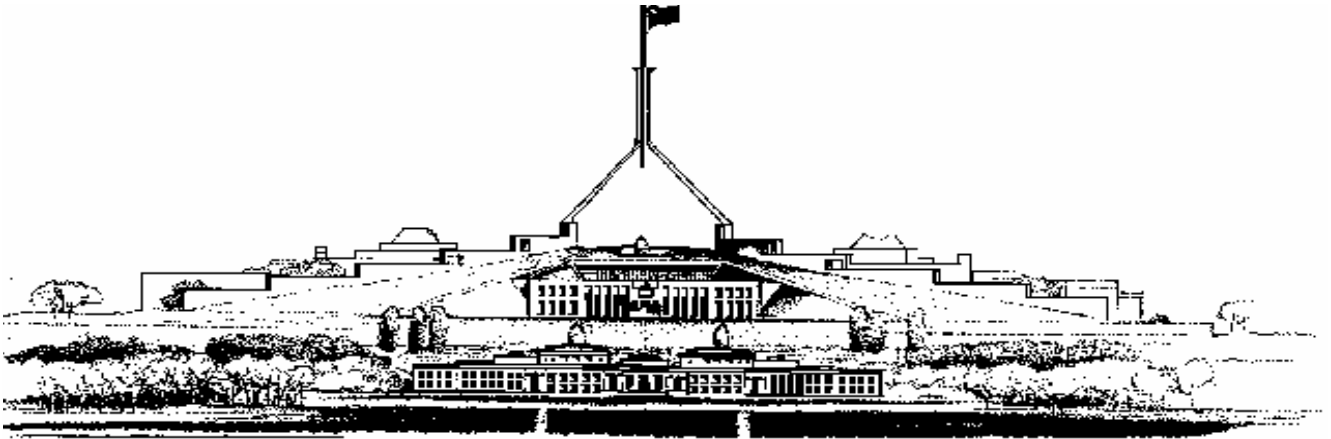




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 1, 2011

Wednesday, 9 February 2011

FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SECOND PERIOD

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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SITTING DAYS—2011

Month	Date
February	8, 9, 10, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28
March	1, 2, 3, 21, 22, 23, 24
May	10, 11, 12, 23, 24, 25, 26, 30, 31
June	1, 2, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23
July	4, 5, 6, 7
August	16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25
September	12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22
October	11, 12, 13, 31
November	1, 2, 3, 21, 22, 23, 24

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

Governor-General

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

House of Representatives Officeholders

Speaker—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP

Deputy Speaker—Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP

Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

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

Leader of the House—Hon. Anthony Norman Albanese MP

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

Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Christopher Maurice Pyne MP

Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Party Leaders and Whips

Australian Labor Party

Leader—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Wayne Maxwell Swan MP

Chief Government Whip—Hon. Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon MP

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

Liberal Party of Australia

Leader—Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP

Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Warren George Entsch MP

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

The Nationals

Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP

Chief Whip—Mr Mark Maclean Coulton MP

Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives

Members of the House of Representatives

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

Members of the House of Representatives

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

Members of the House of Representatives

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

Members of the House of Representatives

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

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

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

Heads of Parliamentary Departments

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

GILLARD MINISTRY

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

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]

GILLARD MINISTRY—*continued*

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

SHADOW MINISTRY

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

[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]

SHADOW MINISTRY—*continued*

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

SHADOW MINISTRY—*continued*

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

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Wednesday, 9 February 2011

The **SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins)** took the chair at 9 am, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

MAIN COMMITTEE

The **SPEAKER**—I advise the House that the Deputy Speaker has fixed Wednesday, 9 February, at 10.30 am, as the time for the next meeting of the Main Committee, unless an alternative day or hour is fixed.

TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (2010 MEASURES No. 4) BILL 2010

FISHERIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2) 2010

HEALTH INSURANCE AMENDMENT (PATHOLOGY REQUESTS) BILL 2010

TERRITORIES LAW REFORM BILL 2010

TELECOMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (COMPETITION AND CONSUMER SAFEGUARDS) BILL 2010

THERAPEUTIC GOODS AMENDMENT (2010 MEASURES No. 1) BILL 2010

NATIONAL MEASUREMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2010

SERVICE AND EXECUTION OF PROCESS AMENDMENT (INTERSTATE FINE ENFORCEMENT) BILL 2010

NATIVE TITLE AMENDMENT BILL (No. 1) 2010

TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (CONFIDENTIALITY OF TAXPAYER INFORMATION) BILL 2010

RADIOCOMMUNICATIONS AMENDMENT BILL 2010

FAMILY LAW AMENDMENT (VALIDATION OF CERTAIN

PARENTING ORDERS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2010

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010

AIRPORTS AMENDMENT BILL 2010

CORPORATIONS AMENDMENT (SONS OF GWALIA) BILL 2010

Assent

Messages from the Governor-General reported informing the House of assent to the bills.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Indigenous Affairs

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (9.02 am)—by leave—I acknowledge the first Australians on whose lands we meet and whose cultures we celebrate as the oldest continuing cultures in human history. I believe that our debates are stronger for our acknowledgement of country for this emerging Australian tradition of respect. I remember so vividly Matilda House’s words, speaking to all of us, when this 43rd Parliament began. She said:

... I express the hope of a united, reconciled nation, the oldest living culture joined with the many diverse cultures of a modern successful Australia.

I believe that, for all the democratic differences between us in this place, this is a hope that we all genuinely share.

I also remember so vividly when Kevin Rudd said, speaking for all of us when the 42nd Parliament began: ‘Sorry.’ With that one word Kevin Rudd made wonderful history for this nation. As an Australian and as a member of the government, I was proud to be here on that day. Then Kevin turned his intelligence and determination to closing the gap for Indigenous Australians, setting six specific ambitious targets for our nation to achieve: closing the gap in life expectancy;

halving the gap in mortality rates for children under five; ensuring access to early childhood education; halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy; halving the gap in year 12 attainment rates; and halving the gap in employment outcomes. I am proud to be here now, taking up the responsibility for the Australian government in closing the gap.

Today I make the third annual prime ministerial statement to this House on closing the gap. The parliament should be in no doubt that prime ministers will be reporting on closing the gap for decades to come. This work will go on. I do believe that Australians want our Indigenous people to have a better life. I also understand that many Australians wonder if our country can ever make that happen. I feel the force of these two Australian emotions: our deep dream of a better life for all and our deep fear that we can never truly achieve it. As I speak to this parliament today I feel the power of those two conflicting emotions.

I know our people think of the past, of the great policy movements and the passionate debates, of the money spent and the stubborn persistence of Indigenous disadvantage, and I know that sometimes we wonder: 'Can we really make a difference?' I am an activist and an optimist. For me, the answer can only be yes. The reality of change is never simple. Our knowledge is never perfect and action is never easy, but closing the gap has allowed Australia to move beyond anecdote and intuition and instead to act on the best evidence we can get. The closing the gap goals mean we know what we are trying to achieve in education, in employment and in health. The closing the gap strategy means we know how we are going to achieve it: improving investment, changing behaviours and working together with respect. This framework is in place and delivery has begun.

'Closing the gap' is the slogan of no political party. That is much of its power. The community, particularly the Indigenous community, made closing the gap a campaign. The government has made closing the gap its policy. In my own work, first as education minister and now as Prime Minister, I have come to see ever more power in closing the gap as a way of defining, driving and measuring improvements in the lives of Indigenous Australians, as a way of describing and understanding the government's plans for the enormously difficult and complex social problems of Indigenous disadvantage. Because I believe a fair nation creates opportunities for all, I see closing the gap as a genuinely important national goal—that all Australians will have the same opportunities, that demography will not be destiny, that success will be defined by hard work, not postcode, and that this will be true for any Aussie kid, whether they are from the Red Centre, Redfern or Rose Bay.

Because I believe in tackling the big challenges in the national interest, I see closing the gap as a way of understanding the problems. It is evidence based, accountable and transparent. It tells us what needs to be done first and fastest and it builds a methodical approach. It allows us to build consensus in support of specific progress, instead of debating abstract ideas, to do what we can with what we have where we are.

Because I believe Australians judge governments on delivery, I see closing the gap as a way of working on solutions. It is a way of making specific, measurable progress. It is practical and cumulative. It gives us new information, which means we can invest where it will make the biggest difference, information which means we can be sure that government is meeting its responsibilities. So closing the gap is a way of saying that Indigenous people should expect from the government the same thing that every Aus-

tralian expects: the building blocks all people look to government to provide and the necessary conditions for opportunity in life.

Closing the gap is a way of saying that Indigenous people should expect of themselves the same things all Australians expect as well. I also believe that with opportunity comes responsibility and that individuals only achieve progress through work and effort. So I see closing the gap as a call for changes in behaviour, a call to every person, to every family, to every community to take care of your children, to take a job when you can find one, to create a safe environment, to send your kids to school, to pay your rent, to save up for a home, to respect good social norms, to respect the law and to reach out to other Australians.

If I speak strongly it is because I have listened to Indigenous people who do these things already, people who speak even more strongly. I am talking about people like Chris Sarra, the inspiring Indigenous educator, whose creed of high expectations and words 'stronger, smarter' stay with me. I am talking about people like Noel Pearson, who pioneered the arguments for social and personal responsibility as drivers of Indigenous opportunity.

To borrow a phrase from President George W Bush, we should not give in to 'the soft bigotry of low expectations'. It is not only the well-known Indigenous Australians, the people we read about in our newspapers and see on our television screens, who are driving behavioural change. It is the mother in the city who feeds her children and gets them ready for school. It is the aunty in the country town who tells the stories to the young. It is the father in a remote community who sets an example of strength and gentleness to his sons. These are the hidden stories and hidden heroes of Indigenous Australia, the people

who are leading the change more than anyone else.

I am certain that Australia will never close the gap without all of us committing to change. When this campaign began, the truth is that the most remote community and the most respected leader, the smallest shop and the biggest corporation, and the Australian government itself, all needed to change. We needed not to change alone but to change together. Saying sorry was vital for so many reasons. One that I want to reflect on today is the chance it gave us to break the cycle of blame between Australian governments and Indigenous Australia. In the worst moments of this cycle, Australian governments have sometimes seemed to say to Indigenous Australia, 'Let us know when you've got your act together.' In the worst moments of this cycle, Indigenous Australia has sometimes seemed to feel that 'the Australian government has to invest before our behaviour can begin to change'. Both attitudes are destructive and wrong. Bad behaviour by individuals is never an excuse for government failure. The failures of government are never an excuse for bad behaviour by individuals.

If Indigenous kids in this nation are not getting a fair go, we share the responsibility for change. I do not mean as Indigenous people. I do not mean as non-Indigenous people. I mean as adults, politicians, bureaucrats, local communities, school leaders, teachers and parents—us. All of us and each of us share the task ahead. I really think we all now see it that way. In the past three years we have genuinely come together with respect and we have worked together with shared responsibility and genuinely broken the cycle of blame. Closing the gap is now more than a public policy. Closing the gap is now a national goal.

In the same way, I believe recognising the unique and special place of our first peoples

in the Australian Constitution can be a wonderful national goal, an opportunity to recognise, in the founding document of our nationhood, our shared pride in being Australian and our shared pride in Australia's continuing Indigenous culture. When that happens, I believe, it will be a wonderful, uplifting, uniting moment for our nation, a day of great national pride. I look forward to working with the expert panel, with all members of the parliament and with all Australians as we approach that national goal together.

But the work cannot wait until that day, and we will not let it. Since 2007 our nation has been working together to close the gap in health, in education and in employment, to overcome decades of underinvestment in services and infrastructure, to encourage and support personal responsibility as the foundation for healthy, functional families and communities and to build new understanding and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. We have done an enormous amount of work together. First, we have invested in what we call the building blocks, those necessary conditions for opportunity: early childhood and schooling, health and healthy homes, safe communities and economic participation, as well as governance and leadership, reversing decades of underinvestment in services and infrastructure, delivering the things all Australians expect.

So we have invested in early childhood, delivering infrastructure, staff and programs in remote communities and town camps; making community based preschools more affordable; hiring extra full-time teachers to support Indigenous kids. Last year nearly 15,000 Indigenous adults and children visited one of the 45 Communities for Children services sites to receive assistance with early learning and literacy, parenting and family support, and childhood nutrition. Ten new child and maternal health services have been

approved for funding across Australia. Two of these services have already commenced, in Warburton, Western Australia and Ceduna, in South Australia. Up to 11,000 Indigenous babies and their mothers will be helped by 2013. More than 6,000 children and parents meet regularly in 69 supported playgroups across Australia, supporting children's development and giving parents a hand as well.

We are investing in schooling. The government is building new classrooms, science centres, libraries and resource centres in 29 remote communities across Australia. These projects are due to be completed this year. Last year more than 3,500 Indigenous young people who were at risk of not completing year 12 or an equivalent were personally helped under the Youth Connections program, which encourages young people to stay at school, get back to school or take up training and achieve their goals. More than 5,000 students were supported in academies such as the Clontarf Foundation football academies, the Former Origin Greats Queensland academy and other sports based academies in 2010. These academies reach out to school students at risk of not completing school. They teach and promote self-discipline and self-esteem, life skills and the importance of education, particularly through close mentoring and participation in sport. More than half of the participants reported improved academic performance and positive changes in attitudes and behaviour.

We have invested in health. The Indigenous Chronic Disease Package is training and expanding the Indigenous health workforce and tackling chronic disease risk factors. This has funded more than 300 new positions in the Indigenous health workforce—outreach workers and health project officers, regional tobacco coordinators and tobacco action workers, healthy lifestyle workers, practice managers and other health professionals. To tackle petrol sniffing, there

are nearly 108 sites across regional and remote Australia supplying low-aromatic Opal fuel. Eleven new Indigenous communities, in the gulf region of Queensland, the East Kimberley in Western Australia and the Top End of the Northern Territory—home to nearly 9,000 people—will be getting access to Opal fuel through 39 new retail sites. This begins in 2011 and will be completed by 2013. Opal fuel has delivered a 70 per cent reduction in petrol sniffing across communities, with improved health outcomes, family function and community safety.

We have invested in healthy homes. The Australian government is making an unprecedented long-term investment to reverse decades of neglect, tackling overcrowding and homelessness, poor housing conditions and the severe housing shortage in remote Indigenous communities. People need a decent house to cook a healthy meal, to sleep at night, for children to wake up the next day ready for school, for parents to wake up the next day ready for work. That means that houses have to be built, and we are doing that. We have listened to communities and we are building housing to cater to different sized families—houses that cater for singles, young families and the elderly and houses that allow privacy. Last year 316 new houses and 828 refurbishments were completed. New and refurbished buildings are subject to new tenancy agreements which help tenants transition to rental arrangements in line with other public housing and to ensure regular repairs and maintenance.

We have invested in safe communities. The Australian government is helping protect Indigenous children from neglect and abuse. We are helping develop new family support services for families at risk, increasing the number of child protection workers and strengthening alcohol controls. The Australian government has paid for the construction of three permanent police stations in the

APY lands in South Australia. These began operations late in 2009 and early last year, bringing a permanent police presence to those communities for the first time. Sixty-six Australian Federal Police officers have been deployed to the Northern Territory since June 2007. We funded 45 extra Northern Territory police recruits who have graduated since 2009 and commenced their duties with the Northern Territory police force in 16 communities from Maningrida to Yuendumu, and another 15 recruits should graduate in April. In child protection, new national standards for out of home care which apply to formal care arrangements including residential care, foster care and kinship care will ensure children get proper care no matter where they live.

We have invested in economic participation. Over 16,000 Indigenous Australians started employment and about 12,500 began training in 2010 with support from the Indigenous Employment Program. As part of the tailored assistance element of the program, work began on construction, retail, hospitality and mining projects valued at over \$180 million. Nearly 2,000 Indigenous Australians were supported into employment over the last 12 months through the Community Development Employment Projects program.

Since starting in September 2009, the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council has generated over \$4 million in contracts and nearly \$3 million in transactions between its members and certified suppliers. The council links corporate and government purchases with certified Indigenous suppliers of goods and services. Demand is growing and not only for Indigenous workers but for Indigenous business as well.

We have invested in governance and leadership. The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples provides a central mechanism

with which government and the corporate and the community sectors can engage and partner on policy design and implementation. In remote communities we are supporting community capacity building and leadership initiatives such as engagement workshops, leadership development workshops and community development training.

Closing the gap demands that the Australian government meets our responsibility to overcome decades of underinvestment in services and infrastructure. We are doing this. Closing the gap also demands personal responsibility, the foundation for the life of every family and community. Indigenous people are doing this too. Closing the gap means change in people's lives and Indigenous people know that when a child starts attending school, when the drinker stops abusing alcohol, when the adult takes the job that is there, then change begins. And Indigenous people know that these decisions are not made by governments; they are made by people. The job of government and of communities is to support good decision so that when the child goes to school, there is a great teacher; when the drinker stops, they find a great counsellor; and when the adult takes the job, they have great skills. That is what we are doing across Australia.

In Fitzroy Crossing the leaders there and the surrounding communities of the Fitzroy Valley in Western Australia requested alcohol restrictions, and they were first imposed in 2007. Since 2008 the alcohol restrictions have been evaluated and reviewed annually. The reviews are good news. There is less tolerance for domestic violence and more willingness to report it. Families are purchasing more food and clothing and parents are taking more care of their own health and wellbeing and that of their children. Fitzroy Crossing is a quieter and more peaceful town for families to live in and a better place for kids to grow up in.

In Alice Springs, the Australian and Territory governments' Alice Springs Transformation Plan is designed to meet very specific local needs. It is funding work on new roads, curbs and gutters, new power and water infrastructure and street lights. Eighty-five new houses are being built, with 18 new houses already completed and the remaining work to be completed this year. This goes with normal tenancy management arrangements where residents are expected to pay their rent and maintain their homes. In Alice Springs itself, there is now more accommodation for renal patients and people receiving other medical treatment and extra managed accommodation beds for homeless men. Health checks and family assessments are being provided to make sure that 300 Indigenous children are ready and able to attend school. And the successful Dog Control Program has been extended for a further two years.

On Cape York in Queensland, the Cape York Welfare Reform trial is a partnership between the Queensland and Australian governments, Cape York regional organisations and the four communities of Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge. The trial encourages people to take responsibility for community wellbeing by improving school attendance and child safety, tackling alcohol and drug abuse, gambling addiction and family violence, and improving tenancy management. Noel Pearson has driven these reforms on the cape over many years. Cape York is a strong example of the way government is working with communities across the country and supporting local design and control.

In Brisbane, Chris Sarra's Stronger Smarter Institute at the Queensland University of Technology has delivered transformational change in Indigenous education. Chris has also led the Stronger Smarter Learning Communities project supported by the Australian government. This has brought new

resources to drive improvements in schools, which our transparency measures show need help. This is giving principals and teachers across Australia the tools to improve performance in their schools—and not just the support but also the challenge to set the highest expectations and for Indigenous kids to deliver the best results. I said earlier that Chris's creed of high expectations and his words 'stronger smarter' stay with me. By the very definition, government must be working to achieve stronger and smarter. Government cannot deliver personal responsibility, but modern government can create many incentives for personal behaviour and we can ensure that there are many opportunities to support good decisions. That is what we are doing now and it is helping to close the gap.

So today the government releases the third annual report on progress towards our closing the gap targets. At their launch we knew these targets were specific and ambitious. They are ambitious because we chose targets that would be difficult to achieve, and specific because we chose targets where we would know if we did not get there. The report tells us that we must keep improving investment, keep changing behaviours and keep working together with respect if we are to meet the targets to close the gap.

Here is what we know. We can be confident of meeting two of the six targets: to halve the gap in infant mortality rates for Indigenous children under five by 2018 and to ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities by 2013. We should be confident that these two targets are on track.

We see improvement in three of the six targets and with faster improvement over time we believe that these can be reached: to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children by 2018;

to halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by 2018.

The final target is the most challenging of all: closing the life-expectancy gap within a generation—that is, by 2031. This means the life expectancy of Indigenous men will need to increase by over 20 years and the life expectancy of Indigenous women will need to increase by over 16 years by 2031. This is a 30-year target. No-one thinks it can be achieved sooner. Indeed it will be extremely challenging.

I know we could never say mission accomplished three years into a 30-year process. But the message of this report is clear. Together, we can do this. Together, we have a plan for progress. We do see change for the better. And we know where we want change to continue. This is the power of Closing the Gap. We do not have a plan to do everything. Such plans rarely succeed. We do have a plan to meet six targets. Together, we can do this. With this evidence of where we have more work to do comes a responsibility to do more work now.

Closing the Gap is built on measuring improvement. Measurement needs to improve as well—so we will always know what works. For preschool access we use a new Australian Bureau of Statistics survey. For literacy and numeracy we use NAPLAN, which is also annual. It is a national dataset which is rich and rigorous. But our mortality, life expectancy, year 12 attainment and employment targets are based on the census, which happens every five years. So we need other ways to measure improvement between the censuses. And the census itself has not always reached Indigenous people or identified them well. So some targets are particularly difficult to measure today. Extra re-

sources for the Australian Bureau of Statistics and for the states are making a difference. This year's census will tell us more about Indigenous Australians as a result. This is an area where more will be done over time.

Today, I met with leaders of the Closing the Gap coalition and I acknowledge them in the parliamentary gallery today. Thank you very much for coming. Their campaign is approaching its fifth anniversary next month. They have a lot to be proud of. The Closing the Gap coalition have been important in advocacy for Indigenous health equality—and we talked about that a little bit earlier. They have become a united voice on what should happen to improve Indigenous health. But they have emphasised to me and to government that advocacy on the outside is not enough.

The Closing the Gap coalition, with the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, are not just arguing for action but advising on what works where, and we thank them for that. This practical effort is to ensure services fit the conditions of specific people in specific places, to work together to deliver the right investments and the right behavioural changes and to translate good policy into real progress. It is the absolute essence of Closing the Gap.

This is the work which will go on and we will do it together: clear goals, measured progress, focused on the targets, government delivering what all Australians expect and Indigenous people doing the same. Together, we can do this. With passion and perspective, we are determined to deliver, all sharing our pride in Australia's Indigenous culture and all sharing our determination to give everyone a better life. We can close the gap.

I present a copy of *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's report 2011*. I move:

That the House take note of the report.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (9.34 am)—by leave—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Leader of the Opposition speaking in reply to the Prime Minister's statement for a period not exceeding 31 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (9.34 am)—I thank the Prime Minister for her statement. I congratulate her on the passion and commitment that she brings to this issue. One concrete, specific, tangible sign that the gap might actually be closing in one respect, if not in others, is the presence in this House of the member for Hasluck, Mr Ken Wyatt, the first Indigenous member of the House of Representatives. Without in any way making a partisan political point, may I say how proud I am that it was the Liberal Party that brought this fine Australian into this chamber.

I sincerely congratulate the Prime Minister on what was a fine and heartfelt speech. I thank the government and commend the government for so many of the measures and initiatives that she outlined in that speech. I have to say, nevertheless, that there is a sense of disappointment about some aspects of the speech because, let's face it, we are about closing the gap in life expectancy, we are about halving the gap in mortality rates and we are about ensuring access to early childhood education. We are about halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy. We are about halving the gap in year 12 attainment rates and employment outcomes—and there was very little specific information on exactly what progress has been achieved.

I accept the Prime Minister's point that statistics are imperfect and incomplete. It may well be that it is very difficult to get a precise read on exactly how we are going

here. Nevertheless, if we are fair dinkum, I do hope that successive prime ministerial statements on this important issue will give us more concrete data about specific outcomes towards these great goals that we all support.

On this subject we have heard a lot of fine speeches in this House over the years. There have been at least a generation of fine speeches in this House on the need for progress in this area. It is great that there are fine speeches; fine speeches are a credit to their authors. But the trouble is that talk in this parliament has not much translated into change on the ground and into progress in the lives of Aboriginal people. Good intentions are essential, and every single member of this House has an abundant well of good intentions in this area, but good intentions are not enough. The challenge is to turn good intentions into better outcomes. That is the test of our good intentions: do they translate into good outcomes? The Prime Minister, to her credit, recognises this; hence the attempt to get better statistics on all of this.

I do congratulate first of all the Prime Minister's predecessor, the former Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, for the historic apology that he made in this House at the beginning of the last parliament. It was overdue. It was heartfelt. It was a great unifying moment for our country. As part of that apology he committed this parliament to an annual statement on closing the gap, and I congratulate the current Prime Minister for continuing that commitment. I also commend the Prime Minister for her recognition that this is a shared enterprise. The failures of government do not justify the failures of individuals and, similarly, the failures of individuals can never justify governmental neglect. That is an important recognition, a very significant principle, and I am pleased that the Prime Minister acknowledged that in her speech today.

We heard about more teachers. We heard about more visits to government services. We heard about more funding for maternal health services. We heard about supported playgroups. We heard about more encouragement for students to stay at school; more mentoring; more sport. I was particular pleased to hear about greater access to Opal petrol, because this was a scheme that I had much to do with myself as health minister in the previous government. There are more police stations—again, excellent to hear that this is finally happening; stronger alcohol controls—again, excellent to hear that this is going on; more people being assisted into work—what good news. But I have to say it would have been a more encouraging statement if we had heard more about how many people, having been assisted into work, are staying in work; how many communities with new police stations have seen an actual drop in violent crime; how many alcohol programs, having been introduced, have been accompanied by a reduction in substance abuse.

I know that there are thousands of people—public servants, people working with non-government organisations, volunteers—all working with high ideals and great professionalism to improve the lot of Aboriginal people. This is extremely encouraging. It is a tribute to the great spirit of Australian society. But I fear that not much is yet being noticed by people on the ground. I wonder how much real difference in the daily lives of Aboriginal people is being brought about.

The life expectancy crisis, the crisis which has spawned the close the gap movement, is a function of the educational crisis, the employment crisis, the housing crisis, the substance crisis and, in the end, the cultural collapse which, all too sadly, afflicts so many Aboriginal communities and so many people. This is what we need to address. And if

all of these are not tackled, might we not be putting bandaids over the mortal wounds?

So I want to suggest, if I may, a slightly different approach, which the government might care to think about as it considers next year's closing the gap statement. It seems to me that the basic test of any civil society is quite simple. Do the children go to school? Do the adults go to work? Is that community substantially free of the kind of trauma that indicates gross social dysfunction? Now we all know that for Aboriginal people school attendance rates are very low. We all know that for Aboriginal people unemployment rates are very high. We all know that this is exacerbated in Indigenous communities, and the more remote the community the worse the problem invariably is. Why don't we set targets of 100 per cent school attendance? Why don't we set targets of 100 per cent work attendance? And why don't we say, 'This is going to be achieved within 12 months'? Why can't every Aboriginal kid in Aurukun or in Coen—where it is actually happening—be going to school every day of every week? Why can't the standard that has been achieved in Coen and the standard which is improving in Aurukun be extended right around the country? And why can't these statistics be published on a monthly basis so we know how we are going, not just in a decade, not in half a decade, but this month, next month, this year, next year? Why don't we know how we are going? This, I think, would be a significant improvement in the way we measure performance in this area.

Another test of civil society is the maintenance of public order. How many Indigenous communities with significant social problems are still without a proper police station and are still without sworn police in residence? We need those figures. How many Indigenous tenants are paying even a social market rate for their homes? It was good to

hear from the Prime Minister today that the new tenancy agreements provide for proper rental payments. How many houses are now subject to those new rental agreements? And how many of those rental agreements are actually being lived up to in practice? These are the sorts of statistics that we need if we are to be confident that all of our good intentions, all of our programs and all of our spending is having the result that all of us want to have.

How many trauma presentations are there at the clinics in Indigenous communities? It would be good to know these figures and it would be good to know how these figures are changing over time. I do not want to pretend that this is an easy challenge that I am suggesting to the government as an alternative. When I was the minister with whole-of-government responsibility in Cape York, I made these selfsame suggestions and, because most of these statistics were in the hands of the state governments, it was difficult to get hold of them. When I was the minister with whole-of-government responsibility for the APY Lands in South Australia, again I made these suggestions and, for much the same reasons, it was hard to come by these statistics. Frankly, these statistics will start off very embarrassingly, but we should move beyond our embarrassment to progress by collecting these statistics, publishing these statistics and improving these statistics. If that is what we really want to do to close the gap, that is what should be done.

The danger in all of this is that there might be an abundance of activity but not much change. The danger is that there might be too much philosophy and not enough common sense. Again, I stress that I say this in a spirit of bipartisanship; I do not say this in a spirit of criticism of the government. Not only did I try to get these statistics collected when I was the minister; I tried to get senior officers of the government to live in these

remote communities. How can you really understand what is happening in remote communities if you do not live there? I regret to say my challenge to the senior officers of my former departments was not met with much enthusiasm. Still, if it is worth doing, it is worth persisting.

