbol of Australia, a location for government, culture and commerce and a home for hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens," he told the House.

Supporting the motion and describing Canberra as a "truly unique and magnificent capital city", Luke Simpkins (Cowan, WA) said the Griffin design deserves to be recognised in the lead-up to the centenary of Canberra in 2013.

"Given the influence and the importance of the architectural competition and given the fact that we are now moving quickly towards the centenary of Canberra, it seems right and appropriate that as part of that celebration we properly reflect the contribution that Griffin made and the importance of that architectural competition," Mr Simpkins said.

Also supporting the motion, Gai Brodtmann (Canberra, ACT) said Griffin enthusiastically responded to Australia's new and unique democracy which was regarded as a progressive social experiment.

"Griffin wrote that he planned 'an ideal city, a city that meets my idea of a city of the future and a nature and liberty-loving people'. He wanted simplicity, comfort, egalitarianism in architecture and a national capital that would reflect that," Ms Brodtmann said.

With planning underway for the celebration of Canberra's centenary next year, she said 2013 will be an opportunity for everyone to celebrate Australia's history and unity. She also took the opportunity to defend a city which often draws derision from those who live outside of it.

"I have always been a bit baffled about why this city does not generate the same awe as that other national capital, Washington. After all, in the US, a career in the government in Washington is highly coveted, and a life in Washington is also highly coveted," Ms Brodtmann said.

"It is a constant disappointment to all Canberrans that Australians do not connect with their national capital as Americans do with theirs, which is why this motion from a non-Canberran is so welcome." •

The Wrap



IN YOUR FACE: Sports odds promotion to be restricted

Odds against gambling ads

Special focus on children's viewing hours.

The promotion of live odds at sporting venues and during match broadcasts would be banned under the recommendations of a parliamentary inquiry into online gambling and gambling advertising.

The Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform also found gambling advertising should be prohibited during children's viewing hours, including sports broadcasts during those times.

Committee chair Andrew Wilkie (Denison, Tas) said there is significant concern from the community about the growth of advertising for sports betting services.

"Children in particular are being constantly bombarded with advertising for gambling during sporting programs and the committee heard alarming stories about children and young people now not talking about their team's form but instead talking about their team's odds," Mr Wilkie said.

"In other words the abundance of gambling advertising during sport is normalising gambling for children."

The committee also has recommended maintaining the restrictions on 'in play' sports betting and online casino style gambling contained in the Interactive Gambling Act 2001, and extending these restrictions to cover 'practice' websites and other inducements to gamble. 'In play' betting includes wagering on the outcome of a sporting event after it has already begun, as well as more exotic bets such as on what team or player will score the next goal in a soccer match.

The recommendation to maintain existing restrictions on online gambling is supported by Relationships Australia, the members of which regularly provide counselling for problem gamblers facing relationship breakdowns and financial ruin. National executive officer Alison Brook said these problems are often

exacerbated for online gamblers because of the ease of access to online gambling and the ability to use a credit card to gamble.

"Additionally, access to gambling via mobile devices has the potential to keep gambling habits more secretive, thus not giving partners and friends the opportunity to help in resisting opportunities," Ms Brook said.

However national betting agency SportsBet claims restricting online gambling in Australia is actually placing gamblers at risk of further harm.

The agency has given support to some restriction of sports advertising, including the phasing out of live odds during play and in commentary and the removal of sponsors' logos from children's sports clothing and equipment. But its submission to the inquiry called for restrictions on online gambling and 'in play' betting in Australia to be removed to allow the industry to be properly regulated.

"The proliferation of the internet as a global phenomenon, ease of access to international websites, the number of offshore websites offering these prohibited forms of online gambling to Australian residents, and the lack of enforcement of the Interactive Gambling Act means the prohibitions are becoming counterproductive," SportsBet said in its submission.

"That is, they are putting domestic wagering and gaming service providers at a significant commercial disadvantage, channelling Australian demand for an established industry offshore, beyond the reach of Australian regulations including customer harm minimisation measures and taxation revenues.

"Prohibition simply does not work. Gambling is an established industry, and the internet is a modern conduit to facilitate this activity, as was the telephone before it."

Mr Wilkie acknowledged the problems in controlling access to international gaming websites, but said the Interactive Gambling Act 2001 has been very effective in restricting Australian based online gambling services and should be maintained. •

LINKS

www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/gamblingreform@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 3433

The Wrap

Cyber bullies to be defined

Government responds to committee's recommendation.