I agree with the Prime Minister that there is a new spirit and a new partnership in Indigenous affairs. I want to thank all of the people who have contributed to this encouraging new spirit, new partnership and new pragmatism in Indigenous affairs. The Prime Minister named some of them herself: Chris Sarra; Noel Pearson, who has been such a prophetic leader not just for Aboriginal Australia but for the entire Australian community; Warren Mundine, a former president of the Australian Labor Party and someone who I wish was in this parliament, who deserves the whole nation's thanks and gratitude for his leadership in this area; Sue Gordon; Marcia Langton; and younger people like Wesley Aird. They all deserve our thanks and congratulations.

Yes, the former Prime Minister Mr Rudd deserves our thanks and congratulations, and even his predecessor, John Howard. He may have been a late convert to this particular crusade but he was sincere and part of the new spirit, the new pragmatism and the new partnership when it comes to Indigenous affairs.

I think that the new spirit is best enshrined in Noel Pearson's resonant phrase 'our right to take responsibility,' which refers of course to his desire to have Aboriginal people empowered and in charge of their lives, not be as dependent as they have been for far too long on what other people have done for them. That is the great challenge for Australian government: how do we facilitate in the days, months, years and decades to

come what Noel Pearson calls 'our right to take responsibility?'

When the former Prime Minister Mr Rudd apologised on behalf of all Australians in this House, he said something which I think deserves to echo around this chamber again and again until this task which we are discussing today is complete:

... unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong.

I would suggest that there is nothing that the former Prime Minister has said which is truer or more significant than this.

I want to suggest to the government in conclusion one final practical step that could be taken to convert the great symbolism of reconciliation into an even greater substance, and that is to tackle the problem of the Queensland Wild Rivers Act. The Prime Minister paid very appropriate tribute to Noel Pearson in the course of her speech. As I said a moment ago, I doubt Australia has had a better or more inspirational leader over the last decade than Noel Pearson. There is almost nothing that Noel Pearson is keener to do than to overturn the impact of the Queensland wild rivers legislation on his people in Cape York. In the eyes of Noel Pearson, this reverses the decade-long struggle for land rights. Having won real control over their land, it has been taken away in the name of environmental purity.

I do not want to smash up the Queensland legislation altogether. That is not my intention. All I am seeking to do with the private member's bill currently before the House is to ensure that it only applies to Aboriginal land where the relevant Aboriginal owners consent for its application. It is a very modest and very moderate bill that seeks to give back to the Aboriginal people of Cape York and elsewhere what should be their birthright, what should be their native entitlement

to empowerment in their lives by using their land. That is what my legislation seeks to do.

I accept that it is very difficult for the government to support legislation which will impact on the work of the Queensland government. But I do think it would be a great and fitting sign of good faith on the part of our Prime Minister if she at least prepared to entertain change on this issue. As I said at the start, there have been many fine speeches in this House on this subject—many heartfelt utterances, much depth of passion and great sincerity. But let us translate that into the very best that we can do for Aboriginal people in our place in our time. That is why I think the wild rivers legislation should be revisited. I think that it would be a good test of the real quality and the real commitment of this parliament if we could find it in our hearts to pass this particular bill. Thanks very much.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Cabinet Secretary and Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (9.53 am)—To enable further debate to take place in the Main Committee on *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's report 2011*, I move:

That the House take note of the document.

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

MAIN COMMITTEE

Ministerial Statement: Closing the Gap Reference

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Cabinet Secretary and Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (9.54 am)—by leave—I move:

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

Question agreed to.

ELECTRONIC TRANSACTIONS AMENDMENT BILL 2011

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (9.55 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Electronic Transactions Amendment Bill 2011 will update the Electronic Transactions Act 1999 to reflect internationally recognised standards on electronic commerce and bring Australia's electronic transactions legislation into the 21st century.

The bill contains minor amendments addressing the challenges of existing, new and emerging technologies in respect of e-commerce. These amendments are an important step in ensuring Australia's legal regime is up to date to support and promote firms and businesses operating in the digital economy.

The bill will provide increased legal certainty in trade by electronic means, and encourage further growth of electronic contracting both domestically and internationally.

The amendments align Australia's legislation with the United Nations Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts adopted by the General Assembly in 2005. The Convention was developed by the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law and is the first United Nations convention addressing legal issues arising from the digital economy.

Accession to the convention requires amendments to the domestic electronic transactions regime. Each Australian jurisdiction has implemented legislation based on

the Model Law on Electronic Commerce 1996, also developed by the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law. The convention updates the model law based on a better understanding of the use of electronic communications since the model law was finalised.

Following support during public consultation for Australia's accession to the convention, the bill was drafted by the Parliamentary Counsel's Committee and was approved by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General in May 2010. In fact, New South Wales and Tasmania have already passed the amendments and I understand that the remaining jurisdictions intend to introduce the provisions within the first half of this year.

Implementation of the convention will facilitate international trade by offering practical solutions for issues arising from the use of electronic communications in the formation or performance of contracts between parties that are located in different countries. It aims at commercial predictability when using electronic communications in international contracts, but does not otherwise purport to vary or create contract law.

Accession to the convention will also improve the efficiency of commercial activities and promote economic development both domestically and internationally.

Eighteen countries have now signed the convention, including significant trading partners such as the Republic of Korea and Singapore.

In summary, key amendments of the bill include:

- clarifying uncertainties in using electronic communications in the formation and performance of contracts
- clarifying that a contract can still be legally effective despite being formed by an automated message system

- refining default rules for determining whether the method used for an electronic signature is reliable
- providing default rules to ascertain the place of business of the parties to a transaction, taking into account modern business practices such as the use of automated message systems. Importantly, this will assist parties to determine the jurisdiction in which the contract was formed.

Conclusion

The bill modernises the law to reflect developments in technology and align the Commonwealth legislation with internationally recognised standards on electronic commerce.

While the amendments do not significantly change Commonwealth law, they provide a more certain legal environment to meet the needs of present day business practices in the digital environment.

I would like to thank the Parliamentary Counsel's Committee for the significant time and effort that went into preparing the bill, and I would also like to thank the individuals and organisations who participated in the public consultation process. I commend the bill to the House.

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

COMBATING THE FINANCING OF PEOPLE SMUGGLING AND OTHER MEASURES BILL 2011

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Mr Brendan O'Connor**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Jus-

tice and Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information) (10.00 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Introduction

This government is determined to disrupt and deter people-smuggling operations. People smugglers need money to launch ventures. People smugglers charge large sums to vulnerable people for the dangerous and illegal voyages that they organise.

Remittance dealers accept cash, cheques and other forms of payment in one location and arrange the payment of an equivalent amount of cash to someone in another location overseas. Remittance dealers range from global money transfer businesses and their franchisees and agents, to smaller entities that may operate out of a small business, such as a grocery store. There are around 6,500 remittance dealers operating in Australia. We believe that the vast majority of remittance dealers conduct legitimate businesses and provide important services to the community.

We need to make sure that remittance dealers are not misused to give people smugglers the funds they need to organise illegal smuggling ventures, or to support other forms of criminal activity.

Australian law enforcement agencies have indicated to the government that they are concerned about the role the remittance sector can inadvertently play in facilitating payments for people smuggling. Further, law enforcement agencies have already used financial intelligence to counter people-smuggling ventures. For example, AUSTRAC data is relied upon to profile targets that facilitate payments to other countries for people-smuggling activities.

This bill will reduce the risk that remittance dealers will be involved, deliberately or inadvertently, in financing people smug-

gling, laundering money or financing terrorism. It will improve intelligence and also protect against criminal infiltration of the sector and ensure the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre, known as AUSTRAC, can crack down on remitters acting unlawfully and improperly.

These initiatives build upon the legislative changes made in 2010 as part of the Anti-People Smuggling and Other Measures Act. As a result of these laws, those who provide material support to people smuggling face 10 years imprisonment, and fines of up to \$110,000.

Enhanced regulation of the remittance sector

Enhanced registration scheme

Remitters are already required to register with AUSTRAC. Providing services without being registered is an offence that carries a penalty of two years imprisonment or a \$55,000 fine, or both. The automatic granting of registration to a remitter upon application, however, affects AUSTRAC's ability to effectively regulate and supervise the sector.

This bill will introduce a more comprehensive registration scheme. Remitters applying for registration will be required to provide information relating to their suitability for registration. The AUSTRAC CEO will have the power to refuse, suspend, cancel or impose conditions on registration. Standard internal and external administrative review mechanisms will be available for all registration decisions made by the AUSTRAC CEO.

People who pose an unacceptable risk of people smuggling, money laundering, or terrorism-financing risk will not be allowed to provide remittance services in the community.

Enforcement Powers

Sanctions available to AUSTRAC under the existing act to ensure compliance with AML/CTF obligations require AUSTRAC to initiate civil proceedings or take criminal action. In many cases, particularly where minor breaches are involved, this may not be a proportionate response to the alleged breach. These processes can be costly and time consuming for all parties involved.

The bill enables the AUSTRAC CEO to issue infringement notices if a person:

- provides a remittance service without being registered; or
- fails to advise the AUSTRAC CEO of material changes in circumstances relevant to registration.

The bill makes provision for the AML/CTF Rules to set tiered penalties for breaches, not exceeding 24 penalty units for an individual or 120 penalty units for a body corporate. The higher end of penalty amounts will apply where: lower amounts would be an insufficient deterrent, or to take account of multiple contraventions, or previous infringements. The infringement notice scheme will provide the AUSTRAC CEO with an efficient enforcement mechanism which will act as an effective deterrent against noncompliance.

Regulation of Providers of Remittance Networks

Networks play a key role in the remittance industry. Currently, large entities that are profiting from providing remittance networks that enable money transfers to and from Australia are not responsible for addressing money laundering and terrorism-financing risk within the network. Instead, the AML/CTF Act focuses on the smaller businesses taking and receiving money from customers including the smaller, relatively unsophisticated remittance dealers that are agents of these network providers.

Many remittance network providers already provide considerable support to their agents to assist them to comply with their AML/CTF Act obligations. The proposed reforms will ensure that the regulation of the sector reflects the structure of the industry. It will regulate the remittance sector more efficiently.

The bill introduces a new, designated service into the AML/CTF Act, which will extend regulation to businesses that operate a network of remittance dealers.

Remittance network providers will also have responsibility for undertaking some of the AML/CTF Act reporting obligations on behalf of their agents. This measure takes into account the relationship between network providers and their agents and largely reflects the support already offered by network providers as part of the international funds transfer process.

AML/CTF Rules

In keeping with the tenor of the AML/CTF Act, the amendments in the bill provide the high-level principles for the enhanced regulation of the remittance sector, with the operational detail to be set out in the AML/CTF rules. AUSTRAC will develop the rules in consultation with the remittance sector.

Other Measures

There are a number of other measures contained in the bill, which are designed to improve Australia's AML/CTF regime.

Increased information sharing

The December 2008 National Security Statement recognised the growing threat of these transnational activities to Australia's national security and identified the need for improved coordination among Commonwealth agencies, including enforcement, regulatory and intelligence agencies.

The current arrangements do not fully provide for the contribution financial intelligence could make to the analysis of national security issues, particularly organised crime, terrorism and counterproliferation.

The measures in this bill build on the steps already taken by the government to enhance information sharing between agencies, such as the new Criminal Intelligence Fusion Centre in the Australian Crime Commission, which was launched in July 2010, to generate and share information and intelligence on organised crime.

The bill will improve information sharing of the financial intelligence prepared by AUSTRAC amongst the Australian intelligence community, ensuring a more holistic approach to Australia's national intelligence effort. The bill will extend the list of designated agencies with which AUSTRAC can share financial intelligence to include the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Defence Imagery and Geospatial Organisation, the Defence Intelligence Organisation, the Defence Signals Directorate and the Office of National Assessments.

This bill will enhance information sharing to ensure that government agencies work together in a coordinated way to counter threats to Australia's national security.

Verification of Identity

The Australian Law Reform Commission considered the use of credit reporting information for electronic verification in its 2008 report, *For your information: Australian privacy law and practice*. The verification of identity measures implements one of the recommendations made by the ALRC.

The bill will also amend the AML/CTF Act and the Privacy Act 1988 to enable reporting entities to use credit-reporting data to verify the identity of their customers. The bill introduces a number of privacy protec-

tions to ensure that information is only used for the purpose of verifying identity.

Firstly, customer consent will be required before a business can verify identity against credit-reporting data and alternative verification options must be made available to them.

Secondly, a credit-reporting agency will not be permitted to disclose personal information held on the credit information file. It will only be able to report on whether the personal information it was provided matches information that it holds on the file—for example, a person's full name, date of birth, or current address.

It also requires credit-reporting agencies and reporting entities to retain information about verification requests for seven years and to delete it at the end of that period. These requirements enhance the transparency of the verification process by ensuring that records can be reviewed to ensure compliance with the act and to enable individuals to obtain access to verification requests or assessments that relate to them.

Finally, the bill establishes the offences of unauthorised access to verification information, obtaining access to verification information by false pretences and unauthorised use or disclosure of verification information. Each offence carries a penalty of 300 penalty units, which currently amounts to \$33,000.

The verification of identity measures will make it easier, for example, for consumers to open bank accounts online, improving competition between online businesses and those with traditional branch structures.

Exemptions from obligations under the FTR Act

The Financial Transaction Reports Act 1988, which I will refer to as the FTR Act, preceded the AML/CTF Act and imposed reporting controls on the financial, bullion and gambling sectors. The FTR Act contin-

ues in force and operates parallel to the AML/CTF Act.

The bill will introduce into the FTR Act an exemption power that will enable the AUSTRAC CEO to exempt, by way of written instrument, a specified person from one or more provisions of the act. This will bring the FTR Act in line with the AML/CTF Act.

Conclusion

The enhanced regulation of the remittance sector will reduce the risk of criminal infiltration and abuse of the remittance sector in Australia by giving AUSTRAC greater knowledge of, and control over, those operating in the sector. The reforms will also shift the compliance burden away from small business agents who make up the vast majority of the remittance sector and on to their remittance network providers. This reflects the existing structure and practices of the sector.

The reforms will ensure that the government has measures in place to reduce the risk of remittance dealers facilitating access to funds for people smuggling, money laundering, terrorism financing and other serious crimes.

The bill demonstrates the government's commitment to stopping the funding of people smuggling and preventing organisers of these dangerous and inhumane ventures profiting from this serious crime. It will also serve to prevent money laundering, terrorism financing and related criminal activities at home and abroad. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Gambaro**) adjourned.

CONDOLENCES

Australian Natural Disasters

Debate resumed from 8 February, on motion by **Ms Gillard**:

That the House:

- (1) acknowledges with great sadness the devastation occasioned by this summer's natural disasters including unprecedented floods, Cyclone Yasi and bushfires;
- (2) extends its deepest sympathies to the families of those who have lost loved ones;
- (3) records its profound regret at the impact of this summer's natural disasters on the economic and social well being of affected communities;
- (4) records its admiration for the courage shown by so many in the face of these disasters;
- (5) acknowledges the enormous effort of defence personnel, emergency workers, and so many volunteers in responding to these disasters; and
- (6) pledges the full support of the Australian Parliament and community to assist affected areas to recover and rebuild.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (10.13 am)—I rise to support the remarks of the Prime Minister and other speakers yesterday regarding the floods which devastated Brisbane, Ipswich and much of Central and South-East Queensland in January. I had the opportunity to go to St George in your electorate, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, and see some of the preparations and the highest waters that I had ever seen in my lifetime out there. Unfortunately, it is almost two years to the day that I rose in this place to express my condolences for North Queensland after the floods that came on the tail of ex-tropical cyclone Ellie back in January 2009. I had no idea then that I would be making another condolence speech so soon about our devastating Queensland floods. Especially having just emerged from a prolonged drought, I certainly did not think there would be floods in South-East Queensland.

Even after spending weeks over Christmas and New Year's indoors trying to keep the young children amused while the rain stayed and stayed with monotonous intensity, most Queenslanders had no idea what was about

to unfold. However, in the days before the Brisbane floods many people like my constituent, Chelmer 96-year-old George McLachlan, did have a sense of what was to come. Why? Because he had seen it all before back in 1974 and knew that Brisbane was in the firing line again. On 10 January an already sodden Toowoomba received more than 150 millimetres of rain, causing flash flooding which turned gutters into raging torrents, washing away anything and everything in its path. As we all know, the other half of this flash flood surged down the range, turning the up-lane into a river and, like an inland tsunami, engulfing Murphys Creek, Grantham and Helidon without warning. I think of the friends and families who lost loved ones on that horrible day. We will not forget your heartache and your loss.

It was then that all of us in South-East Queensland began to realise that this Lockyer Valley water had to go somewhere and was headed for the catchments of the Brisbane and Bremer rivers. In Brisbane we have a unique relationship with our river. It twists and turns its way through the suburbs and the city. It is a source of life, a means of transport, a recreation hub and my northern electoral boundary. Rather than enforcing a divide between the north and the south, the Brisbane River is spanned by many bridges that link our communities, our suburbs and our neighbourhoods. So when the river broke its banks on Tuesday, 11 January it seemed that our beautiful, trusted, languid river had turned on us. The floods destroyed homes. They inundated businesses, smashed public infrastructure and washed away memories. They broke hearts, destroyed lives and almost—almost—broke our spirit. I will return to that notion at the end of my speech. Affected families sheltered with friends and family or in evacuation centres. I am proud to say that all of my flood evacuation centres were in Building the Education Revolution

funded halls at Yeronga State School and St Aidan's Anglican Girls School in Corinda—even a lot of the community meetings such as at the Oxley State School were in their new BER halls. Some of these halls have not even been opened.

When the floodwaters finally began to recede, residents were left with the heartbreak of returning to their homes and businesses and steeling themselves to begin the clean-up. What they found is almost impossible to describe unless you have been there. There was one foot of sludge throughout their homes—sludge that was an olfactory assault. It is as high as a dingo's howl. The walls are in tatters. Mud is everywhere and has to be cleaned out of the crevices. Appliances and furniture are destroyed and floated down the river. Photographs and memories washed away. In my electorate of Moreton at least 5,200 properties were impacted: 4,200 homes and about 1,000 businesses. Some of those, unfortunately, were very big employers. In Rocklea the Brisbane Markets alone employs about 3,000 people and has connections to growers and producers all around Australia. My suburbs of Chelmer, Graceville, Sherwood, Corinda, Tennyson, Oxley, Yeronga, Rocklea, Fairfield, Moorooka, Coopers Plains, Yeerongpilly, Acacia Ridge and Archerfield were all hit hard. Some were hit incredibly hard with up to four metres of water through some houses.

I saw some of my constituents salvage what they could, but many lost everything. And I mean everything. They are people like Maureen Machin of Rocklea. Maureen spent a week at the QEII stadium evacuation centre in Nathan in my electorate after floodwaters engulfed her home. She fled the rapidly-rising waters with only the shirt on her back as her home was completely submerged. Thankfully, Maureen received the disaster relief payment from the government to help her begin to get back on her feet. She used

that emergency payment to buy medication for her sick dog, to buy some food and some clothes, to top up her mobile phone and to put some fuel in the car. As Maureen says, 'Your needs become very basic when you've lost everything.' Some of my constituents are uninsured. Others are at the mercy of the insurers, waiting on assessments and praying for a favourable return on their policy. That is a cruel tension that you would not wish on your worst enemy. Most people are anxious to rebuild, to recover and to return to some sense of normality.

When a Queenslander is down there is always another Queenslander who will bend down to pick them up. Other Australians and even people from all around the world did the same thing. They put their hands in their pockets to help us, and I thank them for it. Australians did it previously after Cyclone Larry and the Victorian fires, and we are sticking together now to help our neighbours back on their feet following this disaster.

In another life when I was a history teacher, there was a grade 8 textbook that I used that had the following quote attributed to Socrates by Plato:

Our youths love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority—they show disrespect for their elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when their elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up food, and tyrannize teachers.

When I first started utilising that quote I was a 20-year-old teacher. I thought I was young and hip and would always laugh about that quote and say, 'Isn't it amazing how old people always complain about young people?' Now I am slipping into grumpy old man status and I well hear some of those comments at my RSLs—'Oh, the young people of today'—and at the Lions and Rotary clubs. They are saying young people are

not joining the service clubs and are not good members of the community. They say they are sitting at home playing Xbox and doing all those things that generations X and Y do. But come the floods, didn't they prove us wrong. They were magnificent. They turned out in incredible numbers. Thank goodness for those social networks like Facebook and Twitter, because they got the message out quicker than any politician ever could have. I reckon generations X and Y turned out in numbers two-to-one in my electorate to clean up the houses of strangers. It is unfortunate that it took something like a flood to prove to me that with our next generation we are in a good pair of hands, because they were fantastic.

There were also other volunteers who turned out and were not so young. I want to acknowledge the hard work of all of the volunteers, particularly the emergency service personnel and SES volunteers. I would especially like to thank the Queensland Police Service, which also did great work in my electorate. I particularly thank Commissioner Bob Atkinson for his inspirational leadership and calmness throughout a very stressful time.

There are many special, courageous people who put their own lives at risk to rescue people caught in floodwaters and helped evacuate stranded communities. I particularly commend the Queensland government's response, led by the Premier, Anna Bligh—her electorate is in mine—and the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services, Neil Roberts. The Queensland government ensured that we knew what was coming and how to prepare. They coordinated evacuation centres and ensured essential services were returned as quickly as possible. Premier Bligh showed why she was elected Queensland's first female Premier and ensured that everything possible was being done to keep Queenslanders safe. I

also thank the Lord Mayor, Campbell Newman, and my local councillors and state MPs, especially the 'King of Oxley', Councillor Milton Dick.

Now we face the incredible task of rebuilding. It will be a long and bumpy road ahead—and a little bit of a smelly road because there is still a lot of mud around in parts of my electorate. The federal government will make available \$5.6 billion to help fund this incredible task. It will take years, but we will rebuild.

I know that Mr Speaker Jenkins paraphrased a Chumbawamba song at the start of this parliament with the line, 'We get knocked down but we'll get up again.' And Premier Bligh used the same line. I think that song is from the nineties and, as I stopped listening to new music in the eighties, I am going to quote from a different song. I am particularly going to quote the song on behalf of someone called Ethel Henders, who lives near the end of my street. The water did not affect my house, but at the end of my street is John Bright Street in Moorooka. I went to inspect Ethel Henders's house. She is 74 years old and the Oxley Creek went through her place in 1974. The difference was that in 1974 the water came down the creek into her home through her backdoor; this time it came through her front door because it was the Brisbane River basically flowing uphill into her house. Ethel's home was stripped bare; everything was gone. Ethel, at 74, is not as young as she once was. She does not have young kids, an insurance policy and the enthusiasm to rebuild, which takes that incredible Queensland spirit that we have talked about. This song is for people like Ethel and many others that may be finding it a bit tough to get up each day. For all the Ethel Henders out there I chose this song, which is from 1986, by Peter Gabriel and I think Kate Bush did the haunting backup

vocals. The song is called *Don't Give Up* and my particular quote for Ethel is:

Don't give up
 'cos you have friends
 Don't give up
 You're not beaten yet
 Don't give up
 I know you can make it good

 Rest your head
 You worry too much
 It's going to be alright
 When times get rough
 You can fall back on us
 Don't give up
 Please don't give up—

For Ethel and all the people who have had the flood damage to their homes, stay strong.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (10.25 am)—
 I support the remarks made by the member for Moreton and many others who have spoken on this condolence motion for the victims of natural disasters. Today is a time to reflect on the great destruction and loss caused to families, businesses and community groups within my electorate of Brisbane by the recent floods. I highlight the resilience and the goodwill displayed by the community during the crisis which brought that strength and that hope to so many people who were affected. A deep sense of sadness overcomes me and many Australians for the tragic loss of 23 lives. For their families, the loss cannot be measured in any words and that pain will be felt for many years to come.

On Tuesday, 11 January that water knew no boundaries and it inundated homes, schools, retail shops, restaurants, printing businesses and car repair shops alike. The hardest hit areas in my electorate included Albion, Bowen Hills, the CBD, Fortitude Valley, Milton, New Farm, Newstead, Rosa-

lie and Tenerife, all of them wonderful areas through which the magnificent Brisbane River meanders. The river, which is enjoyed by many, decided to be an angry river on that particular day.

I have visited many businesses and homes in the affected areas to assist and talk to people whose lives were absolutely shattered and devastated by these floods. Many families—and the member for Moreton spoke of a case in his electorate—will probably never rebuild and some businesses will not reopen. My heart goes out to all of those members of our community during their time of need. In many cases, though, no help can be offered for a building which now needs to be demolished. But I found just showing up and talking to people was somehow a much appreciated gift and a very small gift that I could provide. The deeds that I witnessed and the stories that I heard as I walked around the electorate have embodied the true meaning of that wonderful community spirit, and I am really honoured to have had the privilege to work alongside my constituents as we re-establish a normal life.

Before the flood peaked, strangers helped strangers to move precious belongings to higher ground and to sandbag buildings. Within my electorate, Riverside Industrial Sands at Newstead opened up their doors and donated all of their sand, allowing residents to fill up their bags and to protect their property. I was there with my husband assisting many of the residents in that particular area and I was overcome by the number of elderly people trying to fill sandbags. I think an area that we need to look at in future when we plan for these events is flood assistance before the event. I commend them for their wonderful generosity. Strangers volunteered to do the backbreaking work of filling those sandbags for many of the residents. An Italian mother living in Albion noticed local businesses that were sandbagging and de-

cidated to deliver trays and trays of lasagne and salad to help complete strangers who could do with a break and some food. I have to tell you there were no strings attached to these acts. The woman announced, as she entered this magnificent wine wholesaler with the wonderful fragrant offering as I was visiting, that she did not even drink wine. There were incredible acts like that.

During the crisis, I volunteered at the evacuation centre at the RNA Showgrounds, serving food to those who were seeking refuge and assisting in the coordination of storeroom deliveries. I have to say that the generous nature of Brisbane businesses involved in the food business just overwhelmed me. We were running out of room in coldrooms to put milk, meat and dairy products, and it just kept coming. The flood did not discriminate within the centre, and it was filled with young families, couples—including older couples—and many students, particularly Chinese students who were studying in Brisbane; it was good to see the consul general of China, Mr Ren Gongping, at the centre offering assistance to many of the Chinese students who found themselves stranded in our great city. There were a number of visitors, and they were evacuated at the centre as well as Australians seeking shelter from the oncoming water. I want to pay tribute to the Salvation Army; to the RNA for generously providing those wonderful air-conditioned facilities; to the Red Cross; to Micah; to Lifeline; and to all of the agencies that helped in the evacuation centres.

Once the water receded, thousands of people rolled onto the streets to sweep away mud, to clean up rubbish and to dump rubbish in trucks. They were affectionately called in Brisbane the 'mud army'. They worked in mateship, side by side. They were complete strangers; they were celebrities; they were young—the member for Moreton

mentioned the young particularly, and I also want to commend how many young people I saw out there—and also they were old. They cleaned houses in Brunswick Street; they cleaned houses in Welsby Street. They helped businesses in Rosalie; they helped businesses in Milton. Whole groups of businesses decided to deploy their staff to many suburbs, and I really want to thank the business community of Brisbane for lending a hand in those particular areas. People came from as far away as New South Wales. They loaded up their utes with tools, they drove into unknown affected streets and they simply asked if they could help.

The day after the water receded I found the ruin that lay before me in Rosalie absolutely gut wrenching and heart wrenching. As I felt the tears come down my cheek, I thought to myself, 'I'm here to comfort others, and it looks like they're going to have to comfort me.' But as I came to the first house and put on a stoic act, there was a man who was assessing the damage to his house and was sweeping the front area of his driveway. I think he saw me wiping my tears at my point, and he said: 'Look, love. You're here; that's all that counts.' I must say it heartened and strengthened me. At Rosalie, where street after street was inundated, I came across members of the Brisbane Broncos and other sporting teams helping residents clean up and using that almighty muscle power to help the community and also support that community that supports them throughout the year. So I wish to thank them enormously.

My family was not immune to the tragedy, with the street where my family home is located flooding. Although we were lucky that the water flooded only the property and did not reach the house, we have neighbours who were not so lucky. There was devastation in the CBD. There were whole sections of buildings damaged—Riverside Centre;

Riparian Plaza. At the Stamford Plaza Brisbane Hotel in Edward Street, staff could not get into the hotel for 10 days because of the floodwaters, and I think they probably will have to rethink where they place their administration and central services in the future. In places like Eagle Street Pier, it was absolutely devastating to see a well-known seafood restaurant, Jellyfish, that had refitted at a cost of \$2½ million now having to look at another refit of the same amount. I also talked to many restaurateurs, such as at Il Centro, who were affected by the floods.

I visited the Rocklea markets on the invitation of many of my constituents who are wholesalers there and who have wholesale sections. The losses there are estimated at \$250 million, and it was heartbreaking. Many of those wholesalers are families, and the losses there cannot be measured. They will have significant work to rebuild the Rocklea markets. There is reduced capacity at the moment, utilising generators. They have limited coldroom capability, but they are back in business and their produce is starting to fill our shelves. I hope that we will continue to use local produce and not rely on imported goods. I am encouraging all residents and all Australians to buy local produce and to support local farmers and also to support some of those local businesses that have been devastated by the floods. We all need to buy local to build on that recovery process.