The federal government has agreed to develop a national definition of cyber-bullying, as recommended by a parliamentary inquiry.

But it has stopped short of acting on other recommendations until a cyber white paper is released later this year.

As part of its report into online safety and young people the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety recommended that an agreed definition of cyber-bullying be developed and used by all government departments and agencies.

In its response to the report the federal government agreed to the recommendation and said the Safe

and Supportive School Communities Group has developed a definition of cyber-bullying.

The government said the definition will be discussed and agreed to by state and territory governments.

"The definition of cyber-bullying agreed through these consultation processes will be promoted nationally via government programs and resources," it said.

The inquiry made 32 recommendations to improve the safety of young people when they are online.

The government agreed with many of them in principle, such as more educational programs in schools and the development of national core standards for cyber-safety education. But it said



THINKSTOCK

ONLINE NIGHTMARE: Efforts to stop cyber-bullying

it would wait for the outcomes of the cyber white paper process before taking further action.

The government also noted that it had already implemented several cyber-safety initiatives such as the Youth Advisory Group to provide advice to governments and the Cybersmart website. •

LINKS

www.aph.gov.au/jscc
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Question Time

Order in the House

The following is a question from a reader of *About the House*.

Question

What powers does the Speaker have to control proceedings in the House of Representatives?

Answer

The Speaker, as the presiding officer in the House of Representatives, has a variety of powers to direct debate and maintain order in the House. These powers, exercised impartially, are described in the standing orders of the House, which detail the

procedures that underpin the conduct of proceedings.

The Speaker can intervene when a member's conduct is considered offensive or disorderly. Such conduct could include persistently obstructing the House, refusing to conform to a standing order or wilfully disregarding the authority of the Speaker. The standing orders give the Speaker the power to sanction members for engaging in this sort of conduct.

One of the best known standing orders is 94(a), which can be invoked at any time but is often referred to when members are sanctioned for disorderly conduct during Question Time. Under standing order 94(a) the Speaker can direct a disorderly member to leave the chamber for one hour. The direction is not open to debate.

If the member refuses to leave, or if the Speaker believes the conduct is too serious to be dealt with under 94(a), the Speaker can name the member under standing order 94(b). Naming a member is more serious, requiring the House to immediately vote on the question of whether the member should be suspended from the service of the House for 24 hours.

Under standing order 75 (used rarely) the Speaker may direct a member who in the opinion of the Speaker has persistently engaged in irrelevance or tedious repetition to discontinue their speech. The Speaker may also rise in his or her place, which under standing order 61 requires any member then speaking to sit down and for the House to be silent so the Speaker can be heard. •

Do you have a question?

If you have a question about the House of Representatives email news@aph.gov.au or write to About the House, International and Community Relations Office, PO Box 6021, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600. Questions published in *About the House* will receive our history pack *A House for the Nation* on the first 100 years of the House of Representatives.

The Wrap



DIRECT ACTION: Protest in support of a petition against child sex trafficking

Petitions spike sign of healthy democracy

Thousands of signatures collected.

Parliamentarians have lauded a 43 per cent increase in the number of petitions presented in the House of Representatives in 2011 as a reflection of a healthy democracy.

One hundred and ninety five petitions were tabled last year (including five petitions with over 30,000 signatures each) compared with 136 in 2010. This 43 per cent increase on the 2010 calendar year is significant, even taking into account that generally fewer petitions are received in election years, as was the case in 2010. The 2011 figures still represent a 28 per cent increase on the last non-election year in 2009 when 150 petitions were presented.

Petitions Committee Chair John Murphy (Reid, NSW) said the figures are not just another set of bland statistics, but show trends of a strengthening in petitioning activity across Australia.

“They remind us how fortunate we are to live in a parliamentary democracy

where people have the opportunity to air their views to those who represent them,” Mr Murphy said.

The largest petition in 2011 with 225,328 signatures called for action on child sex trafficking. This petition alone accounted for half the year’s total number of signatures.

There were also 136 ministerial responses presented, which indicates a response rate above 70 per cent. In practice, a tabled response may relate to issues in more than one petition, therefore the actual response rate is even higher. This is certainly an improvement on past years when sometimes no responses were received at all.

These upward trends follow the introduction of a more formal petitioning process and the establishment of a House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions in 2008.