I am also saddened to see that Australia Post has announced that the Milton outlet, which was damaged by the flood, will not be reopened and that services will be moved. Following the closure of the Ashgrove outlet, this is a very disappointing cut to the community's essential services. I have written to Minister Conroy. I think the decision is short-sighted, and I will continue to work with Australia Post and the minister to find a solution. But, sadly, as yet we have had no

response from the minister's office. I will continue to fight for those local residents in Milton who have already been devastated by the flood. This is a double whammy, and it will cause severe financial and time imposts on many constituents and many businesses.

I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the calls of support that I received from members opposite over the past few weeks. I want to thank Minister Tanya Plibersek for her calls. I want to also thank Minister Bill Shorten. During our discussions I suggested to Minister Plibersek that she locate, particularly, the community outreach in shopping centres, strip shopping centres and evacuation centres; I said that that would greatly assist my community of Brisbane. I am pleased to see that she did that; she took my advice and provided that great service to residents and small business to access support.

During this time also Queensland Premier Anna Bligh, the state emergency services, the police and the volunteer services must be commended for the information, the rescues, the evacuations, the support and the care that they provided for all residents in South-East Queensland. I also want to place on the record today my special thanks to Mike Swanson from ENERGEX. Mike, your constant phone calls and my constant phone calls to you helped me enormously, particularly the power updates, so that I could service my community and the needs of my constituents.

Special mention must also be given to the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Campbell Newman, for the strong leadership of the city that he displayed during the crisis. The SMS alert system implemented by Campbell Newman, along with the coordination of relief workers and volunteers, helped get our great city back in business really quickly. I want to also acknowledge the wonderful help that was given to me by Councillor David McLach-

lan, Councillor Peter Matic and Councillor Geraldine Knapp.

I wish to thank the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, for his visits during this terrible time. He visited me on two occasions, he met with business owners at Rosalie and other areas and he also came to the evacuation centre. I thank him for his leadership and I thank him for his compassion. His visit comforted so many people in the Brisbane electorate.

The events of recent weeks have stressed that we do live in a country of very volatile conditions which span drought, bushfire, flood and cyclone. The federal government really needs to look at permanent vision and solutions. While there was a great effort after the flood, I think that we can do more in future to prepare. I think that much of the energy of volunteers can be used in the preparation before a flood. These are some ideas that I will put to my party in the days ahead.

Furthermore, there is absolutely no excuse for insurance companies, who now have access to updated flood maps which will have accurate flood lines, not to provide the correct information and the proper cover to their customers buying insurance. Reports recently that insurance companies have not made payments to policyholders while they investigate how the water flooded the property are absolutely criminal when you hear of the suffering that people are going through. I met with Suncorp Insurance representatives this week, following the floods, and they confirmed to me that they had already made claim payments and that all policy fees were calculated on risk. We discussed many of those risk factors. There is absolutely no excuse for other companies not to have flood cover and not to provide surety for their customers.

Our community was devastated by a flood only a few short weeks ago. Yet, by the sheer

determination of friends, neighbours, family and strangers, we started the long journey to rebuild our homes, our businesses and our community. I was humbled and strengthened by their many acts of kindness and, at this time more than any other, I am absolutely proud to represent the people of Brisbane in this House.

Mr CREAN (Hotham—Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts) (10.39 am)—I also rise in this debate to support the condolence motion that is before us, and to offer my sincere condolences to those families who are grieving the loss of loved ones in the floods and natural disasters which have beset this country.

Over the summer, Australia experienced the biggest natural disaster in our history. It has claimed the lives of 35 people since 30 November and nine people are still missing in Queensland. I associate myself with the heartfelt, emotional and passionate response from the Prime Minister yesterday in this House in relation to that loss of lives and the circumstances that she related.

The loss, of course, does not just stop with the loss of lives. There has been huge loss of property, and in the loss of property is the loss of a big part of people's lives. There has also been loss of stock, of crops and of businesses. In my role as minister for regional Australia, I have seen up close the enormity of the damage that this disaster has wreaked upon the nation. I have also been struck by the remarkable resilience that is out there in these communities. I have seen the strength of the Australian character and the great qualities of mateship and of pulling together. I have seen the great work of the Army, the police and the coordination—particularly in Queensland—by them. I have seen the work of the emergency services. What has also struck me is that whilst we mourn the loss of

lives we also have to pay great tribute to the many lives saved by the efficiency, the professionalism, the dedication and the bravery under very adverse circumstances of those who are our emergency service workers, our defence forces and our police.

I also pay tribute to the people from the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, Lifeline, St John's Ambulance and all of the church groups who were responsible for running the evacuation centres and for identifying, registering and servicing the people who used them. I had the opportunity to visit them both in Brisbane and in Ipswich at the height of their occupancy and saw the fantastic work that was being done, the accolades from the people who were in them and the great professionalism and stoicism that those who worked in there showed. They are a wonderful group of people, and another dimension of the great coming together of the nation.

I also want to congratulate the thousands of volunteers that turned up for the clean-ups. I was in Brisbane on the day in which the first call for volunteers occurred. To see them lined up at the bus stops heading out with their buckets, shovels and brooms was, again, another demonstration. All of it has shown Australia at its best—working together and determining not to let adversity get the better of us.

I think that the motion that is before the House recognises the loss and it recognises that courage. But the other dimension that it recognises is the determination that we must commit to help rebuild—to rebuild the shattered communities, to rebuild shattered towns and ultimately to rebuild shattered lives. I think we all accept that this is going to take time, but I think we have to commit to reinforcing that same sense of cohesion, of working together and of pulling together. We need to see the same sense of cohesion that was there in the emergency, in the evacuation

and in the clean-up reflected in the commitment to rebuild.

The effects of the floods have been felt in every state in Australia over the past three months. Obviously, Queensland has borne the brunt of it. Until last weekend it was said that 75 per cent of Queensland had been affected by the floods, but after Cyclone Yasi I think another 25 per cent of the state was hit. This is a massive impact on Queensland. But there has also been significant flooding in northern New South Wales and Victoria—it was the second time around for Victoria—particularly off the tail of Cyclone Yasi. There has been an impact in Tasmania and South Australia. And the great irony is that Western Australia, which still has not recovered from the drought and is experiencing bushfires at the moment, was not spared from the floods. I happened to be in the Gascoyne midwest region a day before the cyclone hit Carnarvon.

I have visited regions in most of the states that have been affected. I have gone to the towns of Gatton, Emerald, Bundaberg, Grafton, Maryborough, Cairns, Kerang and Wycheproof. I have inspected the damage. I have convened meetings of the mayors of those towns and I have also invited the surrounding towns because much of the impacted infrastructure connects the regions. In the context of trying to bring a sense of a strategic approach to it I have convened a meeting of the mayors and I have invited the regional development bodies from the regions to be there with us to understand the issues, to establish the connections and to identify the framework for building the input to the massive task of rebuilding.

I have also in all of those visits involved the local member where appropriate. I see that the member for Hinkler is in the House, and he was at one such meeting. I reiterate the words that I think the Leader of the Op-

position said yesterday about the great work that local members have put into their communities and being with them. You yourself Mr Deputy Speaker were mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition yesterday. This is where we have to demonstrate our commitment to cohesion, putting politics aside and saying that together we are going to be there as part of the rebuild. I thank the members for that and I look forward to working with them and with the mayors. I have kept in touch not only with the mayors I have visited but also by phone with the mayors I have not yet been able to visit. I thanked them for their information about where things are at and I invited them to let me know if they need assistance in cutting through any of the red tape. More importantly, I said that we need honest assessments about the level of damage and we need their input to the process of the strategic rebuild.

Interestingly enough I visited the Lockyer Valley on 5 January and had a meeting with the mayors there. The member for Wright was with us, as was Shayne Neumann from our side of politics. The important thing that struck me then was the damage that had been done up until 5 January. Here was a community that was starting to get back on its feet and talking about what needed to be done, and then in the following week the deluge hit. It impacted on Toowoomba and it caused the most devastating damage of the lot in one single incident at Grantham, a valley that was hit again.

Last Friday I met with the mayors of Kerang, Swan Hill and Wycheproof and seven other mayors from the surrounding shires. The interesting thing about all of these Victorian towns is that they are now experiencing massive flooding after enduring 10 years of drought that had a huge impact upon them. The interesting thing in the discussion there was that even the farmers who have lost so much could see a positive in the flooding

that had occurred. They spoke about how they are proposing to rebuild and they are looking to cooperate with us and they are, of course, seeking government assistance. They spoke of how the aquifers have been recharged and how they plan to build better and develop more productive farms.

Like so many others in this House who have visited, spoken and connected I believe we need to ensure that there is a commitment from this parliament to rebuild. Under the natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements, which are a partnership between the Commonwealth and the states, there is a requirement for the states to identify the extent of the disaster and notify accordingly, and then the formulas that have been negotiated in the past kick in. Under those arrangements we have seen immediate relief given. Hardship grants are available to individuals and families for their most basic needs. There are payments for homes that have been damaged or destroyed. There are grants to help small businesses and farmers to clean up. There are concessional interest loans to small businesses and farmers to help them get through the difficult times ahead.

It was interesting for me to reflect on this historically. It was my late father who as the then Treasurer in the 1970s negotiated one of the first cost-sharing arrangements with the states for dealing with disasters—and that underpinned the dollar for dollar for dollar formula—and when I was Minister For Primary Industries I negotiated, as part of the national drought policy at the time, a national policy for natural disasters. Indeed, it was that agreement that established the formulas and the conditions that underpin the current arrangements that were carried on by subsequent governments.

I also reflected on the fact that in the Hawke-Keating government we also had a flood mitigation policy program. Again, it

was a shared arrangement, something that the Commonwealth had tended to stay away from, because it had taken the view, rightly, that planning was an issue for states and local governments. That it is, but it was also the case that if the argument had been that we should require them alone to pay not much would have happened. Many levees were built as a result of that program—levees in New South Wales, in particular. I particularly remember campaigning for the one in Lismore, a campaign we kept persisting with when we lost office in 1996. But when I was in Grafton, where there had been repair and improvement to the levee system after its last flood, I saw that this effectively saved the town. It copped massive flooding, but it saved the town.

It is important for us to understand, in the rebuilding exercise, the importance of looking again at these policy solutions and the way in which we commit the resources, because there is not much point—and this was reinforced in many of the discussions that I had—in simply replacing essential infrastructure if it is going to be vulnerable again. Before we get to the concept of betterment, I say we do need a strategic approach out of these calamities. I think that each state must prepare a flood recovery work plan that identifies the specific projects and their priority projects. It is important for that to happen. It must involve value for money. They must be projects that stack up. There is also a fundamental realisation that this rebuild is going to take time. It cannot be done overnight. There are going to be capacity constraints, quite apart from the fact that it is going to take some time to assess the damage. Even if you wanted to get into some of these places, the ground is so sodden that you cannot get works in there.

I remember, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, when you came to me before all of these floods with a delegation of members. You

talked about the rains that had restricted the capacity of roads within your constituencies to get through. That problem has been worsened, but you know the problem better than most. Even if you had the will and the resources, physically it is simply not possible to do it overnight. So it does have to involve value for money. The commitment to recognise the time is also an issue that is accepted by the mayors with whom I have been speaking. It is also the case that to solve this issue and to get the strategy right it has to involve local input. The local input needs to be strategic across local government borders. The argument that it is their patch alone has gone out the door, from the discussions I have had. The fact that there have been groupings of mayors come together to talk about the things that are common to them—those things that have crossed the borders—is a great thing in itself, but it is a real opportunity to start breaking down some of these barriers, because they are only artificial; they are not the reality on the ground.

In that context, as I said earlier at these meetings to the RDAs, the regional development bodies, for the relevant areas—whose task it is to develop something of the strategic vision—the opportunity is there to do it. I want the local governments through the RDAs to give greater thought to how we adapt and prioritise commitments—not just to make the claim under the NDRRA payments but to see how it can be enhanced, to look at it creatively and differently, by focusing on the reprioritisation of other programs. It is a partnership that needs to involve all levels of government, but it also has to involve the private and the not-for-profit sectors.

The insurance sector is also important, and I too pay tribute to the work of the Assistant Treasurer, Bill Shorten, in his constant discussions with the insurers. The insurance industry needs to understand, assess and fac-

tor in the enormous contribution that is being made by the Army and the volunteers in the clean-up effort. This has been a significant support for work that insurers might otherwise have had to expend upon and they do need to factor that in when they contribute to the clean-up. The role of the insurers goes even further. They need to work with us in identifying appropriate flood mitigation works to influence future planning and building codes.

The issue that I mentioned before has struck me most in my discussions—the importance of flood mitigation and flood-proofing. Again, I pose the question: what is the point of replacing vital infrastructure if it remains vulnerable? This is where the principle of betterment under the NDRRA needs to be carefully considered. A great example of a creative response to a previous flood is the opening of a new bridge at Einasleigh in the savannah country of Far North Queensland, a bridge that I opened on 20 January in the wet season. I think they said I am the only minister that has ever visited the gulf and savannah country in the wet season. I was there with the mayor, Warren Devlin, and many of the mayors from surrounding areas because it connected six shires. I was there with the member for Kennedy. It was an example of a flood-proofing response to a flood that occurred in 2009. They went beyond the NDRRA payments and looked to the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program, RLCIP. We found a creative way to build a flood-proof bridge. Interestingly, when we were there to open it, the floodwaters were over the previous bridge. In other words, in another circumstance, the crossing would have been cut.

We have found a creative way towards betterment through existing programs, and that is the challenge that I have been putting out to local government and the RDAs: ‘Be creative in the ways in which you address

this problem. Don't just mail the claim under the NDRRA and look to Commonwealth programs; look to state programs, look to forward programs in local government. Let's see if we can't get a better approach.' That lesson of the Einasleigh bridge, in my view, needs to be applied to the rebuild. There are other Commonwealth programs, there are other state programs and there are local government opportunities in terms of their forward commitments. That is an issue that creative thinking needs to be going into. In relation to betterment, we should be looking at this concept from the point of view of not only replacing government infrastructure but also how to encourage the private sector, small business and primary producers to embrace better flood mitigation practices. That is how we build more resilient, self-reliant communities in the future. That is the legacy we should be aiming for out of this tragedy.

I think there is another lesson out of this, and that is the need for better warning systems, the need to keep improving the warning systems. It has been shown that, where adequate warnings were given, the loss of life was either nonexistent or negligible. The big tragedy in Grantham and in Toowoomba was very costly in terms of lives, and essentially they had very little warning. In fact, when we were up in, I think, Bundaberg—the member for Hinkler nods—the advice that was given was not timely enough. They have accepted the flooding of the river in the past and been able to deal with it in a number of hours. Not getting that warning quickly enough was a significant factor in the loss. With the technology these days, it must be possible to localise the information better, to get on websites information that better identifies the pace of the rise of rivers and other information. As a nation we need to look at more effective ways to identify and disseminate that information. It is also the case that some of the areas were very effective in their

evacuation and their contact of people in potential danger. We need to draw on those lessons and develop best-practice methods. We have to develop a national approach that educates on warning and evacuation techniques.

Today our purpose is very clear. We as a parliament reflect very sadly on the huge loss of life. We extend our sympathy to the victims, obviously, and their families. We must, as a legacy to them if nothing else, rise to the task of the rebuild. We owe them. And we owe it to all the people who have contributed in such a cohesive way to demonstrate that same cohesion as a national parliament, to rebuild the smashed communities and shattered lives. This House will have the opportunity in legislation coming before it later this week to have that tested very early. I hope it rises to the occasion. I look forward to working with many of the honourable members in this chamber whose communities who have been affected and playing a part in their rebuild and their futures.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (11.04 am)—I am happy to associate myself with the motion of the Prime Minister yesterday. I think, as it affected her, this issue affected all who have been in this parliament, especially those of us who have been on the ground in the flood, cyclone or fire areas. The people of Bundaberg have lived through something which has not been seen there for 69 years. Back in 1942 the Burnett River broke its banks. This time it did the same and it reached 7.95 metres, flooding homes, farms and businesses around Bundaberg.

The signs were there all along that Bundaberg and its outlying communities would be hit by the rising floodwaters, but in the lead-up to Christmas and the festive season it seemed that most people were unaware of the crisis that was about to hit them. Heavy rainfall in the catchment area in the weeks

leading up to Christmas pushed the Paradise Dam to full capacity. The rain kept coming, and, after the cyclone event crossed the Queensland coast on Christmas morning, it became clear as the rain depression developed that there was going to be heavy rainfall in the catchment of the Burnett River.

By December 27, communities west and south of Bundaberg were bracing for flooding, and the next day floodwaters infiltrated Bundaberg's near CBD areas. People were rescued from vehicles in the CBD area and we were warned to expect fast-rising waters and major flooding in the town area. When the Burnett peaked at 7.95 metres on December 29, around 200 homes and 120 businesses had been inundated and around 400 people had been evacuated—some of whom did not have a chance to rescue valuables or sentimental items.

Marine businesses on the banks of the river were swallowed up whole by the waters, houses were flooded so that only their roofs were visible and businesses and low-lying areas of the city were awash. Around the nation people watched as the 'rum city' succumbed to the river. Like local residents they were stunned that such insidious events could befall the city in such a short time. Bundaberg Regional Council and our local emergency services excelled themselves in warning residents, organising evacuations and preparing flood prone areas for the deluge. The respite centres that they set up and the marking of roadways to be closed was done very efficiently and expertly. But even the best laid plans can never outmanoeuvre a mass of water determined to reach the sea.

I would like to pay tribute to the district disaster management group led by Superintendent Rowan Bond and the local disaster management group led by David Batt. Our mayor was on holidays in London and was having trouble getting home, and David, who

is a councillor and a policeman, deputised for her and did a marvellous job. I also acknowledge the district management officer, Mal Churchill, an ex police inspector; the council's executive officer on the committee, John Clerke; the Red Cross; the CWA; and church welfare agencies. They certainly did a remarkable job.

On that point, the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts, who just finished his speech, made an interesting point about flood mitigation. Four or five years ago the then Bundaberg City Council, the precursor to the current regional council, sent out a flood report to every citizen in a low-lying area of the city. Let me say it was not popular. It was not popular with a lot of people. It was seen by some to be alarmist and others saw it as perhaps devaluing their properties. But let me tell you that the people who got those letters knew the truth of it when this flood descended, and a number of people in flood areas said to me how better prepared they were as a result of what the council did four or five years ago.

As the floodwaters slowly dropped over the following days, the astounding cost to the community was revealed. Commercial fishing businesses, seafood processors, Bundaberg slipways and marina facilities were destroyed by the rushing waters and masses of debris that were washed downstream. The city's premier netball and cricket grounds were devastated, a state-of-the-art disability playground was inundated and businesses and low-lying parts of the CBD had metres of water through their premises. Only days later—this was another irony—the river peaked again. The catchment of the Burnett River goes north and south, and the southern branch of that, called Barambah Creek, which comes from the peanut-growing area of South Burnett, also had a mass of water which came down the Burnett. So we had a

second peak, not quite as bad as the first, but still enough to inundate a number of those homes and businesses again.

There could be few things more dispiriting than helplessly watching your pride and joy go under water and knowing that it could happen again and again. It is a test of endurance and faith. It takes a special sort of resilience to come back and recover treasured memories and other hard-earned assets. Other parts of my electorate were also hit hard—roads cut and crops ruined. I went out with the minister and the state roads minister and looked at some of the roads. Some of the washouts would absolutely terrify you. Some of them were the width of the road, 10 or 12 feet across, and burrowed out down to perhaps another 10 feet deep. There were washouts of about three by four metres, which would be in the order of hundreds of thousands of dollars to repair.

The financial aspects of the flood were simply devastating to our local economy with cane, horticulture, fishing and tourism industries all affected. Having spoken about those dreadful things, let me say something about the spirit of resilience that we saw in my electorate, similar to that in Brisbane where people just turned up and helped. Steve Cooper, who owns the home hardware store in Bundaberg, tells this great story. He went under. He lost \$1.6 million worth of stock, as I understand it, and the flood went right through his place to at least two metres. He told me that 75 people came to help. Some were friends; some were passers-by. I said, 'How did you know there were 75?' He said, 'Well, I got the Lions Club to come down and do a barbeque for them and they served 75 meals.' So that gives you an idea of the generosity of some people.

In dollar terms, it looks like Bundaberg's cane industry has lost around 2,000 hectares, worth about \$30 million. In the Isis—that is

the Childers area—it will be about \$11 million. That is \$41 million worth of cane from the district. At least \$10 million has been stripped from the region's horticulture sector—tomatoes, capsicum, zucchini, rockmelon, watermelon, pumpkin and sweet potatoes all damaged or destroyed.

One of the worst things about the flood is that, although cane on the undulating ground sometimes gets away with it, when you are on a river flat and the water is over your crop for a number of days, the crop rots. I know one case where two-thirds of a tomato crop went and I know that a lot of the cane that has survived will not have the same sugar content when we finally get it to the crush later in the year. The prolonged wet also means that replanting on some of these crops cannot be undertaken until you can get into the field.

On another note, the port of Bundaberg is very important for the export of sugar and molasses. So much silt was carried down the river that it closed the port. It is going to take six or seven weeks, when the dredges eventually get there, to get that port back to order. That means that all that sugar in those huge sugar sheds cannot be exported. That becomes another anxiety for farmers who are tied up with forward payments.

Four seafood processors were badly damaged. People in the river cannot get flood insurance. They can get through when there is a fresh in the river or a minor flood but when there is one of these one-in-75-year floods or one-in-100-year floods they are just devastated. I would like to talk about that shortly. The local marina was totally washed away, including the fuel facility for most of the trawlers on the east coast of Australia. That means that there will be quite a problem restoring the fishing industry in the area.

In all of these things, of course, the human dimension is the most important. We all have

in our minds that image of Jordan Rice telling rescuers to take his little brother first. We have other images in our minds, especially of people being swept away in Grantham. Some of the devastation in Toowoomba, Grantham and, more recently as a result of the cyclones, in Cardwell and Tully would make your stomach churn. Whole streets were devastated. Houses were washed off their blocks. In some instances even modern houses were washed off their concrete foundations. I have never seen the like of it.

Those things are certainly important and we should focus on them but now I am going to become critical. I am not going to be critical in any partisan sense, although I suppose some things, in the end, sheet back to the state and federal governments. There are river industries like the fish processing works that service the trawlers that come in. In particular, ASP Holdings lost its big catwalk that goes down onto the river—\$200,000 or \$300,000 worth. Its fuel facility went under 1½ or two metres of water. That cannot be restored by a grant of \$25,000 or even a loan of \$250,000. If you have trawlers and pleasure craft you need a slipway. The slipway went under three times in that flooding incident. As I just said, the marina owned by Ray Foley was totally obliterated and the fuel facility—one of the busiest on the east coast of Australia for servicing trawlers—was washed downstream. When you take those types of industries together you see that the whole marine and fishing industries become vulnerable. That involves 120 full-time jobs and during the scallop season up to 275 women come in and work three, four or five hours a day shucking scallops. That is a supplement to their incomes.

I am saying to the government that what we have on offer is not enough. Those industries should be given a grant of about \$100,000 and ready access to the \$250,000 grants. In fact, those grants are not as good

as the ones available after Cyclone Larry. In Cyclone Larry the limit was half a million dollars and you could get a grant equivalent to 25 per cent of your loan, to a maximum of \$50,000. So when we say that we will do everything possible within our means to help and we do not do quite as much as we did after Cyclone Larry, only five years ago, then people become cynical.

As I said, the crops are sodden, waterlogged. I believe—and the minister alluded to this in his speech—that we should have replanting grants, with perhaps one-third coming from the state, one-third from the federal government and one-third from the grower, to get crops back in, be they cane crops, small crops or tree crops. The trouble with tree crops is that once their feet have been wet for a while—especially citrus, avocados, lychees and those sorts of things—you can lose part of your orchard very readily. In the case of citrus trees, if mud gets on the leaves the trees cannot breathe. The leaves die and drop off and the trees die. So I think cropping grants are necessary.

In places like Innisfail in special circumstances and with the agreement of the growers and the unions, I think the equivalent of the dole payment should be paid to the farmers to keep their existing workforce in place, with the farmer topping up the dole to a full salary level. I understand this has been tried before. In that way you keep the skilled labour on the farms, you give the worker a full salary rather than just a dole payment and you keep the expertise in the area. If there are no jobs and there is nothing to hold people then they drift off. For some of these agricultural industries having skilled people is almost the most important thing.

Let me talk about roads. Again I want to be critical. I know the government has to find somewhere the \$5.6 billion for its program of restoration. Our position on the levy

is well known. I would like to talk about the \$1 billion worth of infrastructure. In Queensland, \$325 million of that \$1 billion worth of infrastructure is coming from roadworks and flood mitigation works—most of it along the Bruce Highway. For the life of me I cannot follow that, because the one systemic failure along the east coast flood area and cyclone area was the failure of the Bruce Highway. Yet we are taking \$325 million plus a bit of flood mitigation away from that area. I would have thought that it was almost critical—absolutely essential—that that stay there.

In the member for Flynn's electorate, close to my area, \$65 million worth of that would have gone to works just north of Gin Gin. I hear that the member of Herbert has similar difficulties. As I have said, I am not saying these things to be partisan; I am saying that I do not feel that they correspond with logic. If the Bruce Highway goes under again later in this cyclone season or next year, we are going to have this game over and over again.

I want to talk about QR—Queensland Rail. Fruit and vegetable wholesalers came to see me and said: 'Can you do something with QR? They will not give us trains to bring supplies up to Bundaberg and backload fruit and vegetables out.' As well as being one of the biggest salad bowls in Australia and growing all of those crops I described before, Bundaberg also brings other small crops in and distributes them to places like Biggenden, Gayndah, Mundubbera, Eidsvold, Monto, Biloela, right up to Rockhampton, through that North Burnett-Central Queensland area. It is a great distribution point for fruit and vegetables, and you have to get the stuff into town.

I usually do not interfere in state matters, but I did in this instance. I rang up QR. The attitude was, 'We prefer to service Bunda-

berg by truck.' It is fair enough for short-haul stuff that the railways use trucks rather than trains in normal operational circumstances. But I said: 'You say use trucks, but Gympie and Maryborough, south of Bundaberg, are both underwater. What trucks? No trucks are coming up and down the Bruce Highway.' 'Oh well, we might be able to do it,' they told the fruit and vegetable wholesalers, 'if you would guarantee us 40 wagons.' In an emergency, why would you put a limit of 40 wagons on it? Anyway, neither of those things occurred. They could have occurred but then the rail went under for a short time. It reopened later and they did send a dry goods train to Bundaberg, but believe it or not they could not find any refrigerated wagons to take fruit and vegetables, which was part of the need of the exercise.

That is simply not good enough. It is a state facility. It seems they could not break out of their normal mindset to do it. I said to one guy: 'How much worse has it got to get? There are people dying, there are roads closed, the Bruce Highway is not functioning. You've got the only train line into Bundaberg and you're not going to shift anything.' In fact, it got to the point where we had to have two RAAF Hercules bringing supplies into Bundaberg. The RAAF had to be used for a city of 55,000 people. I found that totally and utterly bewildering and I ask the state government and QR to have another look at this. Everyone else around Australia was responding to this great tragedy, and our local railway was still reading from the rule book. We have to be more flexible when these sorts of things happen.

Finally, I want to talk about flood mitigation. The Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, Simon Crean, has just spoken about this so I will not go over it all again, except to add one feature. In addition to those sorts of things like levies and adjustments to

drainage, which are very important and proved to be so in Bundaberg in this recent flood, we have not really come to terms with removing housing from flood prone areas. The same houses go under over and over again. Some of them have been going under for 130 years. I just throw this possibility on the table: with bipartisan support make available for 25 years \$25 million a year, or perhaps even \$50 million a year—say it is \$25 million a year for 25 years, that is \$625 million and if it is \$50 million a year over 25 years, it is about \$1.25 billion; not big money on a year-to-year basis—to give councils the ability to do things like go to a street and say: ‘Look, if you’re prepared to put your houses up on stilts, higher blocks, you can get a grant of \$50,000 or \$100,000 toward that process. Or we will buy you out and turn that area into parkland. We’ll buy it at a commercial rate so you can shift to another area.’ If we did that in all of those flood prone areas in places like Ipswich and Bundaberg and Maryborough and Rockhampton, sure we will not get to all of them, but at least over 25 years you would be making an impact. We will get other storms like this and other cyclones and floods and people will be put at risk again and we will go through the clean-up of houses again. Let us make a start and when we get to a good year where there is a surplus then we could always add a few more million to the cake.