The committee chair presents petitions in the House of Representatives on sitting Mondays and individual

members may also present petitions once they have been considered ‘in order’ by the committee. To be accepted, petitions must be on paper, show the terms and identify a ‘principal petitioner’ on the first page of the petition. The specific action requested in the terms of the petition must appear at the top of every other signature page. The terms should not exceed 250 words. The principal petitioner’s signature, which must appear on the first page of the petition, as well as all signatures to the petition must be handwritten originals.

Once presented in the House, the terms of the petition are printed in Hansard and published on the committee’s website. The committee may also forward the terms of the petition to the relevant minister/s for a response, and may also decide to hold discussions with the principal petitioner and government officials to enable elaboration and clarification of the subject matter.

“The Petitions Committee does not see its role as one of advocacy for or against causes, but it does see its role as an enabler, enabling the issues that cause concern to be brought to the attention of the House and then to be considered and responded to by the government,” Mr Murphy said.

“As Australians engage with their federal parliament in this very active way, they are also engaging with other Australians. This is pertinent, especially given that the House currently does not accept electronic petitions.

“So collecting a large volume of signatures for paper petitions, as in the case of the five large petitions but also in other cases, would have taken physical effort and required petitioners to personally interact with others in their communities on the issues that matter to them.

“Given the effort required to engage in this way, in a society where we increasingly interact at arm’s length, Australians must still see value in participating in a traditional petitioning process.” •

LINKS

www.aph.gov.au/petitions
petitions.committee.reps@aph.gov.au
 (02) 6277 2152

ONE ON ONE

Continental divide

It's no longer at the forefront of news from Europe, but the division of Cyprus remains a hot topic, according to the leader of a parliamentary delegation that recently visited Australia.

It's remarkable the Republic of Cyprus has developed into a robust democratic country despite more than a third of this large island state in the Mediterranean remaining under the firm control of the foreign power that invaded it in 1974.

The passion surrounding this seemingly forgotten conflict with neighbouring Turkey nearly 40 years ago has not dampened with time, according to the President of the Cyprus House of Representatives, Yiannakis Omirou. During a recent visit to Australia with a parliamentary delegation from Cyprus, he was persistent in his calls seeking reunification of Cyprus.

Not surprisingly discussions between the visiting parliamentary delegation led by Mr Omirou and Australian MPs were dominated by what international action can be taken to reverse the partitioning off of the north-eastern part of Cyprus by Turkey.

The Turkish army had invaded Cyprus on 20 July 1974, five days after the Greek military junta had carried out a coup d'état in Cyprus, with plans to unite the island with Greece. Turkish armed forces landed in Cyprus on the pretext of protecting the Turkish Cypriots from Greek militias and to restore constitutional order as one of the guarantors of the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee between Turkey, United Kingdom and Greece.

The Turkish air force bombed Greek positions on Cyprus, and hundreds of paratroops were dropped in the area between the cities of Nicosia and Kyrenia, where enclaves of Turkish Cypriots assisted. Off the coast, 30 Turkish troop ships landed 6,000 men as well as heavy armour. Within three days Turkey had landed 30,000 troops on the island and captured significant territory. A second invasion on 14 August saw 37 per cent of Cyprus fall into Turkey's hands and led to an international stalemate that still exists to this day.

"We have the Turkish occupation for 38 years now so it is natural we are looking forward to a solution of this longstanding problem as soon as possible," Mr Omirou said.

"And solution means the implementation of the Security Council resolutions regarding the Cyprus problem, of the principles of international law and the chapter of the United Nations and of course European law as Cyprus is a member of the European Union.

"This solution must terminate the occupation and safeguard the implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all the Cypriot citizens and of course termination of the anachronistic guarantees of 1960 — guarantees of the three powers United Kingdom, Turkey and Greece. We are the only country in the world living under such guarantees and guarantors. We are a member of the United Nations and we are a member of the European family. We don't want guarantees — the guarantees are



ONE FUTURE: *Yiannakis Omirou believes a unified Cyprus is possible*

our country's participation in the United Nations and the European Union."

Despite the stalemate, Mr Omirou remained hopeful of a unified Cyprus in his lifetime but warns most Greek Cypriots won't accept a co-federation of two separate states.

"We want the solution as soon as possible," he said. "We wanted the solution immediately after the Turkish invasion in 1974 but it does not depend on us, it depends on Turkey.