I would like to end on a positive note and thank all of those people who have worked so generously. I thank the ministers and the shadow ministers who came to Bundaberg, the Prime Minister, the Premier, the Hon. Simon Crean, both the state and federal leaders of the opposition and the shadow minister for agriculture. All of these people came and offered valuable assistance. What we must ensure is that, having moved on from the hand-on-the-heart ‘we are going to help you’ stuff, we start to act in a timely fashion.

In my closing comments let me be a little bit critical again. Twelve months ago we had a flood circumstance in Queensland and a number of shires and councils were declared. Bundaberg Regional Council, for example, was in for \$13 million, with North Burnett \$600,000 or \$700,000. When this flood event hit 10½ months later none of those grants had been paid. We are still waiting for the flood payments from what is now close to 12 months ago—it was 10½ months ago when this flood circumstance hit. So it is important that we act in a timely fashion. If these councils are going to have to wait for another 12 months to get the net tranche of work, just imagine what the Bruce Highway and all of those other areas that have been flooded are going to be like. Already in parts of the Bruce Highway there are patches on top of patches. I am not exaggerating; that is not just some flippant comment. There is physically one lot of bitumen that has been laid to fix up a hole, breaking up with another lot of bitumen on top of that and sometimes a third lot on top of that. We have to rebuild these roads and rebuild them properly. I thank the House for its indulgence.

Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing and Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport) (11.30 am)—I commend the member for Hinkler and those other members who have contributed to this condolence motion to date and also those who are to do so after me. I think this debate certainly serves to demonstrate that politicians do not only exist in this place. We live in Bundaberg, we live in Ipswich, we live in Toowoomba and we live in Ballarat. These are our communities and they are directly affected by these terrible natural disasters that have occurred. These are our people who have been affected and these are our home towns. We feel very strongly about what has happened to them.

As the 2010 sitting year came to an end, I do not think any of us could have imagined the devastation that this country would face over the summer. In fact, people in the communities around Ballarat, which had been affected by floods in September, were actually looking forward to something of a better break through the holiday season to help them recover further. Many of them had just moved back into their homes, new carpet was laid, new kitchens were put in, the plaster was back up on the walls, and the gardens were restored, ready to celebrate Christmas after four months out of their homes.

Little did those people from places like Creswick and Clunes expect that by today—the day after the resumption of parliament for 2011—they would have experienced flooding not once more but in many cases twice more. Other areas like Skipton and Beaufort, just outside my electorate, were also seriously impacted by the summer floods. Areas including the city of Ballarat were also severely affected, as were suburbs such as Miners Rest, houses in Delacombe—again, the third time flooded in the course of four months—and the suburb of Alfredton.

Heartbreakingly, as I said, many of these families were flooded again over the weekend. Numerous houses and businesses were inundated, along with community facilities including two football and netball clubs, a senior citizens centre, a community swimming pool, bowling clubs, caravan parks, community halls and playgrounds.

Roads and other infrastructure have suffered severely. The shoulders of some sealed roads are frankly too dangerous now and the fast-flowing, high volume of water swept gravel from many of the unsealed surfaces. There is a great deal of scouring damage on sealed main roads and in and around culverts and bridges, including a number that will need to be entirely rebuilt. In many locations

it is a serious mess and a serious danger to be driving on these roads.

I do think it is important that, while I am reflecting on what happened in my own electorate and while we understand just how devastating floods are anywhere, most importantly in this condolence motion our thoughts do turn to Queensland. I know that the people in my electorate would absolutely want their heartfelt wishes to go to the Queensland communities, particularly those where lives have been lost. We cannot even imagine the circumstances that those families in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley are facing today and will face for many, many years to come. We certainly recognise that and I think it is very important in this condolence motion that all members do so. I think Queensland has suffered a very severe blow and in raising the issues in Victoria I do not want to distract from that at all. The tragic loss of life is deeply harrowing and our thoughts go out to their families.

We have all been challenged to ponder how cruel the extremes of this great nation can sometimes be. But, thankfully, we have also had the privilege to witness the formidable resilience of our communities and the great generosity of people who have assisted on the ground and given freely to appeals for funding.

I want to again thank those organisations, including the SES, the CFA, the Red Cross, St John Ambulance, Victoria Police, service clubs, council staff and ADF personnel, and the many other kind-hearted locals who just got stuck in and helped whether it was before the floods in filling sandbags or after the floods in helping people to clean their homes and their businesses. That community support, I know, will continue. I experienced that generosity during a collection on Australia Day for our local flood relief. It is a heartwarming and reassuring experience to hear

and see people wanting to share their experiences whether they be the people in Queensland or our own local community.

As a government and a nation we need to stand together to help flood affected communities rebuild their roads, their bridges, their rail lines and their public facilities. But most of all we need to help them rebuild their hearts. Many of the communities I represent are anxious each time it rains. They are angry and they want answers as to why the floods have occurred and what can be done to minimise the damage that has been done in those communities. There is a lot of work we need to do in those communities to achieve that. Whilst today is not the day to debate issues around how that gets paid for, I do think it is up to every one of us in this place to stand with our communities in the days, months and years ahead and to understand the great responsibility we bear both here in this place and as community leaders to make sure that the heart of these communities is rebuilt and that we do not damage them by the debate that ensues. Thank you.

Mr HAASE (Durack) (11.36 am)—I rise today with other members in this place to pay my condolences and respects to those who have been so adversely impacted by these recent natural disasters right across Australia. Nature plays a very cruel hand indeed and there is nothing we mere mortals can do about it except be prepared. The loss of life in Queensland is a tragedy that we cannot overlook and all Australians are sympathetic and care for those who have lost loved ones.

The natural disasters that we have encountered and the fires that have been attributed to human hand are an aspect of life in Australia that is always shocking. The more severe the event and the further back in history that a similar event has occurred, the more shocking and disturbing it is. But we know

full well that these tragedies have occurred in the past, and those that keep records and make a conversation as to the nature of those records will always be fascinated by the periods between events of a major nature and with disastrous outcomes. What we can do is be well prepared.

As I reflect on the response to these tragedies, I see that in Western Australia, for instance, we have the Fire and Emergency Services Authority, FESA, a government agency responsible for the training of volunteers, in the main, to cope with natural disasters of any nature. All I can say of their efforts and the efforts of equal bodies around Australia is that their performance has been extraordinary. The contribution made by ordinary Australians not part of those formalised voluntary groups has been exceptional. There is no doubt that when natural disaster strikes us in this wide brown land Australians come to the fore: they rally, they contribute and they make a difference. The difference they make is often dependent upon the nature and the veracity of the training and the skills learned in coping with natural disasters.

However, we must never forget that these are natural disasters. My recollection—not personal, I might add—is that 1851 was a very, very bad year in Queensland. This reminds us that we ought to reflect on history to guide us in our future actions. When we decide to create a settlement and select a location for our homestead, our farmhouse or our community, human nature is to go to water, in the most honourable sense of the phrase. We like to be, and historically we needed to be, near water. We had the house cow to keep on green feed for most of the year. We had our draught horses necessarily kept in good nick. We built our communities at the mouths of rivers to provide ports for sailing ships. We did all those very natural human things in the creation of communities, and we often looked to the immediate past

only when deciding where to make our abode, where to create our industries and where to make our investments.

We now know through experience over hundreds of years that many of these locations were absolutely unsatisfactory, due to the danger of flood in particular. Lifestyle today dictates to so many people that they move to the wooded hills of our various cities and they, much to their regret, find that those areas are very prone to wildfires. In the worst of our summers, with the worst of our wind conditions, those locations can become death traps. History shows that there have been too many such tragedies in our short history. Of course, I think at this moment of the tragedy of loss of homes in Kelmscott in Western Australia, where 72 homes now are recorded as being lost to fire. It is so sad to reflect that that fire was in fact created by human error, a human accident. I feel for that individual who now has on his conscience the fact that his actions caused so much devastation.

When it comes to flood, our own actions and our being part of a community drive us to build in those very dangerous locations, and governments might try all manner of things to mitigate the impact on human lives by directing where future reconstruction is carried out. The member for Hinkler has brought to the attention of the House his views on that matter. It would be a glorious endeavour to relocate all dwellings away from areas that were severely flood damaged on a regular basis, but if one reflects on the circumstances in Toowoomba, no-one there could have reasonably expected to have their livelihoods, their homes or their lives lost to flood. What an incredible event that was. Located as they were in high country, albeit a caldera, the last thing they would have expected to happen was to be inundated with rushing floodwaters.

We have a lesson to learn from all of this, I believe, and that is that nature is a very powerful force, and she deals a very savage hand on a regular basis. If it is not happening in Australia, it is happening somewhere around the globe that natural disaster takes livelihood, if not lives. We, as those responsible for decision making federally today, need to look to the future and envisage circumstances where we are better prepared and we have policies in place that assist those who most need it, as opposed to having policies that support those who in certain circumstances do not need it.

Government has an onerous responsibility to make sure that genuine, effective financial support is in place for those who need it. Administrators of the departments of government need to look very carefully to circumstances of the past in view of bettering the circumstances in the future so taxpayer dollars are best and most effectively spent and we do not have circumstances where members of the population in a generally affected area are getting financial support where they knowingly do not deserve it but the parameters of the scheme provided by government allows them to do so. Taxpayer dollars should be highly valued by this government and only dispensed to those in need. They should not go to those who are not in need. We need to have policies that are rigorous and we need to effectively support those who are genuinely in need. This takes skill on the part of our administrators.

I will concentrate for a moment on my own electorate of Durack. Carnarvon, at the mouth of the Gascoyne River, is a local food bowl for the metropolitan Perth population. They were devastated before and during the Christmas-New Year's break. I have said to them—tongue in cheek, of course—that they picked a hell of a time to have such a natural disaster. Effectively, they were quite overshadowed by the destruction and death on

the eastern seaboard. Their circumstances—some 2,000 people, at most, affected and some 200 drastically affected—were personally just as severe as any suffered on the eastern seaboard. But we have a fascination with the latest and the most tragic natural event, and yesterday's news becomes tomorrow's fish and chip wrapper. The people of Carnarvon have a dire situation of rebuilding their homes and their plantations in order to get back into business to meet the winter planting deadlines. That involves replacing the very soil that these products are grown in. Those floods washed away thousands and thousands of tonnes of valuable growing topsoil. To its credit, the Western Australian government has put \$3 million up for the replacement and laser levelling of those plantations. We only hope that that quantum of dollars is going to be sufficient to attend to the task.

Of course, every business that has been affected by this deluge is entitled to a payment of \$25,000. When I reflected on the necessity for accuracy and rigour in the payment of taxpayer-dollar support for those affected, I had in mind the fact that it is necessary to create some parameters when it comes to the payment of this support. There are circumstances in Carnarvon under the Western Australian emergency relief program where this money was paid to an ABN where one owner with one ABN had four plantations and, therefore, was entitled to one payment of \$25,000. In the same area we have share farmers, each with an ABN, working one plantation. There are cases of up to four farmers. That property will receive \$100,000. It is those circumstances, which are administrative errors by way of design of the program, that have the most impact on the local population. They question the equity of the program. It is devised with the best intent in mind, but the outcome is impractical and, from one particular perspective, quite ridicu-

lous and inadequate. So it is important that, when we set about devising the parameters of recovery programs and payments to those affected to cover the future, we do so with hindsight in mind and all of the mistakes of the past well in front of mind.

I should not harp too much on the negative, but it needs to be said. Specific to Carnarvon again is the circumstance of flood mitigation. For over a decade now there has been serious discussion of the design and construction of relatively simply engineered bunding to protect the majority of the plantations. That has not been put in place. The quotations for capital investment range from \$50 million to \$130 million. The best calculation for this single event is that it will cost taxpayers some \$8 million. If you contemplate that this year alone the wet season is not yet over and inundation could occur again and if you think of the number of \$8 millions in, for instance, \$50 million, you realise that protection put in place that would reasonably last 100 years would be a damn fine investment and ought to be done. But human nature, once again, tends to look to the future and not reflect on the immediate past, so these mitigation programs are understandably lost when looking to the future. It is the immediacy of getting back into business and getting the infrastructure in place that takes front of mind, and the programs that would prevent such circumstances occurring again are overlooked until the next time. That is something that all of us, from us in this House down to the local grower, need to keep in mind. We need to take the action today to guarantee better protection in the future, and I, for one, will be very focused on that outcome.

It is a case of dollars always and unfortunately the bean counters of this world tend to rationalise investment. Carnarvon, with a total population of some 6,000, would probably have only 160 plantations that

would be protected. But I remind people in this House and those listening that it really does not matter if the one who is adversely affected by a natural disaster is one of one or one of 100,000—the impact on that individual is just as debilitating, it is just a soul destroying, regardless of the total that they are a part of.

Bidgemia Station, in the Gascoyne, is struggling through some of the worst continued drought in history. It is struggling to save the remnants of a breeding cattle herd. It had salvaged some 200 head to handfeed close to the homestead that had never been impacted by flood events in the past. It salvaged a mere 20 head of those cattle having spent months and capital investments in handfeeding. Bidgemia Station homestead has been inundated and infrastructure destroyed. Its very location at the bend of the Gascoyne River has been severely impacted. This has never happened before; Bidgemia has been there for well over 100 years.

We need to be reminded that nature plays a cruel hand and that, if we are associated with a natural water course, we must at some stage expect those torrents. They will have a devastating impact. We need to look carefully at where we rebuild in the future. I urge all that had any part in building and rebuilding this great nation of ours to have some consideration for the future, to develop good policies that will allow and prepare us for all manner of eventualities. When it comes to water, it is a very powerful force. We need to be a powerful force in dealing with the future when we are impacted again.

Once again, I give my thanks to every volunteer regardless of their degree of effort and to those that cared for others with true human compassion. I express my condolences, once again, for those that have suffered such great loss.

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (11.55 am)—It is a solemn thing to speak on this condolence motion knowing as we do that over 100 people have died due to severe weather events during the course of this summer. The weather events that have severely affected Australia this summer have taken lives and damaged homes, businesses and infrastructure. In the past 2½ months, as I said, more than 100 people have died as a result of these severe weather conditions.

I feel for those families that have been affected by the severity of the floods and fires this summer and express my deepest sympathies and those of my constituents to those families mourning the death of loved ones. The extreme weather conditions have affected communities in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and my home state of Western Australia, where we had floods at Christmas and horrific fires this week. As the member for Durack reminded us, the fire in Perth's south-east destroyed more than 70 homes on Monday and Tuesday this week. Queensland communities—Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley—are by magnitude the worst affected Australian communities.

People living in Carnarvon, the Gascoyne region and the south-eastern suburbs of Perth have been severely affected by flooding and fires too. Over the Christmas period, Carnarvon experienced some of the worst flooding in 50 years. In the second week of January, the Gascoyne River again reached peak—two floods in three weeks. Carnarvon is a coastal community located at the mouth of the Gascoyne River some 900 kilometres north of Perth. As the member for Durack said, it is a small community of some 6,000 residents. In addition to its mining, tourism and fishing industries, Carnarvon is a centre of horticultural production in WA.

Its plantations grow and produce on average \$90 million worth of produce per year—that is 60 per cent of Perth's winter vegetables.

In the week before Christmas, the people of Carnarvon were preparing for and then experiencing the impact of a monsoonal low that delivered heavy rainfall in the Gascoyne River catchment. This was the very same low that passed over Christmas Island days earlier, contributing to the sea conditions that took the lives of up to 50 people on 15 December, when SIEV221 broke up at Flying Fish Cove. The low continued to move south and on 17 December Carnarvon Airport recorded over eight inches, or over 207 millimetres, of rain within a 24-hour period. That is more than an entire year's rainfall in one day. The Gascoyne River rose to its highest levels on record.

The human impact of the flood was seen at Carnarvon Civic Centre, which was converted into an emergency accommodation facility providing temporary accommodation to more than 150 residents. The town's reinforced levees prevented the combination of tidal forces and the overflowing Gascoyne River from swamping Carnarvon's town centre. This levee was built under the guidance of one of the great contributors to WA public life, Councillor Wilson Tuckey, who served 40 years ago as president of the Shire of Carnarvon and then as the federal member for O'Connor.

Wilson's levee held, but unprotected homes, businesses, plantations and pastoral stations surrounding the town were inundated. Homes were washed away, businesses were destroyed and millions of dollars worth of valuable crops and livestock were lost. The damage bill is yet to be finalised, but initial estimates are in the order of \$100 million. During the flood, the State Emergency Service and Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia volunteers

received 278 calls for assistance. I would particularly like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication that FESA and SES volunteers demonstrated as they responded to the needs of local residents.

When communities are affected by natural disasters, one of the most important things they need is information on what is happening and what they should do in response to events and threats. The priority that FESA, the SES, the Bureau of Meteorology and Main Roads placed on putting out information is to be commended. Equally, the time, dedication and effort taken by our broadcasters, particularly the local ABC, to cover the flood and relay vital information deserve to be recognised.

It will take time to rebuild, but Carnarvon will recover just as it has done before. Its relationship with the Gascoyne River and its location on a flood plain mean that the region has a long history of flooding. I recently travelled to Carnarvon and met growers who had been affected by the flood, some of whom, in addition to losing most of their crop, had lost equipment, furnishings and even homes. I was struck by their selflessness. Their main concern was not for themselves or their businesses but for what they could do to help rebuild their community. I managed to catch up with a local mango grower, Eddie Smith. Eddie's plantation, Calypso Plantation, is located in one of the worst hit areas of Carnarvon. Not only did Eddie lose most of his mango crop, but his home was so badly affected that it is likely he will have to rebuild. When we met, Eddie was in a race against time to pick what remained of his mango crop before it went rotten. His packing shed had been running 10 hours a day. With his steadfast determination and the help of local residents and his wife, I have no doubt that he will succeed.

I would also like to praise the leadership shown by Shire President Dudley Maslen. The skilful way in which Dudley managed the shire's response to the flood is to be commended. Dudley knew what to do, where and when, laying out a rapid response network of levees around the town. I was particularly pleased to hear Dudley and shire staff members praise the efforts of state and federal agencies who responded to the flood disaster, including Centrelink. The response to these situations is always at four levels: local government, state government, federal government and, of course, the community. So Carnarvon will not face the task of rebuilding alone. Just as in communities in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, the federal government stands with state and local governments through the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements to ensure that Carnarvon and other places get back on their feet. I commend this condolence motion to the House.

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (12.01 pm)—I was in Brisbane for Christmas and the New Year. I had driven from Townsville to see the Bruce Highway firsthand. It had been four years since I had driven south of Mackay. I was able to get through. I was able to negotiate the stretch between Rockhampton and Miriam Vale, which is surely the worst stretch of road on the national highway, with only a broken windscreen. The flood hit central Queensland and the Western Downs soon after I arrived in Brisbane. When it was time for me to go home, I looked at the maps and realised that I could not get home by car. I could not drive straight up the coast. I could not go west, even as far out as Morven, and turn right to go up to Longreach and back home that way. I took a plane, so there was no real hardship for me at all. But as I was sitting in Upper Mount Gravatt, safe and sound, and as I went home to Townsville it was not lost on me

that so many Queenslanders, and indeed Australians, could not go home, could not get dry, could not get anywhere and had no other options.

I grew up on the south-western downs and I went to boarding school in Toowoomba. If you were to ask me for the place I felt was least likely to suffer flooding, it would be Toowoomba. If you asked me to name the place which would be least likely to suffer the effects of flash flooding so bad that it caused an inland tsunami, it would be Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley. When I was a young bloke, we used to travel from Toowoomba to Brisbane regularly. The Lockyer Valley is a truly beautiful part of the world. To see those images where I used to muck around truly beggars belief. My own town of Townsville copped a fair belting from Cyclone Yasi. But, unlike Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley, we had warning and we had seen this before. I speak on behalf of my entire city when I extend our sympathies to those who have suffered any kind of loss, but the loss of a family member, friend, or neighbour can never be overstated.

Having a warning of a large-scale weather event is not enough. In Townsville our Townsville Local Disaster Management Group, headed by Mayor Les Tyrell, planned meticulously and we are in the shape we are because of that planning and the effort before the event. We were well prepared. We prepared for the worst; we hoped for the best. Our police, headed by Chief Superintendent Michael Keating, were ever vigilant and always available. Our Defence Force personnel, led by Brigadier Stuart Smith, were and still are absolutely magnificent. Our council workers, our ambulance service men and women, our hospital staff and health workers, and our SES volunteers were all so extraordinary in their selfless displays. The Ergon workers from all over Queensland who have converged on my region and north

and are still there working huge hours as they try to bring power back deserve praise of the highest order. As always, the service groups such as Apex and Rotary, the volunteer organisations such as the Salvos, St Vincent de Paul and the churches, and the Red Cross are still on the ground looking to help, and they are in it up to their elbows.

I visited the RSL Care and Blue Care retirement villages, which were both evacuated. The nursing staff and administration staff left their own families to care for others. They knew they were staff-poor and the conditions in which they were operating were not ideal, but that did not stop them doing their best and providing superb care. I spoke with Dr Andrew Johnson from the Townsville General Hospital. He openly admitted that he was running on adrenalin and was about to hit the wall, but he was so proud of his staff and every health worker at the TGH. They were busy, but they were a team and they stuck together.

Townsville is justifiably proud of being a garrison city. We are proud of our men and women of the ADF. To a person, they could not do enough to assist all the way through this event. They doorknocked in the suburbs where homes had to be evacuated. They were out there straightaway clearing the roads. If someone came out and asked them to help in the yard, they did it with a smile on their face. Many of these men and women have had damage to their own homes. Many had families with no power to their homes and many had damage to their homes and yards. But they were all out there helping, and they continue to do so across the region and into the severely affected parts of North and Far North Queensland.

Townsville suffered significant damage, but we deadset dodged a bullet. Our city is strong; our resolve is strong. We are one community and we are pulling through. Our

recovery will take time, but, by and large, we have a smile on our face. That is not to say that everyone is happy. We still have 25,000 homes and properties without power. But, thanks to the preparation, we suffered no loss of life in the city of Townsville. I urge every person in greater Townsville to remember that very point and think of what could have been. In our home, we lost power just after 6 pm on Wednesday night. We had power restored on Saturday evening. Can I tell you: I love electricity!

There have been many stories about people doing great deeds. I would like to share one with you. In Townsville we are well served by the local business Tropical Ice and Chunk Ice. This family-owned company did not lose power. What they did do was make ice—and lots of it. I was there late on Friday night and I asked one of the owners, Ben Menkens, when he was going home. He replied, ‘When there is no-one else wanting ice.’ The queue was sometimes nearly 500 metres long as they had to wait for more ice to be made and brought around. They had mates and family members handing out the ice all day, every day. Believe it or not, it was hot, hard work on the concrete. They did it all with a smile on their faces. Dave Johnson kept everyone happy and informed all the way through. He never lost a beat, no matter what was thrown at him—he was truly magnificent. The queues are not at the factory anymore. They are at the shops around the town as they try to get supplies to the suburbs. They will continue to work at capacity until all their North Queensland outlets and beyond are back to normal.

I would also like to make special mention of our island communities on Palm and Magnetic islands. Magnetic Island is just about ready to go and I know that the member for Wannon will be anxious to get to Arcadia for his annual holiday. ‘Maggie’ is the jewel in our tourism crown, and you should

all spend some time—and lots of money—there.

Jeff Brown is the acting CEO of Palm Island Council. He is also a native of Dalby. He went home for Christmas and was not only caught in the floods a few times but helped out all over the place. He got back to Palm just in time to prepare for Cyclone Yasi. I spoke to his office in the days prior to the cyclone and he was simply chasing high-vis vests. They shifted people from low-lying areas to the PCYC for safety. The council, police, volunteers and island elders must all be commended for their actions.

I would also like to make special mention of the local Townsville media. The guys at WIN and Channel 7 did a great job doing local stories while supporting the national shows which descended on the city. To the local Townsville radio stations and their staff—Steve Price and Glenn Mintern at 4TO; Kelly Higgins-Devine, Pat Hession and Paula Tapiolas at the local ABC; and Karina, Bruce and Wildy at Zinc—thank you all for being there when the lights were out and it was very dark. They worked around the clock and kept us informed during and after the cyclone. Not only did North Queensland Newspapers print the *Townsville Bulletin* each and every day; they printed the local papers for the surrounding districts and they did a full catch-up of the *Phantom* in Saturday's paper—it was truly appreciated and I thank you very much.

I thank the Prime Minister for the phone calls and offers of support. I also thank her for the opportunity to present the needs of Townsville to get back to full fitness. To my leadership, Tony Abbott, Julie Bishop and Warren Truss, I say a huge thankyou. Their concern was greatly appreciated by all the people with whom they spoke and sent messages to.

I support the Leader of the Opposition's call for greater support to businesses which, while not directly hurt by the events of the summer, have been affected by loss of business. We must ensure that no-one is left behind. I also support the member for Hotham's call not just to repair the damage but to fix the problems.

My city, Townsville, will be good to go in a month. We are a strong regional centre with a great future. We were prepared for what was coming as well as anyone could possibly imagine. As a community, our hearts and love go to those in Western Australia dealing with bushfires. We are all Australian and we are in there with you. We wish you all the very best in your undoubted recovery. Keep your chin up and know that the rest of the country is with you at this time.

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation) (12.11 pm)—Parliament is a big strong building. It is full of the cut and thrust of politics; the floors, walls and ceilings echo often with ideas and argument. It is a place of national enthusiasm. But in speaking to this most serious motion I think that one of the most obvious things that I cannot but help recognise is that clearly this place sometimes cannot have the answers—far from it.

We have been witnesses this summer to national disaster and national tragedy. We are left, I suspect, with a requiem of questions: will people be okay? Did families get to safety? How soon will these storms and floods come again? How long will it take to rebuild? Could we have avoided the worst of it? I have asked myself during this summer—the annual holiday that never was this year—when I watch the images on television, visit places affected and witness the stories of people: why does it take disaster to bring out the best in our nation? I actually

think that in some odd, unexpected, unsought for and undesired way these floods and storms have helped us to rediscover and remind us of our greatest strengths.

I was privileged to see up close in 2009 my fellow Victorians prevail through the terrible Black Saturday fires and their aftermath. Again, I have been privileged to witness so many Australians face flooding and destructive storms in recent weeks. Indeed, I believe that Australians are not simply enduring but prevailing. In this great continent that we call home we are witness to the physics and chemistry of Mother Earth working their way across the lucky country in a way that makes you question that famous tag, 'lucky', attached to our country. But if we are strong and resolute in the way that we come to together perhaps 'lucky' is still the best way to think, despite all that brutal water, wind and fire.

I believe this motion is an opportunity not just to define answers to such national introspection but to more softly ask some of the questions—to ask them, and then to ponder and honour as we remember those who we have lost and those for whom the terror and loss are so real. Prime Minister Keating once spoke of the lessons that we can learn from ordinary people, and that lesson is that they are not ordinary. His timeless observation was about Australians in a time of war, and how great that generation was in its extraordinary modesty and sheer determination to pull through. I am reminded of these wise words about ordinary Australians and what they really prove to be when the chips are down when I think about this holiday-less summer that we have had—and that is still yet to end—and the people who have seen the worst of it.

I believe that what it all comes down to is love. Love is what creates the courage we have been witness to. It is the love and cour-

age to calm your family and protect them while the wind is howling above your roof like a train or as the water is rushing down your street like a wild river, or as you sit stranded on your car with your wife and daughter as you float down the torrent of the flood. It is the love and courage to look about your mud filled lounge room, figure out that you will get back to it later, put your boots and hat on and walk out the door to help a neighbour who has lost their ceiling, two retaining walls, the car and the family pet. It is the love and courage to walk out into the tumbled green mess of a cane sugar plantation or a banana farm before your Cyclone Larry recovery chapter has even been concluded, or indeed in the north-west of Victoria to survey your crops which have been ruined even though you have just come out of drought. Amongst all of that, to simply see farmers roll up their sleeves and get on working with their next story of recovery is very Australian, very honest, very tough and very brave. This is precisely what has been happening in recent days. This is what communities are doing right at this moment. It is so compelling.

I care about people with a disability, and I was struck during the floods by how people with a disability were coping while everything around them was being destroyed by torrents of water. In particular, during the Channel 9 flood appeal the observation was made that over 100 people with a disability were trapped in the floods. There was concern that they had not been heard from and that some were unable to escape their homes without assistance. Indeed, tragically some did not flee in time. Neighbours were asked to check on these people, and in an enduring sign of mateship many did so. And, in doing so, they helped people in difficulty who are all too often invisible. When I say a person with a disability might be trapped in a house by the floods, the storms or the fire, you

might instinctively think about someone in a wheelchair. Indeed, that could well be the case, but having a disability can take many forms. I think about those people who lost vital medication and medical equipment when they were flooded out, the people who might have lost the ramps that allow them to enter and leave their house, the people who have lost a motor vehicle that has been modified to allow them to drive and have some participation in the community and the people who have lost electronic devices that they need to communicate with others.

How do you define love and courage when not only has your house been destroyed but when your everyday life was filled with struggle and difficulty well before the floods ever appeared? Coping with loss and devastation is hard for everyone. While we are speaking here to offer our condolences, I urge everyone in this place to think about those Australians with a disability who have been affected by the floods—yet another barrier to them in the lives they lead. People with a disability are vital and valued members of our community but they can sometimes be unintentionally overlooked in the midst of extraordinary tragedy. There are, of course, all manner of degrees of this disaster—from the catastrophic loss of a loved one to the temporary loss of livelihood or time at work and the vital means to support a family. I do believe people are anxious. But people have been anxious before. Australians have been afraid before. We have had to deal with hardship and then stand up again.

In my home state of Victoria I have seen people gradually beginning to get back on their feet after the disaster that struck—after seeing what seemed like the very flames of hell reach out and claim the houses, their properties and in 173 cases the very lives of their families, friends and neighbours. Monday was the second anniversary of the devastating Victorian bushfires known as Black

Saturday. As we pause our usual legislative debate and speak to remember the devastation of this most recent tragedy, the devastation that sprawled across so many parts of Australia, it is worth remembering the bushfires of 24 months ago. It is worth remembering how communities, families, businesses, unions and politicians of all political stripes pulled together, stood up together, rebuilt the burnt places and continued the long process that has left such a scar on the land and, indeed, on our souls. Over 400 bushfires burned on that day two years ago and continued for days afterwards. But it is Black Saturday that we remember. We remember the 2,000-plus homes that were completely destroyed. We remember the 78 individual towns that were affected and the 7½ thousand people who had to seek alternative accommodation after theirs became untenable.

As the Parliamentary Secretary for Bushfire Recovery I travelled to Kinglake, Marysville, Flowerdale and Traralgon South two years ago. I travelled to 33 communities to speak to victims of the bushfire and offer the support of the federal government. I know that Senator Ludwig, the recently appointed Minister for Flood Recovery, will be doing the same for people battling with the outcomes of the floods. Of course, recovery from disasters is about much more than just kind words in this place, no matter how heartfelt. Recovery, in some instances, is about fighting for people who have been forgotten. It is about making hard decisions on how to proceed from nothing or next to nothing.

As we did two years ago, this government has been working with the insurance industry to help those affected by the floods and the storms. Many Australians are today asking questions about their financial security and their degree of protection from disaster by virtue of the detail of an insurance policy.

The questions are plenty and varied. In many cases, but not all, I have been pleased with the early goodwill and good sense with which the insurance and banking sectors have approached their own response, and responsibilities, to these floods. This includes some very real community expectation that there needs to be real change in how these important sectors of our economy operate. My commitment is that I will keep a shoulder to the wheel in all of this and get some of the necessary outcomes that flood affected communities so definitely deserve. There is a varied list of items on the agenda of insurance reform after these floods—from policy disclosure and consumer protection issues to land planning policies and questions about where people build. Some of these things need to be considered thoroughly, carefully and methodically; others demand more immediate movement. In my view, a handful of particular ones can help ease some of the strain of the disaster affected families and improve the insurance sector for the times and unforeseen but inevitable events ahead. Whilst I speak clearly to the matter of a standard definition of floods, I recognise that these matters are not the silver bullet for the improvement of insurance in Australia. But they are an overdue and necessary first step.

One matter relates to the expert hydrologists, the water experts, and how they can help speed up insurance claim processing. Obviously, after the waters and winds have calmed, no family wants to experience unreasonable delay in being able to put their lives back together and fund the clean-up and rebuilding process. Last month the government encouraged the insurance industry to establish an expert panel of hydrologists to make neighbourhood by neighbourhood type recommendations about the nature and cause of flooding. Whilst hydrologists are in short supply at any time, let alone now, this expert

panel is now up and running and should already be assisting the overall claims process through its expert recommendations on the cause of water damage in different areas. It has also been endorsed by the ACCC. Nonetheless, there is still concern about frustrations with claims taking too long. Indeed, yesterday morning I spoke to the Mayor of Ipswich, Paul Pisasale, and the members for Blair and Oxley to hear about some of the frustrations that they are hearing firsthand on the ground in the community. I will be meeting with them again soon and we are likely to go over more of these matters.

I acknowledge, with all the members of parliament, that the members for Blair and Oxley have been doing a terrific job representing the interests of their residents, along with Mayor Pisasale, and I record my congratulations. Where such street-wise observations are raised by any community leaders, this government remains prepared to listen and, where appropriate, act and act as quickly as possible. We were able to ensure yesterday, for example, with the Insurance Council of Australia and the Bureau of Meteorology, that timely data will be supplied to insurers to allow claims to be processed more quickly. It is pleasing that the insurance industry, the Insurance Council of Australia and its members have agreed that it is time we had a standard definition of 'floods'. I acknowledge their view that more will need to be done to improve the offering of insurance products, but it is a good first step.

There is cooperation and industry leadership from the Insurance Council of Australia. We are discussing with them ways of improving insurance policies, including plain English on policy documents, to make it easier and simpler for consumers of home and contents insurance to know exactly where they are, to know exactly what they are covered for and what they are not covered for and to know their policies. I know these

things resonate with all Australians at all times and we will keep to the reform task at hand. Later this week I will be meeting with the very important consumer groups to make sure that we get all views from all sides in this debate.

It was a very Australian Christmas break this year, albeit one to break the heart. We are warned in our national verse of the droughts and flooding rains, the far horizons and the beauty and the terror which make up our national story. Yet it is comforting, in an odd way, when another poet writes that a terrible beauty is born around the cups of soups in the churches and the school halls and the smashed streets, where new friends were made amongst the wreckage. There is a noble beauty in the search for the photo albums, the children's toys and the pet animals that may have survived the juggernaut that came from the heavens and went so fast through a lifetime's history and hopes—now strewn before people in mud and splinters that cannot simply be put back together again.

I suspect it was in a modest way war by other means. I suspect it was a war in which in a real sense, as the floods recede and storms abate, people were made refugees. It would be wrong to falsely find much comfort in it. But it is worth knowing that when the roofs were flying, when a deluge as large as some European countries was swamping heartland, town and street we did not hear a cry of 'every person for themselves'. It was not 'Devil take the hindmost' or 'I'm all right, Jack'. It was, alas, in other countries under hurricane or, indeed, conflict the attitude of, 'Let's look after each other.' It was, 'How can I help?', 'Do you need a hand?' or 'Can I carry that for you?' across the suburbs and towns of a large part of our nation under water and parts of our nation facing cyclone and facing firestorm. I believe that Australians were there for their friends and for

strangers—that they risked their lives for the property and lives of others.

We were there in that wondrous communitarian unity of help that is the Australian settlement, of a difference in shared peril and bad weather. We have witnessed people being there for each other, as we have been in war, tempest and peace. Australians do the right thing. It is habit now. This, of course, does not bring back those who have left us or the heirlooms or the beloved kitchens or the pianos and the gardens tended down through the decades by gentle souls too old to plant them again. This does not mean that it has not happened. What it does mean is that we are good neighbours in this country and Australians rally round. Led by our Prime Minister, our state leaders and many more, we rally round. We give comfort when it is cried for. We are a good people whose goodness has been tested too much this summer. We are people who have shown again that when the time comes around once more Australia will be there facing it all as one.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (12.26 pm)—I am very pleased to speak today on this condolence motion on natural disasters and, in doing so, I am very pleased to talk about another part of our country. Might I start, as was referred to by the member for Maribyrnong, with the Dorothea Mackellar poem *My Country*:

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.
I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror—
The wide brown land for me!

She goes on:

For flood and fire and famine,
She pays us back threefold ...

It is true: this summer season has seen all of that, in Dorothea Mackellar's poem, come true in Australia, sadly.

I acknowledge and pay my respects to those affected in the recent disasters in Australia. Our hearts went out, as everybody's did in this place and all around Australia, to the victims of the floods in Queensland in particular and northern New South Wales and now in Victoria. The people of Carnarvon in my state of Western Australia—it is probably a bit far away—suffered devastation with the Gascoyne River flooding. On top of that, of course, in Queensland came that devastating cyclone out of the ocean, Cyclone Yasi, and the damage that it did and the lives that it put on hold and the businesses and the infrastructure that it destroyed. Here we are today talking about some of the memorable moments during that period and the people and the lives that have been so affected by this devastation. I know many people from the affected electorates will talk about the floods and the cyclone. The enduring picture in my mind and in my wife's mind, as we sat there not believing what we were seeing constantly on the television of the Queensland situation, is of the husband and wife sitting on top of their car with their young child floating down the floodway. The husband obviously tried to get help. They survived; he did not. What a tragic set of events—and there are so many more. There are thousands more stories that could be relayed, and they will be in this House over the next few days and weeks.

I congratulate our leaders, Prime Minister Julia Gillard, Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott, Queensland Premier Anna Bligh and all the leaders from the various states that have had to take a role in these emergencies, declaring emergencies and addressing the adversity within their jurisdictions.

My story is of the devastating fires in my electorate of Canning—the Kelmscott and Roleystone fires. I will mention the earlier fire at Lake Clifton, where houses were lost. I want to tell the story of this fire because it is nothing like Black Saturday. We know what happened in Victoria two years ago on Black Saturday. Fortunately, over the weekend no lives were lost. There were also no lives lost at Lake Clifton. That was only due to the good planning, good luck and some fortune with natural events such as where the wind was coming from et cetera.

I went to the Sri Lankan national day celebrations and entered the Pinjarra races to present a trophy. At three o'clock in the afternoon while driving home I heard on the radio the devastating stories of the fires in the Kelmscott-Roleystone area. It is very difficult for a member of parliament to know exactly what to do. Do we go down and involve ourselves? As you will hear from any of us, we are damned if we do and we are damned if we don't. If we do, some people will say, 'Look at him just showing up after the event,' and those sorts of things. But, on the other side of the coin, many people will say: 'Isn't it good that the local representatives have come down to see what they can do to help, to just be of comfort or to just be there?'

Some of this is under inquiry, and I understand an inquiry is being sought into the Kelmscott-Roleystone fire. Without going into too much detail, I understand a fire was started in the most horrific of conditions. It was hot and the wind was blowing up to 70 miles an hour and gusting up even higher. The wind was coming from the east-south-east. The conditions were such that if there were a spark it would take off, and that is exactly what happened. A spark started a grassfire which then travelled along a water course and burnt out the Buckingham Bridge on the Brookton Highway. It then began to

race across the paddocks and through the bush towards people's houses.

It happened so fast. As you can imagine, if you have 70 miles an hour winds the fire will leap from tree to tree. In this bushfire the fire leapt from treetop to treetop and exploded with the help of the eucalypt trees, which have almost explosive qualities. Unfortunately, it headed across the rural lots towards the built-up areas. It went from smaller farms into residential areas. By the time it got there it leapt from house to house. We know now that at least 72 houses have been declared to have been lost in these bushfires. Seventy-two houses were lost in such a short time.

I want to refer to some heroic stories and some very good luck stories. I was fortunate that Premier Colin Barnett, after declaring this area a disaster zone so the funding could flow, took me and Tony Simpson, the state member for Darling Range, on a tour of the area. As we often see, one house was burnt but its neighbour was still standing, the shed next to the house burnt but the house was standing, and the house was standing but the shed at the back was gone. We saw all those things in the neighbourhood that was in the path of this fire that travelled so fast.

It has been a really difficult time. I need to congratulate a number of people for their contribution, not least the Mayor of the City of Armadale, Linton Reynolds, his councillors and staff for being on the spot straight-away. The City of Armadale has provided its rangers and all the support it can. It has provided the arena as a mustering point where agencies can disseminate information. It is also where people without houses have been sleeping over the last couple of nights.

I want to particularly pay tribute to the career firefighters from metropolitan Perth and the bush firefighters from around Armadale, Roleystone and other areas in the south-west. Of course, the Roleystone bush fire brigade

were the first ones there, because it was their town. They were there in minutes. Without them, more houses would have been lost. There could have been more loss of human life if they had not intervened at such an early stage. When we toured the other day we saw the firefighters at Roleystone along with all the other firefighters. They were exhausted. They had been fighting the fire throughout the night. They were changing over. They were sitting back and having a rest, as they should have been.

The Fire and Emergency Services Authority incident controllers and those who ran the headquarters that coordinated the response and the SES volunteers who made themselves available for hours and hours need to be congratulated. The action of the police is one reason why there was such minimal risk to life. The statewide alert emergency warning system did not really work. People were getting the message to leave their house three or four hours after the fire. It was the police who went door to door telling people to get out and making them get out. In some cases they arrested people who would not leave. That played out on TV. Some people were very unwilling to leave. Once you have decided to stay and fight and the time for fleeing has gone then you are there on your own. There are a huge number of stories documented in the media. The police certainly need recognition for all their fantastic work.

On the day we visited with the Premier and others it was amazing to see the huge helicopters swooping in, after engorging themselves with water, and accurately bombing the fires in coordination with the firefighters on the ground. It was a brilliant thing to see. As an aside, Western Australia is getting two helicopter tankers from Victoria in the next few weeks. Obviously, it has not stopped raining in Victoria so the chances of them needing firefighting equipment for a while is diminished. Two helicopters from

Victoria are coming to Western Australia because it is tinder dry over there and the chance of there being more fires is very real.

There are so many other people to mention. I am mindful of the fact that once you start mentioning people you forget people. I want to mention the Salvation Army. There they were the other day, providing all the food for the fireys, the helpers and the coordinators. They were selfless. They were there on their own, with their trailer, making sure that all those hardworking people were being fed. The work of these dedicated people is truly outstanding.

I mentioned the response of the state government. As soon as they could, Colin Barnett, along with the Minister for Police and Minister for Emergency Services, Rob Johnson, gave their full attention to the situation and declared the area an emergency zone. I also want to congratulate the member for Darling Range, Tony Simpson, for being there. I will mention a few things about him in a moment. The new member for Armadale, Tony Buti, was on the spot, helping his constituents in the best possible way that any member of parliament can. Of course, their staff were also there.

There is another story I have to mention. Before I got up there I was getting calls from some of my constituents. What happened was that people were told to evacuate. Where do they go? Some went to the arena, but many from the Clifton Hills and Kelmscott areas went down to the Stargate Shopping Centre. Being a Sunday, the Stargate Shopping Centre car park was empty, so they all parked there. My office is just over the road from there. You could sit at the bottom and see the hills ablaze. They were sitting there, wondering whether one of those blazes was their home. They were sitting there with their dogs, some of them with a bird in a cage and

that sort of thing. They were devastated, just numb, watching part of their world burn.

On the edge of the Stargate Shopping Centre, open on a Sunday night, was the IGA supermarket. Glen Wood, the owner of the IGA supermarket, was handing out free water to everyone. He ran out of water. He had to go to another store to get another pallet of water because he had given out so much. He decided later on—and this was where I finally made myself useful—that he would put on a barbecue for those who had been left stranded. I did my best to turn the onions and sausages. Tony Simpson, the state member, raced home and got his barbie and we did our best to feed people for most of the night. People came along and started giving immediately. A lady turned up straightaway with three boxes of soft toys for the kids. That was in the car park. A lady and her husband from across the road from the shopping centre brought out a table, got an extension cord and an electric kettle and made cups of tea and coffee for people who were stranded in the car park. You hear all these fantastic stories, like you heard in Queensland, about how people help. Glen Wood, we are not going to forget you. I know the community will not.

Allen Gale from FESA has already confirmed that 72 homes have been lost, 32 homes have had significant damage and 430 hectares of land have been burnt out. There are many people who did not know for days what had happened to their homes. When we went to the briefing at the arena on Monday morning it was like the list of the damned, with people waiting to hear whether their house or street had been 100 per cent destroyed. When people heard their house number, they broke down, quite understandably. It is very hard for them to come to grips with.

The newspaper has been reporting on a number of people, so they are on the public record now—people like Mary Wooldridge, in the *West Australian* here. She lost everything. The paper mentions Tim Semones and his family, with a young baby. Their neighbours have nothing to go back to. The story of the Tucci family is unbelievable. Their home was one of the ones you saw regularly on TV as part of the fire coverage. It was one of the first to go.

I must mention one of the tragic things about this. When people say, 'Turn off your evaporative air-conditioner,' turn it off. What happens—and you can see it in houses like this one in the newspaper—is that the embers get sucked into the draught in the air-conditioning. And what is in the core of the air-conditioning? A sort of cane. It burns straight down, blows all the embers into your house and that is how your house starts to blow up and burn straightaway. The air-conditioning blows all the hot embers into the family room and lounge room and off it goes. It burns from the centre out.

Eileen Parker, sadly, lost everything. So did Frank Duffy. There are some fantastic stories of help. Mr Kalajzich is on the front page of the *West Australian* today. He is an old gentleman who secured his house and moved his wife out of the place, then raced around and saved a lot of neighbours' houses. Some people were at the cricket, watching the English being beaten at the WACA, and there was old Mr Kalajzich, making sure that their place was spared.

I just want to mention the 11 houses that were destroyed in the Lake Clifton fire. Unlike the Roleystone-Kelmscott fire, the Lake Clifton fire was deliberately lit. An arsonist was involved in the Lake Clifton fire. It is the same story: prevailing winds and off it went. I would like to congratulate all the carers, the firefighters and the volunteers et

cetera from the Lake Clifton community, the Western Australian state government, state member Murray Cowper and the Shire of Waroona councillors and staff for their magnificent effort.

Murray Cowper and I visited some of the people whose homes were burnt out in the Lake Clifton area. I went to Joe Ferraro's place and it was totally burnt out. As an aside, you do see some interesting things. At Joe's place, for example, he had shifted his dinghy away from the house and put it under a tree. When he got back it was in the shape of a banana because the tree had burnt, fallen over his boat and turned it into a U shape, compounding it. That was very unlucky. I wondered what the smell was. He had had eight boxes of prawns delivered after Christmas and they had burnt underneath the house. He was not able to get to them until the insurance assessors had been there, and, of course, in the hot weather they stank to high heaven. There are so many people in that area who were affected by the fire. I will not read their names, but I have the 11 names here of the people who lost their houses.

The member for Maribyrnong is quite correct: we as a parliament need to do something about the insurance industry. We have talked about 'flood' and all the obscure definitions. I would like to recount an example to the member for Maribyrnong. Joe Ferraro, while I was there, was telling me that the insurance people were giving him a hard time because he had added a sleep-out onto his house. They said, 'Your insurance is now void because we don't think you've actually got a plan or approval for that from the shire.' So they will find any way to get out of it. At least he was insured. We feel sorry for the people who were not insured and we are going to help them. But the people who were insured did the right thing and we have to make sure that the insurance companies do not use technicalities or the fine print to get

out of paying up. These people have been paying insurance for years, and this is the first time they have ever had to call on it.

In conclusion, I seek leave to table a photo. It sort of demonstrates the defiance and resilience. The photo shows the property at 155 Buckingham Road. It is all gone, and the only thing that is left is a singed Australian flag that is still flying.

Leave granted.

Mr RANDALL—I leave this House with another report on a natural disaster, completely different from most of the reports today. All I can say is that as Australians and representatives of Australians we are getting behind these people and we will stay behind them because, once things have moved on, people continue to need help.

For example, in the Lake Clifton area, now that the fire is over, people are trying to rebuild but they are finding that there are issues with insurance. That is when we really need to help. In Armadale, for example, at the moment they have asked people to stop delivering food and other material goods, which people are doing because of their generosity—money, yes, to the City of Perth Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund. The real crunch will come later on when they try to rebuild and they need planning approval. I note the City of Armadale has taken away any demolition costs and any council planning costs, as they affect the places that need to be rebuilt. Those sorts of things need to happen right across Australia as well as in my electorate.

I add my support to this motion. All of us here extend our sympathies to those who have been affected by the fires and, in my electorate, those in the Roleystone, Kelm-scott and Lake Clifton area. Thank you.

Debate interrupted.

MAIN COMMITTEE
Australian Natural Disasters
Reference

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (12.47 pm)—On indulgence, Deputy Speaker Murphy: I congratulate all those who have spoken, from both sides of the House, on their contributions to this condolence debate. I wish to associate myself with their remarks of sympathy and to thank those who have worked so hard to help those in need. I seek leave to refer the condolence motion to the Main Committee for further consideration.

Leave granted.

Mr FITZGIBBON—I move:

That, unless otherwise ordered, at the interruption of the debate at 1.45 p.m. today the condolence motion moved by the Prime Minister in connection with natural disasters stand referred to the Main Committee.

Question agreed to.

CONDOLENCES
Australian Natural Disasters

Debate resumed.

Dr MIKE KELLY (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (12.48 pm)—It is a great privilege to be able to add my condolences to the very eloquent expressions of empathy that we have heard in this chamber over the past two days, as well as the wonderful recounting of the details associated with this season of loss and tragedy that we have experienced around the nation. It really gives us a full understanding of the depth of what we have faced, and it is a tribute to the connection, I think, that all members feel with their local areas. In particular, I pay tribute to the Prime Minister for her speech yesterday, which I believe was a magnificent, inspiring, unifying and rallying point for the nation at this time.

Certainly, they were tragic circumstances, and we have heard many eloquent expressions and explanations of some of those situations that we have all seen in the media. I will not add to that. I would like to spend my time here today focusing on what we should do now in tribute to those who lost their lives. The focus should be, of course, on reaching out to the grieving but also on dedicating ourselves to the reconstruction and recovery effort to honour the memories of those who lost their lives. There is a natural focus on the dramatic pictures that we see of the floods' immediate effects, but it is also important to understand the long-term effects these floods, fires and other disasters will have.

In that spirit, on behalf of the government, during the summer I toured flood affected areas of New South Wales—in particular, Wagga, Dubbo, Parkes, Narrabri, Wee Waa, Narromine and Warren. I would like to state my thanks here to the mayors of those areas: the Mayor of Wagga Wagga, Wayne Geale; Parkes, Ken Keith; Dubbo, Allan Smith; and Narrabri, Robyn Faber. They did a wonderful job, at short notice, of bringing together the people that we needed to hear from in relation to those long-term effects. To the people who attended those meetings or met with me on that trail—the SES workers, property owners, small and medium business people, engineers and the like: thank you very much for the input you gave me, which I was able to bring back to the government to inform our discussions. It will no doubt inform our long-term discussions about what we as a nation need to do to deal with these sorts of large-scale tragedies. We may experience not only further events, as we have seen from the cycles that these things come in, but also events of greater intensity, with the probable effects of climate change.

I would also like to thank some of the property owners for their hospitality, particu-

larly the Angel family at the 'Broula' property near Tarcutta. It is very interesting to look at how these long-term effects are playing out in some of these properties. We can all appreciate that a flood will destroy fencing and infrastructure on a farm. In the case of the Angel family, they had already suffered two previous waves of flooding in March and October, and then came the November-December floods. Their neighbour had repaired his fencing each time, so their loss was compounded in that respect. But their crops were also affected, downgraded from milling quality to feed quality. They had harvested some of their crop to try to minimise the damage by selling it for feed, but then most of that was washed away in subsequent flooding.

But the longer term problems they face may be things we have not contemplated, such as the fact that the enormous floods that came down from the Tumbarumba region, which was formerly in my electorate, have deposited gravel over a metre deep across a large section of his property. He now no longer has access to the topsoil on that section of this property because of that one-metre deep layer of gravel. Some of the silting in the southern and south-western areas of New South Wales is of poor quality and of no benefit to the soil, so there are significant issues there also regarding the effect on the topsoil itself on some of these properties.

The councils were very effective in conveying to me and showing me some of the damage to the infrastructure that they have suffered. I think that we need to understand what they are going through. Heartbreak is too weak a word to express the situation for a lot of these farmers and the circumstances they are now in. This year was going to be the recovery crop. This was going to be the crop that got them back on their feet after those 10 long years of drought and out of the debt that they had acquired in that time. The

worst of it was that they had already sunk cost into that crop. They had laid the fertiliser and the herbicide and done the work, and so all the money was there sitting in those crops when they were destroyed.

It was patchy. Some properties suffered extensive crop damage, others did not. But even for those who did not suffer damage to their crops immediately, damage to the roads, bridges and infrastructure has meant that it has been extremely difficult to both get the headers down for harvesting and also the produce to market. All of this became dramatically apparent in our tour of the affected properties and certainly that information has formed a large part of the thinking of the government in informing its response, and it will continue to shape the national discussion that will now take place on how we can assist these farmers. Many of them, because of the drought, were engaging in forward selling of crops. They now have to pay for crops which they were not able to harvest but which they received money for.

While I am here, I would like to pay tribute to the member for Parkes, Mark Coulton, who accompanied me on a large part of that tour of western New South Wales. Mark is a man I respect enormously. He is a very decent, hard-working local member who has taken a great deal of time to understand deeply the impacts on his region, and he continues to do. He was very helpful in making sure that that information was made available to me in the time that we had on the ground. So I thank the member for Parkes for his assistance and commend him on the work that he has done, and is doing, in his community in the face of this destruction.

We have heard talk about betterment as well. It was very apparent when we observed some of the infrastructure that you can engage in false economy with some of the infrastructure work that goes on in council ar-

reas. We observed in the north of New South Wales a road which only 12 months previously had been sealed but which was almost completely destroyed because corners were cut in relation to the cost of building the road. It is perfectly understandable where councils are under pressure with their budgets. But, by comparison, we saw a road where the required effort, attention and care had gone into the building of it. As a consequence there was very minimal damage done to it and very little effort will be required to restore it. So there can be false economies in the way we deal with infrastructure.

We have also learned a great deal in terms of civil engineering techniques and technology over the years. Many of these significant pieces of infrastructure—bridges and the like—were put in place many years or even decades ago. We saw one bridge near Wagga where the bridge itself was completely intact but both approaches had been completely washed away. Since the approaches were built, civil engineering techniques have changed dramatically. Certainly in the rebuilding we do need to learn lessons and understand the patterns that we observed in this flooding, and in particular to shape how we do the infrastructure reconstruction. I am grateful to the engineers and the councils for showing me those effects and discussing the technical and specific issues with me.

I think that it was particularly poignant that in the context of this season of loss and tragedy we celebrated Australia Day, and of course close to Australia Day we also had the announcement of the Victoria Cross for Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith. The response of the community to the disasters was what made us particularly proud on Australia Day to celebrate the thousands and thousands of volunteers who came out to respond to the crisis in Brisbane and other places and also of course to celebrate the VC, demonstrating those traditional Australian values of courage

and sacrifice we all admire so much. It gave us the opportunity to re-dedicate ourselves to a unified approach based on fundamental Australian values in dealing with this tragedy, pulling together as a nation in a multi-partisan way at this time.

In my own area of Eden-Monaro, we were, I guess, the starting gun for this season. On 9 December the floods arrived in my own region, and by comparison now we consider ourselves extremely lucky. I received text messages from members asking me how we were travelling—I had to evacuate my electorate office—but many of those members subsequently suffered much worse circumstances, so I think of those messages.

Four shires out of my seven were disaster declared. In particular, in our local area here, Captains Flat, a lovely little town with a wonderful community spirit, suffered very significant damage. One of our Comcar drivers, whom many will know, Leslie McIntyre, was affected by this. Leslie woke up in the middle of the night hearing strange noises. She climbed out of her bed and found that she was up to her knees in water. In the dark, she scrambled out of her house and battled out to the front yard. The waters were quite strong and she feared for her life. Today I would like to pay tribute to Mr Gary Baker who, despite warnings not to cross the river at the flat because it was unsafe, did so. In the middle of the darkness, Gary's arm reached out, grabbed Leslie and saved her from those circumstances, in disregard of the warnings that he had received. So I would like to thank Gary Baker for his courage, and I certainly know that Lesley is extremely grateful for having her life saved.

On the negative side, there is a significant insurance issue in Captains Flat, just as we have seen play out in many other regions. There were people who carried insurance and were keen to make sure that it did have

flood coverage. Now we are finding that there is unwholesome quibbling going on, on the part of the insurance companies, in respect of this damage. It is traumatic. We are still, and have been since 9 December, in the situation where this to-ing and fro-ing is going on with great trauma, stress and personal and economic loss to the victims of that damage in Captains Flat. I urge those insurance companies to rethink their position on this, to rediscover their compassion and to interpret these provisions in the way that they ought to be interpreted. There is the scope to do that. You could always find ways of interpreting words to mean one thing or another, but there is certainly scope there for them to come to the rescue of these very deserving people in the Captains Flat area.

I also take this opportunity, as many have, to salute the service of the emergency service providers and respondents that operated, but in particular to my brothers and sisters in the Australian Defence Force who have done a fantastic job. As many have said, wherever they have turned up they have brought heart and hope to people who find themselves in these circumstances. I know that often we think of the Defence Force in its overseas operations but, if you look back through its history, by far the overwhelming commitment of our Defence Force has been in disaster response in the service of this nation. The capabilities that they bring with tactical lift, heavy lift, water purification, engineering capabilities and just sheer manpower are a great asset to this nation and well worth the investment this nation makes in it. For those who cry of a waste of money in defence spending, let them see what those assets have done and have brought to bear in this disaster and think again.