"We are not ready to accept co-federation and we are not ready to accept two separate states in Cyprus."

Mr Omirou presides over a House of Representatives chamber with 59 members elected for a five-year term. It has 56 Greek Cypriot members chosen by proportional representation and three observer members representing the Maronite, Roman Catholic and Armenian minorities. Twenty four seats are also allocated to the Turkish Cypriot community, but they have remained vacant since the 1960s.

He said Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots had lived together in harmony for centuries in the same villages and the same cities and he believed they could do so again. "Historically there were not any problems between the two communities of the island," he said

Cyprus joined the European Union in 2004, and Mr Omirou is looking forward to his nation taking its turn later this year in the presidency role of the European Union.

"Although we have not experienced this and although we are a small country, we are optimistic that we will succeed with this because we are a country with experience in international diplomacy, parliamentary diplomacy and organising conferences."

House Rules

Year of the private member

Private members made their presence felt in the House of Representatives in 2011 following the changes to standing orders after the 2010 election.

THERE has been wide debate about the impact of the parliamentary reforms negotiated following the August 2010 federal election. The statistics point to a significant shift in the way the House works.

One key goal stated by the independents in the negotiations was to give private members (MPs who are not ministers or the Speaker) more opportunity to highlight individual electorate issues and present their own legislation.

Increased participation by private members has primarily been achieved by changes to the order of business in the House and Federation Chamber (previously known as the Main Committee), and an increase in sitting hours in each chamber.

A comparison between the 2011 sittings and the pre-election sittings in 2010 shows around a 10 per cent increase in the proportion of time spent on contributions by private members. Nearly one quarter of all business conducted in the House in 2011 was made up of either private members' business — that is, legislation and motions sponsored by private members — or other opportunities available to private members, such as members' statements and contributions to adjournment and grievance debates.

Twenty-one of the 223 bills initiated in the House of Representatives in 2011 were introduced by private members. Of these, 12 were debated at the second reading stage and two were passed by the House. In previous parliaments, private members' bills were only occasionally debated and, even then, not usually voted on.



APRONE

BACKBENCH BOOST: *Parliamentary reforms emphasised the role of local MPs*

Also during 2011, 117 private members' motions were moved and debated, with 52 being put to a vote. Of those motions voted on, 42 were agreed to by the House. Prior to the 43rd Parliament, it was rare for votes to occur on private members' motions.

The statistical summary for 2011 also shows a heavy workload in the House and the Federation Chamber.

There were 64 sitting days in 2011 during which the House met for a

total of 640 hours, while the Federation Chamber met on 54 occasions for a total of 290 hours.

During this period, 142 committee reports were presented, 882 questions without notice were asked and 621 questions in writing were submitted.

There were also 195 petitions presented, which, in total, comprised 704,954 signatories, and 136 ministerial responses to petitions were presented. •

Continued from page 54

Despite its close proximity to Greece at the epicentre of Europe's sovereign debt crisis, the Cypriot economy and its financial institutions remain the most stable in the Mediterranean due to billions of dollars in investment from Russia. Cypriots are still among the most prosperous people in the region.

"We face some problems — for example we have unemployment," he said. "For the first time in our history we have nine per cent unemployment, which is very big for our country. But I could not say that the people are feeling the crisis as they are feeling the crisis in a majority of European member countries." •

PARTIES IN THE HOUSE

Given the dominance of the major political parties in the House of Representatives, it may be surprising to learn that they are almost entirely unrecognised in the rules (standing orders) which govern the work of the House.

In all of the 160 pages of procedural rules and practices which underpin the way the House operates, the words 'party' or 'parties' are only mentioned five times, and then only in reference to the make-up of certain committees and the broadcasting of parliament.

The standing orders extensively outline the rights and responsibilities of the government in parliament, but nowhere does it state that the government needs to be formed by a political party.

While political parties may lack recognition in the formal documents that govern the House of Representatives, in reality the contest between political parties decides who forms the government — and this has been true since the very first Australian federal parliament.

In the beginning

The first federal government was formed under Prime Minister Edmund Barton, who led a group of parliamentarians known as the Protectionists for their central policy of using trade tariffs to protect Australia's business from competing with cheap imported goods.

However the Protectionists won only 31 seats in the 75 seat parliament, and had to rely on the support of state based Labor parties to form government with a third party known as the Free Traders in opposition.