Many reservists were also mobilised in this support. In the previous term, I had responsibility for the reserves in the portfolio of Defence and met with the defence reserv-

ists who had worked in response to the Victorian bushfires. I spoke to them about how they felt about that and, overwhelmingly, they tremendously appreciated and felt privileged for the opportunity of being able to serve directly the Australian community that they had joined up to serve. They found the experience rewarding and would do it again in a heartbeat. We have seen that demonstrated time and time again. I salute the men and women of this country in uniform, including our reservists, who have responded so magnificently in all the disasters that this nation has experienced.

We do now have to focus on the next job. I have seen Australians confront these tragedies. I have seen many disasters and wars and much destruction overseas. I have often seen people in such a state of shock that they did not know what to do next and would sit around waiting for someone to provide a solution. In this country it has been magnificent to see communities not wait for that and to see how they self-organise and self-help. Certainly, as they do, we need to now focus on the next step, putting one foot in front of the other. However, I stress that, in doing that, we all need to be in step as a nation.

Mr COULTON (Parkes) (1.03 pm)—I too rise to add my words to this motion of condolence on the natural disasters. I acknowledge the words of the Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the member for Eden-Monaro, and thank him for his visit to my electorate in January. The electorate of Parkes has been battling this disaster in various forms since November. It started at the same time as the grain harvest started. Just as farmers were about to start or had just started the harvest, it started to rain and it did not stop. For a large part of my electorate, it was the first crop they had had in 10 years. The lost expectation of the crop that was going to turn things around has been devastating for many

communities. The financial impact of that is actually probably greater than the direct flooding that my electorate suffered as well. Even as we speak today, there are still farmers trying to salvage parts of their grain crop two months after what would normally be considered the end of harvest. As the ground dries out enough to carry machinery, they are trying to salvage what they can. The quality is extremely low and the value per tonne is not very high, but they are trying to get what they can.

The electorate of Parkes is 256,000 square kilometres and covers 34 per cent of New South Wales. Pretty well every shire in my electorate was affected in some way or other. They were affected in different ways. Earlier on, the mid-western area of New South Wales, around Mudgee, had large storms with quite severe, rapid damage. Many people in that mountainous area to the east of Mudgee were isolated because the roads were destroyed. When I was last speaking to the General Manager of the Mid-Western Regional Council, they were estimating that the repair bills were going to be something like \$20 million. In December, a fortnight before Christmas, the Macquarie Valley suffered major flooding and the city of Dubbo was cut in half for nearly two weeks. There was one bridge open, but the main bridge that covers the Newell Highway was blocked, which led to traffic chaos in Dubbo. It led to the closure of the main street due to flooding to the back of commercial premises. Leading up to Christmas, this was an economic disaster for those businesses affected. Realistically, a lot of them missed out on Christmas trade that they will never recoup. I compliment the way that the councils have helped and worked during this particularly stressful time. Indeed, Dubbo City Council had to rebuild one of their urban streets during the middle of this crisis because the highway traffic that was diverted down this

normally urban road completely destroyed it, and they had to rebuild that as well as deal with the changed traffic conditions.

At that time we also had flooding in the lower Namoi. The week before Christmas I flew across the Namoi, Bogan, Macquarie, Castlereagh and Lachlan river valleys and there were huge amounts of water there. In the Macquarie valley, in the Warren area, there were large amounts of damage not only to the winter crop but to the cotton crop and the summer crops as well, as levee banks on irrigation farms were destroyed.

As I stand here today, a large proportion of the Parkes electorate is under water. The town of Lightning Ridge has been isolated for some weeks. Goodooga has been isolated for a month and will possibly be isolated for two to three months. Rain that fell in Toowoomba caused that horrible devastation. That water has just reached the top end of my electorate now. That is the third flood peak that has come through into the Lightning Ridge, Goodooga, Brewarrina area—and it is at record heights there. When I was at Lightning Ridge it was 30 centimetres above record high. That might not seem a lot, but in that flat landscape that means miles and miles of extra width. The levees protecting farmhouses were not high enough, so the farmers have suffered severe losses to homes, shearing sheds, machinery sheds and machinery and, in many cases, livestock have drowned. The problem they have now is that the stock isolated on ‘islands’ will eat their way out of the available feed on those islands and they will have to be cared for by fodder drops by helicopter. So this crisis will be moving on for some time.

Something I would like to mention is the issue of mental health. This is a very stressful time for all those communities—for the farmers that have lost crops, the small business people that have had their businesses

devastated and the people that have had their homes inundated. I was very concerned when around Christmas time and the New Year period there were stories going around of large numbers of farmers in my electorate having succumbed to the stress of the situation they were in and committed suicide. I have done some research, I have contacted the police and followed up the rumours of suicide that I had heard, and I think it is largely an urban myth. Maybe there has been the odd case, but certainly not to the level portrayed. I had a phone call from the *Australian* newspaper on a Sunday evening asking for confirmation of the reports and I said that I believed this was not the case. The story the next day did not quote my words but those of a member for an electorate in northern Queensland who spoke of large numbers of suicides.

The reason I raise this is that I think this sensationalising of an issue such as suicide and mental health is terribly negative. People deal with stress and they do it in a remarkable way, but mental health is a much more complex issue. You do not have to be under stress from a flood or to have lost your crop to suffer issues of mental health and feel suicidal. To tie mental health issues with periods of extreme stress I think is very dangerous because then funding for mental health gets tied to extreme issues, whether it be drought or flood, and it is a simplistic way of looking at a very complex issue. So I hope that as people try to grab a sensational headline they might think of the consequences of making suicide an issue to sell newspapers rather than doing the research to find out the truth behind the story.

Just recently, due to large storms in the Dumaresq Valley, we have had floods in the Macintyre and the villages of Toomelah and Boggabilla were both evacuated 120 kilometres to Moree. It was one of the largest evacuations over such a distance that we

have ever seen in this country, and I would like to compliment the people involved in that process. Moree Plains Shire Council is led very strongly by Mayor Katrina Humphries, who had a sense of the magnitude of the flood and raised the alarm early, and as a result they were very well prepared. I also compliment the people of Moree for opening their arms to the visitors to their town over that particular period of time, and the people of Boggabilla and Toomelah on the way they conducted themselves during that very stressful period. I would also like to compliment the government departments—the state department, DOCS, and the Centrelink staff in that area. We did have an issue because the people in the border towns that were evacuated to Queensland were eligible for a relocation grant but if they were relocated to Moree they were not. This was quite upsetting to some people. I have to say that it was thanks to the management and staff of Centrelink that we managed to resolve the issue at about five o'clock on Saturday afternoon and by Sunday afternoon those people were receiving financial assistance at the evacuation centre. I would like to thank the Centrelink staff for their extra effort at a particularly stressful time.

I would like to finish by complimenting the volunteers. While the flood in the Parkes electorate may not have been as sudden and as dramatic and as devastating as others, it has been a long, slow road. We have got volunteers in the west of my electorate who are giving months of their time monitoring flood levels, manning roadblocks, organising food drops to families, organising fodder drops and a whole range of other things that are going on for a very long time. So I would like to compliment the work the volunteers are doing. I would also like to compliment the work that all the councils have done as the primary organisers of immediate assistance for their communities.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Human Services and Minister for Social Inclusion) (1.14 pm)—I want to support the motion that was moved by the Prime Minister yesterday and seconded by the Leader of the Opposition that has been spoken to by a number of members on both sides yesterday and today.

As a nation we have been faced with unprecedented floods, fires and tropical Cyclone Yasi this year. This summer all Australians, those who have been directly affected and those who have not, have been confronted with the reality of just how frail and unimportant we are in the face of nature's brutal power and force.

The devastation wreaked by flood, fire and cyclone has been beyond the imaginings of most Australians. It seems not so long ago that we were faced with the tragedy of prolonged drought and yet this summer, in parts of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, parts of Tasmania and Western Australia, we have been confronted with more rain than anyone could have imagined and certainly more than we could handle.

We have often been described as a nation of extremes. I sometimes try and imagine how the rest of the world must see us when, every time they see Australia on the news, there is a fire, a flood or a cyclone, or someone is being eaten by a crocodile. Yet we, as Australians, though we struggle with these events, have developed such strong instincts and practices of resilience in the face of them.

Sadly, the natural disasters that communities across Australia have experienced this summer are not just oddities; they are not just about the power of nature. We cannot sit back and remark upon them because the toll, the cost of them, is measured in human lives and in the massive destruction to people's property and livelihoods.

We are of course most concerned about the loss of human life and the injuries that people have incurred, but we are also concerned about the communities that have been turned upside down that will take years to rebuild and the many thousands of people that have lost their homes and all of the memories that those homes contain or have lost their businesses or places of employment. Thousands of people will wear these scars for many years to come, particularly the scars of the loss of human life—the tragedy of parents losing children, children losing parents, and of partners, siblings, friends and neighbours being lost, particularly in the floods. Of course they will never be forgotten, and it is not just their immediate family and friends that will remember them; as a nation I think all of us will remember the exacting cost of this summer.

So many homes and so many memories too—I do not think anyone who has not been through a fire or a flood of this scale can possibly imagine what it is like to lose everything that reminds you of your childhood and your early years and the lives of your children. We had terrible fires in New South Wales years ago, including in the area where I grew up. So many people remarked to me at the time that, first of all, they were thankful that they had escaped safely, but when they lost their homes they mostly regretted losing family photographs and those other things that remind us of our lives together.

We have been particularly moved, I think, by the tragedies in towns like Grantham and Murphys Creek in the Lockyer Valley. On our TV screens we watched that wall of water, that inland tsunami, lay waste to those communities. As those floodwaters moved through Queensland and we saw the floods approach Brisbane, a metropolis of more than two million people, and the central business district of Ipswich disappear under the floodwaters, all of these images have

stayed with us because they indicate that these were not normal weather events that we were watching. This followed hard on the heels of the destructive floods in Central Queensland—the ones that hit Rockhampton and the surrounding region very hard.

All of the images that we have seen from around the country—from WA, Tasmania and parts of Victoria—were followed by what happened last week in Far North Queensland when tropical Cyclone Yasi bore down upon the Queensland coast. It was not any old cyclone; it was a cyclone more powerful than Hurricane Katrina which devastated New Orleans in 2005 and Cyclone Tracy which ripped through Darwin in 1974. Yet, through all of that, the bravery and the spirit of Australians has shone through. Premier Bligh in Queensland has remarked many times on the spirit of Queenslanders, and I think those of us around Australia were moved by the resilience shown in Queensland.

In 2006, after Cyclone Larry, my colleague the Treasurer told the parliament of the impact of that cyclone. He said a Queensland colleague told him:

... the one thing that does not need rebuilding is the spirit of the affected communities, because that spirit stood resolute and undamaged against Cyclone Larry.

I think that could be said about these most recent events as well: that spirit of resilience has been demonstrated in abundance in the stories of survival that we have heard.

It was inspirational to read the story of Phil and Lynne Davis who stood firm in the face of Yasi when it crossed the coast and their town of Tully Heads in Far North Queensland last week. In the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Phil said of his home:

This is still our little piece of heaven.

Phil and Lyn had somehow retained their sense of humour, judging by the sign in their

flooded front yard that said simply: 'Thanks, Yasi, for landscaping my yard.'

Ian Surawski was holidaying in Vietnam when he heard that Toowoomba had flooded. He believed that Brisbane would be next, so he hopped onto the first available flight home. The flood came much too quickly, and he arrived home to find that his house was under five metres of floodwater. Ian was lucky enough to salvage more than most, including some clothes, tools, furniture and other contents that were important to him. He said:

Most of the solid furniture was OK—any of the modern stuff fell apart though ...

There was a china cabinet that belonged to my mother...but all the china seems to be intact, and some volunteers have offered to clean it all.

I'm involved in Goodna and District Rugby League Football Club and I had 16 sets of footy jerseys, which are all being washed for me. They'll be okay. Someone else is washing some of my clothes—I don't know how many times they'll need to be washed though.

I was able to save some of my air force mementos—they're pretty important to me. We saved a selection of the footy club memorabilia—a lot of those were laminated.

Those stories of saving mementos and important objects and also the willingness of volunteers from everywhere to help in the effort have become very familiar to us over these last few weeks. We have seen emergency services personnel from all over Australia go into affected areas. We have seen police and Defence Force personnel go to affected areas, and the work they are doing is very gratefully received by the affected communities. But we have also seen volunteers rush to offer assistance of any type—shovelling mud, cleaning up people's houses, sandbagging and trying to prevent inundation before the floods approached in situations where communities had some warning.

I also want to pay tribute to the volunteers for their bravery and their spirit in helping their fellow Australians. I want to pay particular tribute to the outstanding work of Centrelink and its staff in responding to the succession of natural disasters that we have experienced this summer. I commend Centrelink across the board, from the Chief Executive Officer, Carolyn Hogg, and her first-class deputy, Grant Tidswell, through to all the customer service officers who have been involved in the emergency response this summer. Your work has been outstanding.

Centrelink sometimes cops a bit of criticism and it is all too seldom praised for the phenomenal work it does on behalf of all Australians. We should be grateful as a nation that we are able to mobilise our emergency response so quickly. Centrelink has been central to these efforts. Centrelink was able to deploy hundreds of staff within days to flood affected areas to start providing assistance to those flood affected communities. At the height of the flooding across three states—Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales—over 300 extra staff were working in emergency and recovery centres, assisting people with processing payments, doing outreach work, offering social workers and counselling, and making sure that people were getting the financial assistance they needed immediately and the longer-term assistance they needed to rebuild their lives.

It is very important to paint a picture of where these staff were. They were doing work in emergency centres, in recovery centres, in school halls, in church halls and at card tables in shopping centre strips right across the affected communities. In particularly badly affected areas they were going door to door. They were knocking on people's doors, seeing whether there was anyone home and seeing whether they needed assistance. I just cannot speak highly enough of that effort, and members of parliament on

both sides have told me how important those efforts were in their own communities. Experienced Centrelink staff flew in from all over the country to help with the efforts, and many staff now remain in Queensland helping the victims of tropical cyclone Yasi. In total, more than 2,500 Centrelink staff across the nation have been working on the processing of payments for people affected by disasters. There have been staff in call centres across the nation: in places like Newcastle, Geelong—which has a 24-hour call centre—Brisbane, Perth and La Trobe, all doing their bit to help people in flood affected areas.

There have also been people from other agencies: Medicare, the Child Support Agency, the Australian Taxation Office, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the Fair Work Ombudsman—all of them experienced at answering complex inquiries from people who are very distressed. They have been volunteering to work on the Centrelink phone lines to help at this most difficult time.

Centrelink fielded 500,000 calls over the first couple of weeks of January in relation to the floods. At one stage, calls to the emergency hotline were consistently numbering between 30,000 and 40,000 a day. Those calls were translating into often more than 30,000 applications for financial assistance in a day. It is difficult to get an idea of the magnitude of the task of answering all of those calls—giving the correct information, helping people to put in applications for financial assistance and then making sure that the money hit their bank accounts, in many cases within 24 hours and in most cases within 48 hours. Centrelink has processed more than 460,000 claims and has paid \$545 million worth of Australian government disaster recovery payments so far. It has processed 44,000 claims and paid over \$19 million worth of disaster income recovery subsidies.

This task is monumental, and I really want to again congratulate the staff of all of the agencies involved, and I congratulate Centrelink for its leadership in processing nearly half a million claims for assistance and paying out over half a billion dollars. In addition to this, Centrelink has also had its 'business as usual' work to do—delivering services to millions of Australians every working day. In all of that, many of the staff of Centrelink were themselves affected. Many of their own homes and families were affected by the floods in Queensland in particular. One Centrelink staff member had a very narrow escape when her car was caught in a flash flood near Ipswich in the middle of the night. She had been driving on a dark, rural road to collect her father as floodwaters were threatening his farmhouse. Her car was hit by the flash flood and quickly floated downstream and began filling with water. With her mobile phone between her teeth, she climbed into the water. Despite the powerful floodwaters, she managed to swim to safety. She had loaded all of her important possessions into her car because she thought her house was about to go under. She now had absolutely nothing. The next day, with her house inundated and wearing borrowed clothes, she walked seven kilometres to go to work. She had decided that her own flooded house could wait a while and, in the meantime, she would go to work and get on with the job of helping others.

It is no wonder that Phillip Coorey in the *Sydney Morning Herald* described the government's response to the floods as 'the flawless rollout of a disaster plan, including emergency Centrelink payments and mobilisation of the military'. I am very proud to be the Minister for Human Services at a time when Centrelink has played such a significant role in helping individuals, families and their communities as part of the government's response to the summer disasters.

Centrelink staff across Australia worked evenings and weekends to take calls from flood victims, to process their claims and to offer counselling to those who wanted it. During all of that time, many agency staff were flooded out of their own homes and offices but continued to work. I am proud of these staff and their contribution. They and their colleagues should be equally proud.

I wish all Australians affected by natural disasters this summer the very best in their efforts to rebuild and recover. I sincerely hope that they and their communities can return their lives to something like normality as quickly as possible. Of course, for those who have lost family and friends, life will never be the same, and the thoughts of all Australians are with you today and always.

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (1.31 pm)—I stand today following a whole host of members whose electorates and, moreover, the people they represent, have been flood affected over recent months. I say ‘affected’ rather than ‘damaged’ because, even though many individuals, many families and many businesses did not endure, as some sadly did, walls of water rushing through their homes and shops, everyone in some regions has been affected in some way or other by the terrible events. Every state has experienced the devastating effects of the floods. Some were not as widely reported as others but that is not to say certain people in areas which did not make the national news were spared.

The member for Braddon, Sid Sidebottom, my colleague on the Standing Committee on Regional Australia, conducting an inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in regional Australia, had to take leave of our recent tour to return to his Tasmanian home to sandbag his house and, I am sure, to help out others while he was there. The member for Wannon, Dan

Tehan, and the member for Capricornia, Kirsten Livermore, were not even able to make the tour, such was the extent of flooding in their respective Victorian and Queensland electorates.

It seemed almost incongruous for a committee to be going from regional town to regional town to discuss ways to save water and hear plausible arguments as to why water should not be taken from farming communities, when the nation was inundated with the worst flooding since 1974. The flooding in Queensland was especially disastrous. The rain came and kept coming, and as it moved south a trail of destruction and, unfortunately, death was left behind.

The images of a four-wheel drive being swept along a Toowoomba street when flash flooding hit the city on 10 January are implanted in Australians’ memories. This image spread around the world. Few could believe what they saw. This was nature at its very worst. To then learn that the Brisbane River would spill its banks too shocked the nation and the state even further.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been affected by these floods. They have lost their homes, their pets and their income and some, tragically, have lost their loved ones. Material possessions can be replaced, even if it is hard to accept that treasured mementos are gone forever. Livelihoods can be rebuilt. But the loss of human life is precious, as we all know. This is a flood which will never be forgotten.

As people start to repair and rebuild their homes and businesses, some will be trying to repair and rebuild their families as they move on from this tragic event. Australians are resilient people; we knuckle down and get on with the job and, when times are tough, we put our shoulders back and chins up and find a way through. Queenslanders will do this, as

will those from other states, but it will take time.

Many people are saying now is not the time to discuss options to prevent future flooding. But if we keep putting this off then it will end up in the too-hard basket or be forgotten until next time a disaster strikes. We cannot and must not let this happen. To mitigate further flooding, possibly save lives and certainly store water, Australia's water storage infrastructure must be improved. Flooding affects people's livelihoods. We should be doing everything and anything possible to stop flooding such as this occurring again.

No new major dams have been built in nearly a quarter of a century. In the Murray-Darling Basin, the last significant dam constructed was the Dartmouth in north-east Victoria way back in the 1970s. Dartmouth's capacity is 3,906 gegalitres, similar to the amount the Murray-Darling Basin Authority declared in its controversial guide is now needed to be taken from the system for the environment. When proposals for dams are presented they are usually dashed by environmental concerns. In fact, since it was created after the 2007 election, Infrastructure Australia has not received a single proposal for a dam to be built. Dams offer more than just water storage; they are a potential source of emissions-free electricity and they are an important addition to food security. Dr Barry Croke, from the Australian National University, is a water catchment expert and says dams help to 'delay, lower and broaden' the impact of floodwaters on urban settlements. He says that, without the Wivenhoe Dam, floodwaters would have flowed into Brisbane much faster, with a higher peak occurring earlier. It is time the social benefits to communities are put before the environment and it is time we shake off our dam phobia.

By no means as severe as the Queensland floods, my electorate of Riverina was also affected by flooding as 2010 drew to a close. For the past decade the Riverina has been devastated by drought and most farmers, not only in my electorate but everywhere else too, lost millions of dollars worth of livestock and crops. Families suffered, properties were sold and, in some overwhelming circumstances, lives were lost. Finally, in the autumn months, prayers were answered. The skies opened and the drought was broken. Farmers started preparing themselves for a high-yielding bumper season, a season which would hopefully start to pay off some of their ever-increasing bank debt.

Livestock farmers were breaking records week after week and crop farmers were sowing soil wet enough to grow great crops yet dry enough for them to succeed. However, by 15 October, the rain had not stopped. The Riverina was fast exceeding its need for water. In my electorate, properties in Adelong, Collingullie, Tarcutta, Tooma, Tumbarumba and Uranquinty fared the worst. Towards the end of November, it was estimated that \$500 million was wiped off the value of the \$3.2 billion New South Wales harvest; however, the rain and the flooding continued over the first weekend of December, making the damage bill much higher. Most crops around the Riverina, be it wheat, lucerne, lupin or canola, were either lost or severely depleted in value. By mid-December, the situation had become so dire, districts in my electorate were placed on the natural disaster list, homes were evacuated, livestock was drowning and crops were under water. But the cruelest cut of all was the realisation that what was meant to be a bumper crop was not going to happen.

On 14 December, federal opposition leader, Tony Abbott, Leader of the Nationals, Warren Truss, and shadow minister for agriculture, John Cobb, visited the Riverina to

inspect flood damaged crops. Mr Abbott, Mr Truss and Mr Cobb embarked on a tour of properties west of Wagga Wagga near the village of Collingullie. The first property they inspected, owned by Adam Jenkins, once grew lucerne and soybeans, but with the current conditions and floodwater his crops were under water—a loss of \$100,000 in soybeans alone.

We then went across the road to the ‘Maroubra Park’ property of John and Anna Dennis and their sons. They are wheat and lupin growers. They had a wheat crop to strip. Its initial value of more than \$300 a tonne was depleted by 14 December to significantly less, with the quality downgraded to mere feed wheat. Mr Dennis also had a paddock of lupins which was suffering from rain induced fungal disease. He was not alone. You can understand why farmers must have been thinking of those immortal words of Hanrahan in John O’Brien’s—or Father Patrick Joseph Hartigan’s—famous poem, ‘We’ll all be rooned if this rain doesn’t stop’.

Many New South Wales farmers hardest hit by torrential rain, which has downgraded the value of their crops, are about to have their exceptional circumstances relief payments containing the much-needed interest rate subsidy provision terminated next month. This program helped save them in the drought and is needed more than ever now and into the future. I was gratified to see the Prime Minister nod her head in understanding and agreement when Nationals leader Mr Truss raised this during his speech yesterday, and I would ask the government to consider extending these EC provisions. Farmers in Queensland have lost crops too and need support. Without these crops farmers were relying on, many will be hard pressed to find money to put food on the table, plant a crop next season or even meet loan repayments. The destruction of that state in a matter of days was unbelievable, and we must be pre-

pared to do whatever we can to help circumvent any such devastation again.

The December flooding of the Murrumbidgee River would have been far worse but for the wonderful efforts of our local defence personnel as well as various organisations, including the magnificent State Emergency Services and the Wagga Wagga Rescue Squad. The speed with which the councils and police in my electorate sprang into action was to be commended. On the very night our local Wagga Wagga Rescue Squad, from which the New South Wales Volunteer Rescue Association was formed, was commemorating its 60th anniversary, many of its members were doing what they could to help save the city from rising floodwaters. Sandbags were hastily made and installed where necessary, levee banks were strengthened, people were mobilised, communities at risk were evacuated and, unlike the flash floods of a few weeks earlier in smaller regional valleys, the floodwaters came and went without breaking the levees and without causing too much heartache or damage to urban areas.

We have heard stories of heroism, stoicism and resilience; the Australian spirit at its best. There are many tales of mateship, individual bravery and effort in the face of unimaginable loss. We heard yesterday in this House, the member for Wright, Scott Buchholz, and the member for Groom, Ian Macfarlane, among others, speak emotionally about their personal experience of some of those people in their own seats, stories which have moved a nation to tears. I would like to mention one of my constituents who has made a real difference in these tragic times and who has, as have many others, gone above and beyond what would normally be expected of a person in his position. James McTavish, formerly second in command at 1st Recruit Training Battalion at Kapooka Army Base near Wagga Wagga, is

now SES regional controller at Wagga Wagga. He coordinated the city-saving flood efforts at Wagga Wagga and he is still in Queensland as task force commander overseeing New South Wales SES teams.

Speaking of my local SES, a group of volunteers from the Riverina will return to their homes today, having put in many hours in the clean-up efforts. Another group went to do what they could yesterday. Tens of thousands of dollars have been raised in the Riverina to support Queensland Premier Anna Bligh's flood appeal.

The events of recent times show again the ageless cycle of nature, floods following droughts. This is not climate change. This is not—as one elected to this place who should know better ridiculously and inappropriately suggested—the fault of the coal industry. This is Australia, a continent of contrast and extremes, a very beautiful yet very harsh land. Australia can throw up its worst in a short space of time—bushfires, cyclones, floods, droughts, storms—but nothing can weaken the resolve of our people. I offer my condolences, and those of all in the Riverina, to those who have suffered the most in these floods. As a nation we will rebuild and we will survive, but we will not forget.

Mrs D'ATH (Petrie) (1.42 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the Prime Minister's condolence motion. I will start by giving my condolences and the condolences of people across my community to those who have lost family members and loved ones in these terrible floods. When we talk about the floods, we are not just talking about those that hit South-East Queensland in early January; we are also talking about the floods that affected the whole of Queensland over the Christmas period and many towns throughout New South Wales and Victoria. We have also seen Cyclone Yasi—a cyclone of epic proportions, the like of which we have not seen in our

history—hit North and Far North Queensland, and in the past week we have seen terrible fires hit Perth resulting in the loss of many homes.

These are certainly tragic circumstances and ones we should reflect on. Many lives have been cut short, many young lives that were yet to start. Our hearts go out to those lost ones and to all of those who are grieving and who will grieve for a long time to come. In this the first week of parliament for 2011, we also reflect on the second anniversary of the Black Saturday fires that hit Victoria. That too is a reminder of what this country can throw at us. We have seen the worst over the last few weeks and we have seen the best. I thought it best, in trying to put ourselves in the shoes of someone who has lost everything, to read the words of someone who has been affected by the floods in the Lockyer Valley but, considering the time, I am not inclined to start those words. I await an opportunity to read those words at a later time.

Debate interrupted.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Sudan

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (1.45 pm)—Yesterday, official results were announced. There has been an overwhelming vote for South Sudanese independence. The global ballot saw almost 99 per cent of voters opting for secession. This is a historic achievement for the South Sudanese community in my electorate of Melbourne and other parts of Australia, who played a crucial role in this referendum. My office has been working very closely with the South Sudanese community in my electorate and I want to congratulate the organisers for their tireless efforts over the past months.

Many people have been part of this work—too many to mention—but I want to acknowledge the hard work of Akoch Man-

hiem from the Sudanese Lost Boys Association, Barnabas Bol Kout, Ambrose Mareng and Majok Abian of the South Sudanese Community Organisation of Australia and the Humanitarian Crisis Hub. Their work was crucial to the outcome.

It is now vital that Australia join with the international community in recognising this new nation-state. It will be important that friends of South Sudan continue to lend a hand in the coming months and ensure that the next steps towards independence can be taken. For my part, I will continue to work with the community in my electorate as the process towards independence continues. I know the Sudanese community in my electorate would like to thank the government for its support in helping them vote and contributing to the costs of the referendum in Sudan. It is a salutary reminder of why we should not cut our foreign aid budget to Africa. In particular, I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs for his assistance in helping make available funds for voters to travel to polling centres.

Indonesia

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (1.47 pm)—In the late 1970s I attended primary school in Banda Aceh. I was there because my father was working on an AusAID project to improve education in Indonesia. At the same time, Indonesian education was improving me. As the only white child in my class, I came to appreciate perspectives and cultures quite different from my own. The power of stories and songs, an understanding of geography and history are things that stay with me still.

For Indonesia, as for Australia, education is the best anti-poverty tool we have developed. A wealth of evidence now shows that education raises wages and increases participation in the democratic process. Better educated citizens are healthier and their children

receive many of these benefits too. Yet while Australia has for decades been a partner in improving the Indonesian education system, that bipartisan consensus now threatens to crack. Fuelled by some of the most reactionary groups in Australia, a campaign has been afoot to say that when floods hit Australia we should stop assisting others. This kind of inward looking approach will directly harm thousands of Indonesian children. But it will also harm our national interest, which is in engagement, not autarky. Our nation is not so poor—in finances or national spirit—that we must choose between rebuilding the damage done by the floods and being a good neighbour. (*Time expired*)

Queensland Floods

Ms LEY (Farrer) (1.48 pm)—This morning my office attended a briefing by officials of Emergency Management Australia. I thank the Attorney-General and Minister for Human Services for ensuring that local members are being kept up to date with the federal response to the recent emergencies and disasters.

It struck me yesterday, during the often heartbreaking recounts of these events by my colleagues, the number of times the insurance industry was mentioned as a semipermanent or permanent obstacle in the overall recovery effort. I acknowledge insurers are now coming to realise that the wording of their policies does need to reflect the reality of a flood event, and that a person's home is damaged whether the water comes from the sky or elsewhere. I also ask, after numerous examples in my own electorate of Farrer, that insurers look at their social conscience with regard to the human beings who make these claims.

I wondered, too, why a customer who phoned their insurer was knocked back, yet when their local MP called on their behalf the claim was suddenly approved. In a num-

ber of cases in my region insurers reluctantly agreed to pay out on someone's contents but not that same person's home. The insurers alleged the property had been poorly maintained or not kept up to scratch.

The insurance industry self-analysis needs to be full and thorough, and reflect what should be their core business: assisting real people in their real time of need.

Whittlesea Country Music Festival

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (1.50 pm)—This weekend we celebrate the exciting Whittlesea Country Music Festival. This annual celebration brings the cream of Australian country music and all things country to the historic township of Whittlesea. It is a great local tradition in my community and it returns, bringing the community together, including those affected by the Black Saturday bushfires.

The festival has become a symbolic event for my communities following the cancellation of the festival in February 2009 due to the impacts of the fires. The showgrounds that were to be used for the festival became a staging ground for emergency service vehicles. In the years that have followed, the volunteer organisers of the Whittlesea Country Music Festival have worked extremely hard to ensure this long, proud tradition in the township continues.

It is a time when we will celebrate our strength, determination and courage and come together and enjoy the best that Australian country music has to offer. The continuation of the show is a testament to the dedication of the many locals who drive and grow this fantastic event. Beginning on 11 February we will have three days of country music, with more than 40 acts performing at many venues including the Saturday street party. There will be acts from top performers, including Shannon Noll, Beccy Cole, Steve Forde, the Sunny Cowgirls, Harmony

James, Pete Denahy, Steve Eales and many more

Over the weekend there is plenty to do and see for you and your family and friends, with things like the famous street party, many local gigs, the Victorian and National Country Music Awards and the famous truck and ute show. There will be lots of local produce to try and enjoy. It is a great event and I encourage all members to make their way down and enjoy what Whittlesea has to offer this weekend. *(Time expired)*

Broadband

Mr HAASE (Durack) (1.51 pm)—As the member for Durack, which covers 63 per cent of Western Australia—about one-quarter of this nation—I rise to speak today about some equity for the bush. We are now listening to a government talking about the NBN providing an incredible service to city dwellers, while my mob still cannot use the simple, popular, common mobile phone. I have black spots around my electorate that you would not believe. Highway 1 runs around Australia, including through my electorate, for some 2,000 kilometres and yet for hundreds of kilometres at a time on that very popular and major highway there is no mobile coverage. This causes amazing problems for emergency responses to horrendous accidents. There are mining companies aplenty each side of that highway. The number of black spots for mobile coverage is inexcusable and something must be done. Very reasonable, hardworking people who pay their taxes and expect to get the same services in my electorate that they get in the cities around this nation deserve recognition. It is costly, but it is equitable to do so, and it is certainly time that a caring government that cares in times of natural crises also cares for my people in times of emergency. *(Time expired)*

Queensland Floods

Mr LYONS (Bass) (1.53 pm)—I would like to commend the efforts of my constituents in Bass for their generosity in donating to the Queensland flood appeal. Many fantastic events have been organised in a short amount of time, including barbeques, cocktail parties, auctions and concerts just to name a few. I have even found myself playing cricket—the first time since primary school—tennis and other sports at events.

The staff of the Launceston branch of Westpac hosted a barbeque and invited me to cook sausages. We raised \$800 at that event, and that was matched by Westpac, so we were able to send a donation of \$1,600 to Queensland families. A gala cocktail party was pulled together in less than a fortnight and we raised about \$50 000, which was matched by the Tasmanian government, so we were able to donate \$100,000 to the flood appeal. Indeed, the generosity of all Australians, and particularly those in Bass, helps our mates in Queensland in the aftermath of the flooding. They should be commended.

Dairy Industry

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (1.54 pm)—I rise today to talk on dairy pricing, and I do so with a daughter of dairy farmers from Timboon in the gallery. She was a winner of one of the Heywire competitions. I congratulate her on that.

Western Victoria is Australia's largest dairy producing region. The 1,500 dairy farmers in western Victoria currently produce nearly one-quarter of Australia's total milk production. The dairy industry provides about 6,000 jobs in the region and accounts for about one-third of the region's economic activity. A recent WestVic Dairy report has set a realistic target for growth in the industry from current levels of 2.1 billion litres up to three billion litres by 2020. The four main drivers of this growth will be increasing the

herd size, establishing new farms, keeping farmers in the industry and increasing milk yields. The only way we can encourage this growth, or even sustain current production levels in the dairy industry, is to ensure that our farmers get a proper return. This will not happen if this discounting war continues. I call on both major supermarkets to stop this race to the bottom. Over time these unsustainable prices will lead to our farmers being paid less than the cost of production for their milk, and it will lead to many dairy farmers walking away from the industry. Forget about growth; it will end up reducing our farmers and the jobs they provide. (*Time expired*)

Skilleroos

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (1.56 pm)—I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate a Throsby constituent from Port Kembla, Mr Guy Brooks, who has recently been selected to represent the Team Australia Skilleroos at the International WorldSkills competition in London in 2011. The Skilleroos are 30 of Australia's elite, young skilled workforce champions who will train for the next 10 months to be competition ready.

WorldSkills is the world's largest international skills competition where young people from across the globe compete to become the 'best of the best' in their chosen skill. Australia's Skilleroos will be represented in 27 different skill categories, with Guy Brooks competing in the category of welding. Australia has competed at every competition since 1988 and is currently ranked fifth in the world. The Gillard Labor government is investing \$1.3 million a year to 2010-11 in WorldSkills Australia, and it is great to see young Australians like Guy Brooks leading the way by being part of the highly skilled future our economy needs.

Economy

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (1.57 pm)—The men and women of Australia's small-business community work hard, they take risks and they create jobs right across our economy. They should not be burdened with the unnecessary cost and red tape compliance obligation of administering the government's Paid Parental Leave scheme. The government has continually failed to come up with any compelling reason whatsoever for forcing employers to take on this pointless PPL pay clerk responsibility. Small businesses in particular know that this imposition by the government, for no good reason, backed by no factual evidence, will give them increased red tape and increased costs in revising their pay systems. They have to reconcile and receive the government's instalments and then pass on the payments—all because, apparently, the government believes that on an electronic funds transfer statement it might say 'maternity leave' and the eligible recipients will immediately know that they are more closely connected to their employer. What a nonsense.

But I thank the ACTU for finally belling the cat. Yesterday in their press release they said:

Passing the coalition's private member's bill would make it more difficult for employers who would like to top up the 18-week payment.

I then turn to an internal ACTU circular where the justifications for the campaign are clear: 'The bill will also restrict union capacity to improve and enforce paid parental leave in the workplace.' The test of this House tomorrow is whether we look after the small businesses, or this government is compliant with an industrial relations campaign that— (*Time expired*)

Ms Anne Mann

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (1.59 pm)—I rise today to speak about a wonderful woman in my electorate, Anne Mann of Oxley. Anne is the founder of the Young at Heart Seniors Group in Erindale. This self-funded group started eight years ago to give local seniors a place to get to know each other and it meets every Wednesday at the local Erindale church.

From humble beginnings, with just 18 people at that first meeting, the group has flourished and now boasts 80 members. Anne is also responsible for organising affordable two- or three-day getaway trips to nearby areas such as the south coast and day trips to Canberra events and institutions such as Floriade. The group is popular among seniors in my local community—to the point that even when it decided to take a five-week break over the Christmas holidays, 15 members continued to meet and mingle at a cafe in the Erindale shopping centre each week. Members of the Young at Heart Seniors group have described Anne Mann as an 'absolute asset' and a 'trooper'.

DEPARTMENT OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 pm, in accordance with standing order 43, the time for member's statements has concluded. I advise members of recent movements in senior staff in the Department of the House of Representatives. Ms Robyn McClelland has taken up duties as the Sergeant-at-Arms and Ms Claressa Surtees has taken up duties as the Clerk Assistant (Table).

CHRISTMAS ISLAND

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—I rise on indulgence to acknowledge the tragic loss of lives which occurred when a vessel known as SIEV221 sunk just off Christmas Island on 15 December last year. That boat came to grief on a very rocky

shoreline in very dangerous and difficult seas. Forty two people survived the wreck—41 were rescued and one man managed to swim ashore by himself.

The 41 who were rescued were rescued because of the outstanding professionalism of our nation's Customs and Border Protection Command and also the courage shown by Christmas Island residents as they rallied to save lives. I pay tribute to each of them today. They responded instinctively to what is the oldest law of the sea—that is, that you have a duty to rescue those who are in peril—and they did so fearlessly. Forty one people are alive today because of their courage.

At least 30 people died that morning and there are an unknown number who are missing and presumed dead. Whatever one's views they were fellow human beings, men, women and children, whose lives were lost on our shores in a tragic accident. We acknowledge the circumstances of their passing with sadness and with respect.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (2.03 pm)—I rise to join the Prime Minister in expressing the House's deep regret for the tragedy that took place just after dawn on 15 December when an unseaworthy boat carrying about 90 people smashed onto the rocks of Christmas Island. Islanders woke to the screams of men, women and children and, as Australians do, many of them scarpered down those cliffs to try to help. Naval and Customs personnel also put themselves at risk to save lives.

Forty two people were saved, 30 bodies were recovered and we cannot be sure how many others perished. It was the wrong place, the wrong time and the wrong thing, but I suppose people cannot be faulted for thinking that Australia would be the best place for them to live. If anyone is to blame for this tragedy, it is the people smugglers.

Certainly, it is not the Customs and naval personnel, who did what they could in difficult circumstances to help.

This tragedy should strengthen our resolve to do whatever we can to deny the people smugglers a product to sell. We do not agree in this parliament on how to stop the boats, but we certainly do agree this is a terrible tragedy and we must do everything we can to try to avoid any repetition.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Australian Natural Disasters

Mr ABBOTT (2.03 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind the Prime Minister that after Cyclone Larry the government made available concessional loans of up to half a million dollars for storm affected businesses to help them to recover and to continue to employ their staff. I ask: has the government considered increasing the maximum concessional loan to this amount?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Following the cyclone, I talked to people as best I could on what was a difficult day of weather so that we could not get as far as we would have liked to on our journey in the helicopter. Even on the occasions when I was out on the ground, it was raised with me that there were other forms of assistance following Cyclone Larry. They were some special forms of assistance for the banana industry and there were other producers in the region including those who produce exotic fruits—lychees and those kinds of things—that raised questions of special assistance with me.

The answer to the Leader of the Opposition's question is that we have at this stage, working with the Queensland government, triggered the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements, which include concessional loans of up to \$250,000 for small businesses and primary producers. It also triggers other forms of assistance for small busi-

nesses and primary producers including clean-up money. It also triggers, and we have triggered, the ability to use income support recovery payments so that people who cannot ply their ordinary trade and go to work or small businesses or farmers who cannot get their ordinary income because of the disaster are entitled to some payments.

The government believes it will have to work with the Queensland government and the local community on a package that recognises the special characteristics of this region hit by the cyclone. We have commenced some of those discussions with the Queensland government. Their ability to consult communities on how this should be best done has been constrained just by the physical logistics of (1) bad weather (2) a lot of damage and (3) turning their efforts first to the provision of food, water, shelter and trying to open up blocked transport routes so that supplies can continue to get through. But as the efforts move from that immediate humanitarian work we will do the consultations necessary with Queensland and with the local community to see how we can best structure future arrangements to meet the special needs of this region.

Australian Natural Disasters

Ms LIVERMORE (2.06 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister outline the government's response to recent natural disasters, particularly in my community of Rockhampton?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Capricornia for her question. She was one of a number of members who had the opportunity yesterday in the House to share their reflections on the summer of disasters that we have all shared and her reflections from her local community. I did have the opportunity to visit with her in Rockhampton. They are very stoic people. They were very well prepared. They were isolated for a very long

period of time. But as we started the process yesterday of sharing some reflections—and we will continue to do that during the course of this week and beyond—it is also important to reflect on the way in which Australians got in to help each other. They did not need to be told; they did not need to be asked. They just got in to help each other, and they obviously expected that government would do the same.

Consequently, we have got in to help people as these natural disasters have unfolded. I can advise the House—and these figures are accurate as at 3 February—that we have already granted 38,000 claims totalling \$17 million in disaster income recovery subsidy. We have also accepted 350,000 claims, granting a total of \$421 million under the Australian government disaster recovery payment—that is, the emergency money that people can get. Referring, too, to the Leader of the Opposition's question to me just a few moments ago, we are already seeing take-up of clean-up and recovery grants for small businesses and primary producers: 925 clean-up and recovery grants have been granted in Queensland, totalling \$4.5 million; and 237 clean-up and recovery grants have gone to small businesses and primary producers in New South Wales, totalling \$3.5 million. We have also seen uptake under the emergency assistance provisions of the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements, the personal hardship and distress assistance, in the order of \$13 million. We are dealing with 7,560 applications to date for essential household contents in Queensland and 1,986 applications to date for assistance with people's dwellings.

The government responded quickly to make this emergency assistance available because it was needed. We have responded quickly, too, to make the decisions that are necessary to support rebuilding. The nation is looking to us to make the decisions neces-

sary to enable us to rebuild in Queensland and around the nation. That is why I announce that the government will invest at least \$5.6 billion in rebuilding. That figure has been drawn from preliminary estimates. We will do that by making space in the federal budget, by reprioritising and reprofiling infrastructure, and also by asking Australians to make a contribution. I believe Australians do want to assist those who have been affected by these natural disasters. We will be asking Australians to make that contribution through the levy that I have announced. Every dollar collected in that levy is matched by \$2 that has been made available in cut-backs through the government's budget, and we have reprofiled infrastructure not only to make money available but to ensure that we are not pressing and creating additional capacity constraints as the nation tries to rebuild. This is the right package when the nation is looking to us to make the right decisions in this parliament in the national interest.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.10 pm)—Order! Before calling the member for Dunkley, I inform honourable members that we have in the gallery this afternoon this year's participants in the Heywire Youth Issues Forum. I warmly welcome them on behalf of members and wish them well in their deliberations this week.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Australian Natural Disasters

Mr BILLSON (2.11 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. While the government is offering concessional loans to small businesses damaged by floods and the cyclone, it is offering no assistance to the thousands of small businesses affected financially but not physically. Small businesses such as tourism operators, trucking companies and

shopkeepers in cut-off towns are suffering from a serious loss of income and their workers are at risk of losing their livelihoods. Will the Prime Minister consider taking up the opposition's constructive policy proposal to extend \$100,000 concessional loans to these businesses so they can get back on their feet and keep local people employed?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question and indicate, in part, the answer that I gave the Leader of the Opposition. I do want to be clear with the parliament about the ability of people to apply for the disaster income subsidy arrangement—that is, the arrangement for 13 weeks of assistance if people are not able to go about their ordinary trade because of circumstances like being cut off by floodwaters. The assistance that the government is already providing is not quite as confined as the way the member phrased his question. I do not seek to make a big issue of that, but I did not want anybody to be confused about the circumstances in which you can get that recovery payment. That does flow, for example, when people have been cut off and are simply unable for some period of time to get to their ordinary place of work.

Can I reiterate what I said to the Leader of the Opposition. We understand that there are impacts broadly in the regions that have been hit by these disasters. We particularly understand that in the region hit by the cyclone. I have seen it from the air myself: acres and acres as far as the eye can see with every tree snapped in half and consequently all of the loss of production that that is going to mean for banana growers and the like. I have seen that damage and I do understand that that will press on people. But we do want to design any additional assistance both in consultation with the Queensland government—because under our Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements we work in

partnership on the recovery—and in consultation with the local community.

On the package available under Cyclone Larry, even in the few hours I was in the region last Friday and able to talk to people, I had people give me feedback that they thought it was a good package and it worked for them. I had one person give me feedback that it had not worked for her and her business. When you get that kind of feedback, you obviously do want to do the consultation that will enable you to structure assistance so that we can best work with local needs and make a difference to them.

Australian Natural Disasters

Mr RIPOLL (2.14 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. What action is the government taking to rebuild my community and how will the government ensure that we get value for money?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Oxley for his question. Of course he and the area he represents were very much affected by floodwaters; indeed, the member for Oxley's electorate office was flooded, meaning that he needed to keep working, representing his community and assisting them during this natural disaster, whilst dealing with a natural disaster in his own electorate office. I am sure everybody wishes him well as he recovers from that. I think we can all imagine what it would be like to have our office cut off and full of floodwaters as we were trying to go about assisting our community at the same time.

To the member for Oxley I can say the following: we have the right plan to rebuild the nation as it recovers from this devastating summer. We have found savings within the budget and we have taken the tough decisions we need in order to make those savings available to support rebuilding. The rest we are asking Australians to share. We are asking Australians to share through a one-off

temporary levy. I do note—and people should—that the levy is one-off and temporary. It will last for one year and one year precisely. The vast majority of Australian taxpayers will be asked for less than a dollar a week. People with income of \$50,000 and under will not be asked to contribute at all. We have also rephased infrastructure. We have done that in consultation with state governments because we need to make sure that, as well as having the money to rebuild, we have the skills necessary to rebuild—the necessary skilled workers available to get out there and do the construction that we need. Consequently, rephasing infrastructure is not just about government expenditure. It is also about capacity constraints and making sure that we are making available the skilled labour we need. We have also taken some decisions in relation to skilled migration and in relation to unemployed Australians and getting them where they can get a job rebuilding from these devastating natural disasters around the country.

I am asked about value for money, and I want to make sure that every taxpayer dollar gets value for money and does the most work. That is why we are ensuring that at every level there is clear accountability and value for money. First, we are creating a reconstruction inspectorate, and I thank former New South Wales Premier and former federal Minister for Finance and Administration John Fahey for taking my invitation to chair that reconstruction inspectorate.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—It is obviously a very popular choice in the parliament! He will be joined by Martin Albrecht, a former managing director of Thiess, and he will also be joined by Matt Sheerin, who leads the Queensland audit practice of the global firm Deloitte. In addition, we have two very high quality nominees on the board of the Queen-

sland reconstruction authority: Mr Brad Or-gill, a former chair and CEO of UBS Australia and the person who oversaw the BER implementation taskforce; and Glenys Beauchamp, the Secretary of the Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government. We have made Major General Mick Slater available to chair the reconstruction authority. We will also have a national partnership agreement with clear accountabilities for expenditure. We will make sure that expenditure and statements are certified by the Auditor-General before payments are made. It is my intention to make sure through these arrangements that we are deriving value for money as we rebuild from the devastating summer that has been.

Flood Levy

Mr HOCKEY (2.18 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. How many Australians will have to pay the flood levy and how many Australians who would normally be responsible for paying the flood levy will not have to because of specific circumstances?

Mr SWAN—I thank the Shadow Treasurer for this very important question. It really goes to the core of who will pay this levy and who will not. We know, for example, that everybody under \$50,000 will not pay this levy. We also know that those over \$100,000 will pay more. We also know that those that are receiving payments under our disaster relief arrangements—

Mr Dutton—What about the figures?

Mr SWAN—I am going through them. We also know that those that are receiving payments under our disaster relief arrangements—those adults that have received the \$1,000 and those with children the \$400—will not be paying that amount of money. I cannot tell you how many of those there are. I cannot tell you, but the Prime Minister before did give you a quantum. Of course we

cannot give you a final figure about that. I am more than happy to provide you with estimates later on. I cannot give you a final figure and neither is it realistic to give one. But this levy will raise \$1.8 billion and it will be predominantly raised by those on higher incomes. It will be predominantly raised by people like the shadow Treasurer and me. That is where the great bulk of the revenue will come from. About 50 per cent of it will come from higher income earners. Of course, those under \$50,000 will not pay anything at all. We will exempt those that have received the disaster payments in Queensland. We will exempt them in Victoria, in northern New South Wales, in Western Australia and elsewhere in the country.

Mr HOCKEY—Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. To the Treasurer again: given that the government estimates are that it will raise approximately \$1.8 billion from the flood levy, exactly how many people does the Treasury estimate will have to pay the levy.

Mr SWAN—I am happy to provide the answer from the Treasury after question time.

Child Care

Mr CROOK (2.22 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare. Will the government review its decision to cut funding for neighbourhood model occasional care centres, leaving some communities in regional Western Australia with no childcare option?

Ms KATE ELLIS—I thank the member for O'Connor for his question. I am always delighted to talk about this government's record when it comes to funding child care and early childhood education. As the member may be aware, we have, over the course of our government, massively increased funding in this area—in fact, to more than double the level that the Howard government

spent—with over \$18 billion to be spent over the next four years on early childhood education and care.

Having said that, the member is quite right that this has been not just a massive increase in spending but also a reform process. What that has meant is that there are areas that the federal government was previously funding that are now being left to the states. Equally there are areas that previously the state governments were funding that the federal government is stepping in on. To give an example of this, funding of \$12.6 million on neighbourhood model occasional care centres has been ceased by the Commonwealth government, but in place of that there is \$955 million which is now being spent by the federal government on universal access to preschool, an area which the states were previously left to fund 100 per cent.

To put this in context, in 2009-10 Commonwealth funding for Western Australian neighbourhood model occasional care was some \$423,000. Now forgoing that, the Western Australian government is receiving \$98 million when it comes to Commonwealth funding for kindergartens. So we have had an extreme reform process and we have massively increased funding in these areas, but there has been a shake-up of responsibilities.

The member for O'Connor might be interested that the Western Australian government will fully fund neighbourhood model occasional care services until 30 June 2011 and we expect that this funding should continue given the massive increase in Commonwealth expenditure in Western Australia. But still our government will never walk away from Australian families in need of care, so we have put in place a number of new measures which I am about to outline to help the very families that the member for O'Connor represents. These include direct support for

five services in the wheat belt region through sustainability assistance of approximately \$150,000 per year, exemptions for six services in the wheat belt region to operate less than five days a week on an ongoing basis and in-principle agreement for two more services to be added to this list so that they will be able to continue to receive Commonwealth support in the wheat belt region.

In last year's budget we added \$59 million to upgrade budget based funded services. This means that childcare centres in the areas which are facing the biggest disadvantage in Australia are funded and run by the Commonwealth government with no fees in place. We believe that these kids deserve the best service, which is why we have put in place \$59 million to upgrade those services. Seventeen of the centres we are upgrading are in Western Australia and I would welcome the opportunity to take the member for O'Connor to visit those centres in his area to show how these improvements are going to help the lives of those children.

Ultimately the best thing that the Commonwealth government is now doing for these families and for their children is funding an unlimited number of childcare places in long day care, in family day care and in outside school hours care. This is all part of our commitment to more than double the funding levels that the Howard government put in place and make sure that child care in Australia is accessible, is affordable and is of high quality—because we know that the families who the member for O'Connor represents, like the families that we all represent, rely on this. (*Time expired*)

Australian Natural Disasters

Mr PERRETT (2.26 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline to the House the economic impacts of the recent natural disasters?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Moreton for his question, because his area was severely damaged. Those areas south of the river, near the city, did have a very dramatic impact from the floods. Something like 5,000 premises in his area were affected and certainly many of those people would have received support payments from the Commonwealth—of that there is no doubt. I think something like 1,000 businesses as well were impacted in that area. The member for Moreton worked tirelessly through that period with those businesses and the affected households, as indeed did many other members in this House on both sides of the aisle. They were out there working with their local communities to make sure they had access to Centrelink so they could access payments and to make sure that services were being delivered by the agencies, whether the city council or the great not-for-profit organisations that played such a role.

We talked yesterday about the human impact of this flood, but today I want to talk a little bit about the economic impact of the floods and the cyclones not just in Queensland but elsewhere. Treasury estimates that the January floods alone will knock half a percentage point from growth in 2010-11 and most of that will hit in the March quarter. Of course, that is before you have the impact of Cyclone Yasi, and that impact was great in North Queensland and Far North Queensland. There was a dramatic impact particularly on our coal exports, which may be down as much as \$5 billion, and rural production, which may be down as much as \$2 billion. And, of course, there was damage to other sectors, as a member said before. There was around \$300 million in the tourism sector and around half a billion dollars in remaining industries such as manufacturing, retail and transport.

That is all before you get to the price impact—the impact on the CPI and what it ac-

tually means to people at the supermarket. Treasury has estimated that the January floods will increase CPI inflation by one quarter of a percentage point in the March quarter, and that is before you get to the impact of Cyclone Yasi, which will probably add another quarter of a percentage point to that figure.

Of course, as the Prime Minister was saying before, up there in North Queensland and Far North Queensland 90 per cent of Australia's bananas are produced and about one-third of our sugar is produced. So we will see price rises but, thankfully, they will largely be temporary. They will unwind as crops regrow and production comes back online.

Of course, all of this will have an impact, but the thing that we need to remember is that it is not going to knock our economy off its medium-term growth path, and its medium-term growth path is strong. We have a strong investment pipeline, particularly in resources. ABARE estimates there is \$380 billion in an investment pipeline in the resources sector alone. We should never forget that we have had very strong job creation—364,000 jobs in 2010—and, of course, we do have a strong fiscal position, returning to surplus faster than any other major developed economy. Of course, today we have had a welcome rebound—a small one—in consumer confidence. That is very good. I firmly believe that Australians can have confidence that, as we move forward, activity will recover and we will rebuild from these events.

Flood Levy

Ms GAMBARO (2.30 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. A small business in my electorate, Apex Smash Repairs, was flooded up to the ceiling. It lost vital equipment. It suffered damage of \$200,000 and was out of business for two weeks. But, because the owners of the business did not suffer any flood damage to their family

home, they are not exempt from the flood tax and they will have to pay. Prime Minister, will the government reconsider its flood tax to ensure that victims of the flood like the owners of Apex Smash Repairs are not made to suffer twice from this tragedy?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for her question. Of course, a business in those circumstances is entitled to assistance through the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements I have just outlined for the damage to the business. It is able to access assistance through the natural disaster recovery arrangements, and we are, of course, more than happy to assist the member on the details of that. I have done my best to advise all members of the coalition with affected electorates about a particular email address they can contact us through to deal with constituent issues, and we can make sure that people get the right information. Of course, members of the government and members on the crossbenches are very welcome too to make inquiries through that email address.

On the question of payment of the levy, the exemptions for payment of the levy, because we are talking about personal income taxation, are being figured off the personal arrangements that we have under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements—that is, eligibility for the emergency money under the Australian government disaster relief payment and associated payments. So the aim here in making those exemptions has been to exempt from paying the levy people who have been immediately impacted personally by natural disaster.

I would also indicate to the member that, as well as advising her constituents of the relief arrangements for them because of what has happened to their business, she may well want to talk to them about what they ordinarily expect to be their income, because I

would remind her that overwhelmingly Australian taxpayers will be asked to pay less than one dollar a week under the levy, and around half of Australian taxpayers are exempt from it entirely because they earn less than \$50,000 a year. So the design of this levy—and it does mirror in design some levy arrangements that have been used in the past in this country—is to calibrate the burden on upper income earners. That is absolutely appropriate. People who earn more should be asked to step forward and assist more, and under this levy they are.

Australian Natural Disasters

Mr GIBBONS (2.33 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline to the House the fiscal impacts associated with the recent natural disasters and the government's plan to rebuild the affected areas? How has this plan been received, and what is the government's response?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Bendigo for his question. He too has been affected in his electorate. In the Bendigo electorate some 200 houses and a number of small businesses were affected, and he has been working very hard to ensure that in his community that assistance is delivered where it is needed.

The rebuild task here is going to be a huge, huge call on our resources. It is going to require very significant investments by government. We do have longstanding Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements; we had them under the previous government as we have under this government. These arrangements mean that the Commonwealth will meet 75 per cent of the rebuilding costs that fall within the NDRRAs, and also costs which come with some of the income support that the Prime Minister was talking about before.

So our initial estimate just in terms of the January floods, before you get to the cy-

clones and so on, is that it will cost the federal budget \$5.6 billion. Of course, as we have said, two-thirds of that funding will be delivered through cuts to the budget and infrastructure deferrals, and, of course, one-third will be provided by our modest levy, which will not be paid by people who earn less than \$50,000 and will not be paid by those directly affected by the floods, because it is the responsible thing to do to pay as we go.