With the three major parties unable to command a significant majority over each other, let alone an overall majority in the House, instability reigned supreme.

In the first 10 years of the federal parliament the government changed seven times.

The power of two

In 1909 Protectionist leader Alfred Deakin made a decision which has shaped the Australian parliament ever since.

After years of largely working with the Labor party to form government, the Protectionists formed an alliance with the other non-Labor parties under the name the Commonwealth Liberal Party.

The new party quickly moved to test the incumbent Labor government's authority, and on 27 May 1909 it

defeated Labor on the floor of the House by 39 votes to 30.

The Labor government resigned, the new Liberal party took its place, and the precedent for a two party system was born, with Labor on one side and a coalition of non-Labor parties on the other (forerunners of today's Liberal and National parties).

A force to be reckoned with

Today the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal/National Coalition continue to be the two major forces in Australian politics.

While the Australian Greens have begun to grow their representation as an alternative party, especially in the Senate, the Labor party and the Coalition still hold more than 95 per cent of seats in the House of Representatives between them.

Every federal government since World War II has been formed by either the



PAT CAMPBELL

PARTY TIME: Political parties take centre stage in Australian politics

Labor party or the Coalition parties and their predecessors, and the vast majority of members ever elected to federal parliament have been members of political parties.

A question to consider is to what extent the party system has been good for Australian democracy.

Those in favour of strong political parties in the House of Representatives point out that parties provide a meaningful focus for public opinion and offer the voters real policy alternatives.

Parties keep the parliamentary system stable and help to organise and streamline the business of parliament. Unlike the shifting alliances that characterised parliament's first decade, a strong party system ensures that the government of the day is able to carry out its policy program.

People against the party based political system say it stifles debate and decreases government accountability.

They argue that party cohesion in the House of Representatives reduces the chamber to a 'rubber stamp' for government policies and activities and there is no real scrutiny because everyone votes as their party dictates.

OVER TO YOU...

Divide your class into small groups as if you were forming a political party.

Decide what you would call your party and why.

Discuss what your three main policies would be.

Choose one of your group to outline your policies to the rest of the class.



POLL POSITION: Voters can face a choice between party and independent candidates

They also say that because backbenchers within parties are expected to follow the party line in the chamber, they cannot act as an independent voice for their electorate.

Minority and majority

The control of the major parties has been challenged in the current parliament, with independent and minor party members of the House gaining more power and influence following the 2010 election.

In 2010 neither the Labor party nor the Coalition won enough seats to form government in their own right, the first time this had happened since 1940.

Eventually the Labor party won the support of three independent members

and the Australian Greens member Adam Bandt, allowing Labor to form government with a one seat majority in parliament.

This means Labor is governing from a minority of members, relying on independents and other parties to pass every piece of legislation through the House — just like Edmund Barton's first government back in 1901.

Some have hailed this as a victory for direct democracy; others say it has hamstrung the parliament and given the independents far too much say over national issues.

But whether this is really a step away from the power of parties or just a one-off event, we will have to wait and see until the next election.



PARLIAMENTARY PIONEERS: Australia's first prime minister Edmund Barton (fourth from left) with members of his cabinet.

House Work

Your guide to investigations by House of Representatives and Joint Committees

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee

- **Language learning in Indigenous communities**
Public hearings being conducted
www.aph.gov.au/atsia
atsia.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4559

Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry Committee

- **The Australian forestry industry**
Report released 23 November 2011
www.aph.gov.au/arff
arff.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4500

Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity Committee

- **Integrity of overseas Commonwealth law enforcement operations**
Public hearings being conducted
- **Integrity testing**
Report released 23 November 2011
www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/aclei.committee@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 3521

Australia's Immigration Detention Network Committee

Interim report released 7 October 2011
www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/immigration.detention@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 3521

Climate Change, Environment and the Arts Committee

- **Australia's biodiversity in a changing climate**
Public hearings being conducted
www.aph.gov.au/ccea
ccea.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4580

Corporations and Financial Services Committee

- **The collapse of Trio Capital and any other related matters**
Interim report released 24 November 2011
www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/corporations.joint@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 3583

Cyber-Safety

- **Cybersafety for senior Australians**
Submissions being sought
www.aph.gov.au/jscc
jscc@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4202

Economics Committee

- **Reserve Bank Annual Report 2011 (First Report)**
Report released 22 March 2012
- **Reserve Bank Annual Report 2010 (Third Report)**
Report released 21 November 2011
www.aph.gov.au/economics
economics.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4587

Education and Employment Committee

- **Mental health and workforce participation**
Report being prepared
www.aph.gov.au/ee
ee.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4573

Electoral Matters Committee

- **Funding of political parties and election campaigns**
Report released 9 December 2011
www.aph.gov.au/em
jscem@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 2374

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee

- **Review of the Defence Annual Report 2010-2011**
Report being prepared
- **Inquiry into Australia's overseas representation**
Report being prepared
- **Australia's human rights dialogues with China and Vietnam**
Report being prepared
- **Australia's trade and investment relationship with Japan and the Republic of Korea**
Public hearings being conducted
- **Defence Annual Report 2009-2010**
Report released 27 February 2012
www.aph.gov.au/jfadt
jscfadt@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 2313

Gambling Reform Committee

- **Prevention and treatment of problem gambling**
Submissions being sought
- **Interactive and online gambling and gambling advertising**
Report released 8 December 2011
www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/gamblingreform@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 3433

Health and Ageing Committee

- **Registration processes and support for overseas trained doctors**
Report released 19 March 2012
- **Dementia: early diagnosis and intervention**
Submissions being sought
www.aph.gov.au/haa
haa.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4145

Infrastructure and Communications Committee

www.aph.gov.au/ic
ic.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 2352

Intelligence and Security Committee

- **Administration and Expenditure No. 10 (2010-2011) – Australian Intelligence Agencies**
Report being prepared

- **Administration and Expenditure No. 9 (2009–2010)**
Australian Intelligence Agencies
Report being prepared
www.aph.gov.au/pjcis
pjcis@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 2360

Law Enforcement Committee

- **Commonwealth unexplained wealth legislation and arrangements**
Report released 19 March 2012
www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/le.committee@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 3419

Migration Committee

- **Multiculturalism in Australia**
Public hearings being conducted
www.aph.gov.au/mig
jscm@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4560

National Broadband Network

- **Rollout of the National Broadband Network – Third review**
Public hearings being conducted
www.aph.gov.au/jcnbn
jcnbn@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 2322

National Capital and External Territories Committee

- **The annual report of the National Capital Authority**
Public hearings being conducted
www.aph.gov.au/ncet
jscncet@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4355

Petitions Committee

www.aph.gov.au/petitions
petitions.committee.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 2152

Procedure Committee

- **Procedural changes implemented in the 43rd Parliament**
- **Maintenance of Standing Orders**
www.aph.gov.au/proc
procedure.committee.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4670

Public Accounts and Audit Committee

- **Auditor-General's reports nos. 16–46, 2010–11**
Report released 24 November 2011
- **National funding agreements**
Report released 24 November 2011
www.aph.gov.au/jpaa
jcpaa@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4615

Public Works

- **Proposed development and construction of housing for Defence at Ermington, Sydney**
Public hearings being conducted
- **Proposed development and construction of housing for Defence at Rasmussen, Townsville**
Public hearings being conducted
- **Construction of Projects Two and Three of the Christmas Island New Housing Program**
Report being prepared
- **LAND 17 Phase 1A Infrastructure Project**
Report released 14 February 2012
- **Proposed Royal Australian Air Force Base East Sale redevelopment, Sale, Victoria**
Report released 14 February 2012
- **Proposed HMAS Albatross redevelopment, Nowra, NSW**
Report released 14 February 2012
www.aph.gov.au/pwc
jcpw@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4636

Regional Australia

- **Use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) workforce practices in regional Australia**
Public hearings being conducted
www.aph.gov.au/ra
ra.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4162

Social Policy and Legal Affairs

- **Residential strata title insurance**
Report released 21 March 2012
- **Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder**
Public hearings being conducted
- **Operation of the insurance industry during disaster events**
Report released 27 February 2012
www.aph.gov.au/spla
spla.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 2358

Treaties Committee

- **Treaties tabled on 28 February 2012**
Submissions being sought
- **Treaties tabled on 7 February 2012**
Submissions being sought
- **Treaties tabled on 22 November 2011**
Submissions being sought
- **Treaty tabled on 21 November 2011**
Public hearings being conducted
www.aph.gov.au/jsct
jsct@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4002

A number of committees are conducting inquiries into legislation before parliament. Details of current bills inquiries can be obtained from committee websites.

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