Of course, I said before that we do have strong long-term fundamentals, but we do need this revenue for the rebuilding process to provide the certainty for those families and those businesses that their government is behind them and prepared to back them. That is why the government moved so decisively to provide that certainty to the business community. But, of course, it is a temporary levy and we do also have to make sure that, when the economy continues to grow, there is room for the rebuilding from the floods as well as the natural growth in our economy. So paying as we go is the responsible thing to do, and it is an approach that has been endorsed. This is what the *Financial Times* had to say:

In this age of reckless sovereigns, the choice of a levy is extraordinary, but prudent.

It is absolutely the right thing to do in our circumstances. It is absolutely the right thing to do, because Australians did want to work together to deal with these challenges in their community, and Australians have united behind what the government has done.

But, of course, the only one who has not been part of that is the Leader of the Opposition. We saw yesterday their so-called funding package, which consists of deferrals, double counts and backflips. He is all opposition and no leadership.

People might take him seriously if he had not actually come into this House on some-

thing like six occasions and supported a levy. Who was it who came into this House on 17 June 1996 to support a gun buyback levy? It was the Leader of the Opposition. Who was it who came in 2001 and supported a levy for the Ansett employees? The Leader of the Opposition. If a levy was good enough in the election campaign, it is good enough for people in— (*Time expired*)

Flood Levy

Mr CHRISTENSEN (2.38 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to his recent statement in the media that through the flood tax the government is working to ‘rebuild infrastructure and homes’. Can the Treasurer outline exactly which homes of flood victims are going to be rebuilt by his flood tax?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for his question, because it gives me an opportunity to inform him that they are eligible for money under the NDRRA, and that money is flowing under the NDRRA.

But, of course, as he correctly points to it is the case that there will not be sufficient funds under the NDRRA for those people who are uninsured to rebuild in all cases. That is certainly the case, and that is why we have worked as the government, and why so many people and business leaders have worked, to ensure that the public appeal funds are built up so that additional support can go to those communities. That is why donations to the Premier’s appeal in Queensland and other appeals around the country are so important.

As I was saying before in my previous answer—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My point of order is relevance. The Treasurer was not asked about homes being rebuilt from private donations; he was asked about how the flood tax would rebuild homes.

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer knows he is required to be directly relevant.

Mr SWAN—There is indirect assistance to people for their houses. In fact, when I have been around communities, and the Army has been there with people who own those homes, the support has been flowing and so has money to keep those people going in the immediate phases of recovery.

As I was saying before, 75 per cent of the public infrastructure is the bill that will flow to the Commonwealth. That is what we are responsible for under the NDRRA. The member for Dawson was talking about homes, donations and so on. Those opposite have been out there using the flood as the opportunity to raise money for the Liberal Party.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer will be directly relevant to the question or he will resume his seat. The Treasurer has the call, but he will not digress to matters that are not contained in the question.

Mr SWAN—I was referring to the fact that during all of this—during this extraordinary coming together of our community—where the whole community was out there helping Australians who were in great need—

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will be very careful in the way he debates!

Mr SWAN—we had the spectacle of the Liberal Party using it as a fundraising opportunity.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer will resume his seat.

Mr Christensen—Mr Speaker, I thought the Treasurer was going to go on, but I seek leave to table a media report where the Treasurer actually states that.

Leave not granted.

Australian Natural Disasters

Ms SAFFIN (2.42 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Defence. Will the minister please inform the House about the Australian Defence Force response to the recent natural disasters?

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—I thank the member for her question. The response by the Australian Defence Force and its personnel in the face of natural disasters over the recent summer period in Australia has been magnificent.

It has been a terrific response. On the one hand it has been spontaneous and on the other hand it has been very well planned. I say spontaneous because we have seen the contribution in three different areas. Firstly, we have seen Army, Navy and Air Force reservists spontaneously take to the streets to help out their local communities. Secondly, we have seen local area commanders make decisions within their authority in the face of emergencies in their own local area. For example, this occurred when we saw recent floods in Carnarvon in my own state of Western Australia. Thirdly, of course, we have seen the much more formal and more broadly planned response when a state, whether it is Queensland or Victoria, in the face of an enormous natural disaster needs the assistance of the Commonwealth and the Australian defence forces.

We have seen that assistance come from members of all of the three arms of the service. I just take this opportunity to thank, for example, Colonel Luke Foster and Brigadier Paul McLachlan, who headed up our Operation Queensland Flood Assist task force; Brigadier Stuart Smith, who is currently heading up our Operation Yasi Assist task force; and Brigadier Robert Marsh, who headed up our Victorian flood assistance task force. These Defence Force Army personnel

and the men and women who worked with them did a terrific job.

I just draw attention to one particular aspect of that contribution. Whilst very many of us saw Army, Navy and Air Force personnel out there literally mopping up—and I make this point advisedly—when Australians see Defence Force personnel out on the streets helping out, not only do they know that the Commonwealth and the Defence Force are doing the right thing; it also fills them with a great deal of confidence that at a time of urgent need Defence Force personnel are out there helping out.

The one instance I want to draw particular attention to is Army, Navy and Air Force personnel engaged in the aftermath of the flash flood and storm through the Lockyer Valley in Toowoomba evacuating over 400 people to the Forest Hill evacuation centre in conditions described by experienced pilots as some of the worst weather they have ever taken to the air in. I think this is a massively underappreciated act of great heroism that is worthy of again placing on record.

Most of us appreciate the great work that the Australian Defence Force do when it comes to, if you like, their core business—military, defence and national security issues. But occasionally we see the second great arm of the work that they have done consistently and throughout all of their period as the Australian Defence Force—disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. Often we see that as a response by a civilised country, Australia, wanting to be a good international citizen in areas in our region, whether it is an earthquake in Indonesia or a tsunami in Samoa or Tonga. Occasionally we see it on our own shores, as with the floods and the cyclones this year and the Victorian bushfires a year or so ago. It is a contribution individually and collectively that is massively appreciated by the people in distress, massively appreciated

by the Australian people and deeply appreciated by members of this House.

GP Superclinics

Mr EWEN JONES (2.46 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. I refer the minister to her admission that the government chose the location of GP superclinics without analysing whether there was a shortage of medical care in that area. Minister, what is the point of spending \$650 million building GP superclinics that simply duplicate existing medical services such as those at Deeragun in Townsville? Would this money not be better spent assisting the flood and cyclone recovery by rebuilding the roof of the Tully Hospital?

Ms ROXON—Thank you very much for that question. It allows me to address what I think has become quite an inappropriate argument that has been running in parts of Queensland when, of course, so much attention should and will urgently be given to the rebuilding of hospitals and other services that I think have been coping extremely well in difficult circumstances. At the start of his question the member asked what the point is of building these services. The point of building these services is that unfortunately the Leader of the Opposition left 60 per cent of the country short of GPs, meaning that not just in times of crisis but also in the middle of the night and on weekends, when families want their children to get care and see a GP, they have not been able to do so. It is not correct that an assessment was not made by the government of the areas of need; it is correct that that work was not done by our department.

If the member wants to say to me that his community of Townsville does not want a superclinic, there are many, many other communities across the country that desperately want one. We have made it absolutely clear that if any community clearly indicates

to us that they do not want a superclinic—and local members are welcome to do this; they have all been written to—I am quite happy to have that money redirected to communities that do desperately need them and make sure that our commitment that people can see a GP close to home when they need one will be realised by the work of this government.

Australian Natural Disasters

Mrs D'ATH (2.49 pm)—My question is to the Attorney-General. Will the Attorney-General inform the House about the Commonwealth's emergency response to natural disasters across Australia this summer?

Mr McCLELLAND—I thank the member for her question and note the tremendous assistance that she and indeed other members of this House have given to constituents affected by the natural disasters that have affected the Australian population during this summer period. Literally hundreds of thousands of Australians have been impacted. We are well aware, from the debate yesterday and from the member's personal accounts, of the impact of the floods in Queensland and Cyclone Yasi. Extensive flooding also occurred in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia. Western Australia received extensive flooding at Carnarvon in December, severe storms and, just this week, severe bushfires with some 60 homes destroyed and 30 seriously damaged. In fact, the area now covered by natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements in Australia exceeds the area of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Holland, Spain and Portugal combined.

Of course, substantial preparations went into the season. We had noticed that it was going to be a bad year for the second time. Emergency Management Australia conducted pre-season briefings but this time they did it on a localised basis assisted by

Geoscience Australia, the Bureau of Meteorology, the defence forces and human services. For the first time, they commissioned emergency management liaison officers from the Commonwealth, with state emergency responders, and they were in turn able to call on assistance and liaison officers from other agencies.

Financially, there has been massive relief. The Prime Minister has indicated that to date there have been in the order of 357,000 claims under the Australian government disaster recovery payments totalling some \$421 million and 38,000 Australians or thereabouts are receiving disaster income recovery subsidies right around Australia totalling some \$19 million. But, as the Treasurer has indicated, when the full extent of natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements are implemented, that bill, including the reconstruction of infrastructure right around Australia, will be in the order of billions of dollars.

These events have been significant. This Friday I have called an extraordinary meeting of emergency management ministers from the various states and territories around Australia. We will be receiving a debriefing from each of the ministers regarding the impact in their state or territory and conducting an initial assessment of the impact of these natural disasters and the response. But also, significantly, we will be sitting down to plan future directions in respect of emergency management policy development. We think that exercise will be of benefit to the Council of Australian Governments meeting next week, chaired, of course, by the Prime Minister, which will be developing a whole-of-government national resilience strategy.

These events have been devastating. Regrettably, they are part of our natural environment, but can I assure all members that the federal government is committed to pro-

viding every reasonable assistance to individuals, to businesses and to communities who have been affected and, significantly, is taking all necessary action in partnership with our governments around Australia to increase the capacity of resilience of local communities, to minimise the impact of these natural disasters and to bounce back after they inevitably occur.

Flood Levy

Mr HARTSUYKER (2.53 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. On 31 March 2009, thousands of residents in my electorate of Cowper were severely impacted by a major flood event. Despite the flood being declared a natural disaster, the government never provided victims with one-off Centrelink disaster payments of \$1,000 per adult and \$400 per child. Will the Prime Minister now ensure that people who suffered a substantial loss as a result of the floods of 31 March receive those payments and be exempted from the government's flood tax?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question and I am very happy to answer it and, as I answer it, to clear up what is clearly becoming a set of misapprehensions on behalf of the opposition which I do not think we should allow to run unchallenged. The guidelines under the natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements are the same guidelines operated by the Howard government. They are the guidelines that the Leader of the Opposition called on me just before Christmas to make sure applied to natural disasters this summer. So any question about the natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements guidelines we are operating are the very guidelines the Leader of the Opposition called on me to have for natural disasters this summer. I know consistency of purpose is not the Leader of the Opposition's strong suit, so if he has changed his mind—

other than on the question of additional assistance for people in Cyclone Larry that he has raised in parliament today and raised in the Sunday newspapers—generally about the architecture of natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements and he now believes, as the questioning of his members would seem to imply, that they should extend to meeting all losses sustained by every business and every householder then the Leader of the Opposition should say that, we will have it costed for him and he should nominate matching savings. I think he is going to find that pretty hard to do.

Mr Hartsuyker—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I would like the Prime Minister to be directly relevant to the question, which related to the Centrelink disaster payments that existed in 2009.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister is aware of the requirement to be directly relevant to the question.

Mr Martin Ferguson interjecting—

The SPEAKER—It was a frivolous interjection by the Minister for Tourism. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—So let us not hear anything more about natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements other than the call for additional assistance for small businesses as outlined by the Leader of the Opposition, unless the Leader of the Opposition articulates what it is and then we will have it costed.

On the question asked by the member, the triggering of Australian government disaster relief payments is being operated by the current government in the way it has been operated by governments past. It has never been the practice of the Australian government—under Mr Howard or any other Prime Minister—to trigger those payments for every weather event or natural disaster. It has never been the practice. It always has been the

practice of the Australian government to respond with those payments when natural disasters are of a size that the view is formed that it is beyond the capacity of the community and the state to deal with it. There is not one factor that is put into decision making by this government that was not a factor in decision making by the former Howard government. So let us, once again, not listen to an analysis that says somehow we are less generous with AGDRPs than governments past have been.

Finally, I have taken questions today about the operation of the levy. I am still waiting for the answer as to why it was good enough for the Leader of the Opposition to say a \$6 billion levy was necessary to fund his election promises but it is not good enough to have a levy to rebuild Queensland and the nation.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The front-benchers on both the left and the right of the chair will come to order.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER—That includes the member for Mackellar.

Australian Natural Disasters

Mr ADAMS (2.58 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development, Local Government and the Arts. How is the government's response to natural disasters, including in my own electorate of Lyons, being shaped by the concerns and ideas being brought forward by the local communities?

Mr CREAN—I thank the member for his question. While his state has been impacted by the flooding, obviously nowhere near the extent to which it has occurred in Queensland and in other states, it nevertheless has had an impact and I have been kept informed by not only the member for Lyons but also

the member for Braddon, whose electorate also has been affected. My advice to them has been the same that I have been giving to local governments as I have visited many parts of the devastated sections of this country. I have seen the devastation firsthand and the reality is that we all know there is going to be a massive rebuild required. That rebuild has to be based upon a partnership with the states, which the Prime Minister has referred to. This has been the practice through governments of both persuasions over many years.

It is clearly important for those states in this partnership to develop a statement, a strategic indication of the priority projects that need to be replaced. In doing that, they have to adhere to this principle that the Prime Minister has also referred to: value for money. The partnership is one that involves not just governments—and when I say 'governments' I do not just mean us and the states; I mean local government—but the private sector, the not-for-profit organisations and in particular the insurance industry. This is a framework that we as a government are developing. But that framework will be best served if there is local input. We are committed on this side to drive regional development and creative solutions which produce a more efficient outcome, and we want local input. It is important for us all in terms of the path forward to ensure that the strategic partnership I talk of is shaped by that local input.

I have had the opportunity in many of the visits that I have made to engage in discussions with not just the mayors of the particular towns affected but the mayors of the surrounding towns and to involve in those discussions representatives of Regional Development Australia. Because we need to get the strategic links with these councils in terms of the infrastructure to be replaced.

I said at the outset that the rebuild task is going to be massive; it is. It is going to require new resources as well as creative application of existing programs to see where the reprioritisation and reuse of existing programs does not just meet the task of the rebuild but also addresses the key issues which many areas have raised, and those include better flood-proofing and flood mitigation, the betterment concepts. That is why we do have to be creative.

I mention the task of involving new resources. That is why the levy is important. Let's not kid ourselves that this can be done simply through existing programs. I personally believe that existing programs can help, but this is a requirement for the nation to pull together. And that is why this parliament as a whole needs to show to the rebuild the same resolve and cohesion that has been there in the recovery and clean-up. Get behind the levy; support it in the interests of the nation.

The SPEAKER—The member for—

Mr Hunt interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Flinders has concluded, I hope. It is not assisting the House. The member for Ryan has the call.

Australian Natural Disasters

Mrs PRENTICE (3.03 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. In view of the severe damage to transport and other infrastructure throughout Queensland as a result of the recent floods and cyclone and the Prime Minister's commitment to helping the state rebuild, will the Prime Minister include within the natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements the replacement of Brisbane's cat and ferry terminals, the no longer floating river walk and its water and sewerage assets, and extend similar payments to other local authorities?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for her question and advise her that the arrangements that we will use on recovery beyond that provided by the natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements will be to work with the Queensland government and work through the Queensland recovery authority. I believe that is the right mechanism because that is the mechanism that is going to keep us in touch with local communities, including Brisbane City Council. I have met with the lord mayor, and I am well aware that there was public transport infrastructure damage. Like every other Australia I saw the huge walkways floating down the Brisbane River, and I am well aware of that damage too.

Obviously the Brisbane City Council, as a big entity, has some capacity itself to deal with rebuilding and recovery, and the lord mayor in his discussions indicated that—that as a very sizeable council they do have capacity to work through a range of issues in a way that many smaller councils would not. But he also indicated to me that he would be in discussions with the Queensland recovery authority about additional assistance that Brisbane might need.

Can I say to the House: I do not believe that it is appropriate for me as Prime Minister in this place or indeed any other to walk around picking projects I like the look of and saying, without consultation and working through, 'I will fund this,' or, 'I won't fund that.' That is not the approach I will be taking. That is not the approach that is fiscally responsible. That is not the approach that gets value for money. That is not the approach that best meets local community needs.

What we have done instead is worked with the Queensland government. We have made Major General Mick Slater available—he is a very good man, a good Queensland, a man with a nice touch with communities.

Mick Slater as well as the Queensland government will work with local councils and local communities to identify their priorities. Having identified their priorities, we will then work through in proper process with the Queensland government to look at needs, to set priorities and to see what needs to be done first.

Can I indicate to members across the parliament—the government, the crossbenchers and the opposition—that will be my approach. That is the responsible approach. That is the best way to rebuild Queensland.

Australian Natural Disasters

Mr NEUMANN (3.06 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. What assistance is the government providing to rebuild Queensland following recent natural disasters, particularly in the Ipswich area? How is this rebuilding being financed and how has this been received?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Blair for his question. I certainly note that sections of the Ipswich Motorway were underwater and the road was closed for some 2½ days at the height of the floods. Fortunately, there has been no major damage to the road and work is back underway on the \$2.5 billion upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway.

Around 70 per cent of Queensland's road network was badly impacted during the floods. Some 150 major roads were cut. There have been some 2,000 workers out there around the clock making urgent repairs to ensure that Queensland can get moving again. All airports are now back up and running. All ports are back up and operational. All sections of the Bruce Highway, with some speed restrictions, have been re-opened from Brisbane right up to Cairns. Passenger train services in South-East Queensland are back up and running. The majority of the freight rail network, with the notable excep-

tion of the Toowoomba line and some in the north, is up and running.

This progress of course costs money, and you have to find the finances from somewhere. It also requires leadership, which requires putting the national interest first, above opportunistic political considerations. That is why this government has put together the \$5.6 billion funding package to help with the recovery. It includes a \$2 billion upfront payment to Queensland to help with the immediate clean-up and rebuilding efforts. We have taken action. We will rebuild infrastructure. We needed to prioritise those immediate needs.

Only weeks ago the opposition agreed with this. The shadow minister said on 18 January, 'We want to be able as a nation to commit to more infrastructure but some of them are still a long way from starting, so maybe something can be done in the interim with the funding earmarked.' The Leader of the Opposition said on the same day, 'Let's face it: the government is going to have to focus on the urgent, unavoidable and necessary repair work.' That is precisely what we are doing. Those opposite continue to put their political interest ahead of the national interest. This is a time when Australians need a hand up. But the Leader of the Opposition has had his hand out for political donations to the Liberal Party and could not even answer the question—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We became very familiar with the 'slag and bag' from government ministers at the end of last year. I hope at the beginning of a new year you will call them to order and pull them into line.

The SPEAKER—I have indicated my desire that there be less debate in answers, but the standing orders still allow that. I say to the minister that he must relate his comments directly to the question.

Mr ALBANESE—Absolutely, Mr Speaker. Responses to the floods are a matter of one's judgment as to whether one is prepared to put the national interest first. Those on this side of the House are doing just that. We will be doing that when we introduce the flood levy legislation tomorrow. I call upon those opposite to improve their judgment, which has been pretty poor of late, and get on with the business of assisting this government to help rebuild Queensland.

Uranium Exports

Ms JULIE BISHOP (3.11 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Resources and Energy regarding his recent meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister Krishna. Did the minister reaffirm the government's ban on sales of Australian uranium to India while India remains outside the nuclear non-proliferation treaty? Has the minister, in discussions with foreign governments, canvassed the possibility of a nuclear deal with India outside the treaty within the next few years?

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I can confirm that when I met the Indian foreign minister in Melbourne a couple of weeks ago I reaffirmed that the position of the Australian government is that we are not in a position to sell uranium to India as they do not meet the Australian government requirement with respect to ratification of the United Nations Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and in terms of entering into a bilateral agreement with Australia, on the basis of which we sell uranium to countries.

I have said previously that I am very supportive of the actions of the United States and their engagement with the international community with respect to the additional accountability of India in terms of their civil nuclear facilities and the willingness of a variety of countries, through the Nuclear Suppliers Group, to actually supply uranium

to India. That is not new. It has been acknowledged by me and by other ministers that, in terms of the actions of countries beyond Australia who are capable of selling uranium to India, the leadership of the United States, in association with other countries, is to be commended.

International Development Assistance

Mr MELHAM (3.13 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the minister advise the House of the importance to Australia of the Australia-Indonesia education partnership and of any risks to this partnership?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question. Fighting terrorism has long been a bipartisan position in this parliament. Since the Bali bombings of 2002 that bipartisan commitment has had a particular application to Indonesia, given our concerns about the risk of militant Islamism in Indonesia, particularly the ability of militant Islamism to penetrate the Indonesian education system. That is why, in 2005, with complete bipartisan support from the then opposition, then Prime Minister Mr Howard announced a program, the Australia Indonesia Basic Education Program, in order to deal with this challenge. We supported it. It provided some \$387 million for a range of measures, including 330,000 new places for junior secondary school kids in Indonesia—a good measure. On top of that there was the construction and extension of more than 2,000 new junior secondary schools in Indonesia. That is a good measure. Also, that program extended to more than 500 Islamic schools in Indonesia—a further good measure.

On the question of the efficiency and effectiveness of this program—and the Leader of the Opposition might listen to this—it was reviewed not just once but on two occasions, most recently in May 2010. The review re-

port completed at the end of the program said that it was an efficient and effective program against the targets set for it. It further made 14 recommendations, of which the government has embraced 13, and partially the 14th.

Based on this report the Prime Minister announced recently in Indonesia that we would extend this program into the future to cover the 2010-15 program. This would involve a further 2,000 junior secondary school places—again, a good measure. It also involved an additional investment to support something like 293,000 school principals and other officials—every school principal in Indonesia—being trained in school management programs, thereby affecting some 50 million kids in the education system.

This is a good program as well, building on the good program which preceded it. In fact we supported Mr Howard's decision to do this. Alexander Downer, with whom I have often had a unity ticket on these questions in the past, said that it is an:

... incredibly important way we contribute to the counterterrorism effort.

I note for the record that his replacement in the seat of Mayo also said this morning that the program should be retained for the reason that it contributed directly to Australia's domestic security.

I am asked about risk to the program. The risk to the program lies in the rash policy judgment of the Leader of the Opposition. He said yesterday that this program had not been reviewed. Wrong. It has been reviewed on two occasions, the most recent of which he would have seen, if he had done any policy homework, is up on the departmental website. He said yesterday that this program in the past was designed exclusively for Aceh. Wrong again. It applied to the entire Indonesian archipelago.

There would perhaps be one person in the word who would be happy with the new policy adopted by the Leader of the Opposition, and that is Abu Bakar Bashir, because he supports militant Islamism continuing in the Indonesian education system. The Leader of the Opposition has put partisan politics ahead of the national interest. Our foreign aid policy is based on prosecuting Australia's national interest, our national security interest, our economic interests and our international humanitarian interests. (*Time expired*)

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

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Questions in Writing

Mr TRUSS—Mr Speaker, I asked question No. 45 to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy some 110 days ago. It is about fast broadband speed so I wonder whether you could seek an early answer.

The SPEAKER—I will write to the minister as required under standing order 105(b).

Questions in Writing

Dr SOUTHCOTT (3.17 pm)—Under standing order 105(b) could I ask you to write to the Minister for Health seeking reasons for the delay in answering questions Nos 13, 14, 118, 120, 124 and 125.

The SPEAKER—I will do as required under standing order 105(b).

Questions in Writing

Mr FLETCHER (3.18 pm)—Under standing order 105(b) I regret to advise that there are 15 questions that I have asked that have been outstanding for more than 60 days. I can read through the number or seek leave to table a list of the 15 questions which are outstanding and seek your assistance.

The SPEAKER—Leave is granted. I will write to the ministers as required.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Treasurer) (3.19 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER—Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr SWAN—Yes.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr SWAN—During question time the member for Dawson asserted that I had said that homes of flood victims are going to be rebuilt by the flood levy. That is what he asserted. What I actually said was:

As the Federal Government works with volunteers and the business community to rebuild infrastructure and homes the only home Mr Abbott has his eye on is the Lodge ...

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS**Report Nos 17 to 26 of 2009-10**

The SPEAKER (3.19 pm)—I present the Auditor-General's Audit reports Nos 17 to 26 of 2009-10 entitled No. 17- *Assurance audit - 2009-10 Major Projects Report: Defence Materiel Organisation*; No. 18- *Performance audit - Government Business Managers in Aboriginal Communities under the Northern Territory Emergency Response*; No. 19- *Performance audit - Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program*; No. 20- *Performance audit - Administration of the Wine Equalisation Tax*; No. 21- *Performance audit - Indigenous Housing Initiatives: the Fixing Houses for Better Health Program*; No. 22- *Financial Statement audit - Audits of the Financial Statements of Australian Government Entities for the Period Ended 30 June 2010*; No. 23- *Performance audit - Home ownership on Indigenous Land Program*; No. 24- *Performance audit - The Design and Administration of the Better Regions Program*; No. 25- *Performance audit - Administration of the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program*, and No. 26- *Performance*

audit - Management of the Tender Process for a Replacement BasicsCard.

Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.20 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members earlier today. Details of the documents will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings* and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:

AusAID—Office of Development Effectiveness—Annual review of development effectiveness for 2009.

Australia and the International Financial Institutions—Report for 2008-09.

Australian Communications and Media Authority—Communications—Report for 2009-10.

Australian Electoral Commission—Redistribution of Victoria into electoral divisions—Report for 2010.

Broadcasting Services Act 1992—

Digital television transmission and reception—Report, December 2010.

Sport on television: A review of the anti-siphoning scheme in the contemporary digital environment—Review report, November 2010.

Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy—Investigation into access to electronic media for the hearing and vision-impaired—Media access review final report, December 2010.

Department of Finance and Deregulation—Certificate of Compliance—Report for 2009-10.

Department of the Treasury—Tax expenditures statement for 2010.

Finance—Consolidated financial statements in respect of the year ended 30 June 2010.

Fisheries Research and Development Corporation—Report for 2009-10.

Freedom of Information Act 1982—Report on the operation of the Act for 2009-10.

Industry—Report of the independent review of the PTTEP Australasia (Ashmore-Cartier) Pty Ltd Montara Action Plan—Review of PTTEP Australasia's response to the Montara blowout—Report by Neotic Solutions Pty Limited, November 2010.

Interactive Gambling Act 2001—Prohibition on interactive gambling advertisements—Reports:

2007.

2008.

2009.

2010.

Sugar Research and Development Corporation—Report for 2009-10.

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

ELECTION PETITIONS

Court of Disputed Returns

The Clerk—I present letters from the Chief Executive and Principal Registrar of the High Court forwarding in accordance with the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918, copies of the following orders made by the High Court of Australia sitting as the Court of Disputed Returns:

Briscoe-Hough v Melham and Ors—Order, dated 1 December 2010—Petition No. S249 of 2010. Leave be granted for petition to be withdrawn. The Petitioner to pay costs of the Australian Electoral Commission.

Fremantle v O'Neill and Ors—Order, dated 30 November 2010—Petition No. S248 of 2010. Petition be referred for trial to the Federal Court of Australia, New South Wales District Registry.

Green v Bradbury and Ors—Order, dated 30 November 2010—Petition No. S251 of 2010. Petition be referred for trial to the Federal Court of Australia, New South Wales District Registry.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Economy

The SPEAKER—I have received a letter from the honourable member for North Sydney proposing that a definite matter of public

importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The failure of the Government to insulate the economy against the risk of natural disasters.

I call upon those members who approve of the proposed discussion to rise in their places.

More than the number of members required by the standing orders having risen in their places—

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (3.22 pm)—I am immensely pleased that the Treasurer has decided to debate me in the chamber on this occasion, because previously he has contracted that out to the Assistant Treasurer, who is mysteriously not here today. It should come as no surprise that much of the work of the Treasurer these days is contracted out. The Prime Minister just contracted out the financial integrity of the recovery in Queensland to a former Liberal finance minister, which must be just a touch humiliating for the Treasurer, but we move on.

Last year the Treasurer said that his banking reforms would deliver lower interest rates over time—'Banking overhaul will bring down rates, says Swan'. He went on to say that essentially the banking reforms that he announced last year would bring interest rates down. The Treasurer has previously said that consumer confidence is fragile. He has previously said that retail sales are not as strong as we would like. He has also on numerous occasions, in fact on more than 25 occasions, warned that the banks should not go beyond the Reserve Bank in increasing interest rates.

Australia is not immune to the challenge of natural disasters. On this occasion it has come in threes with flood, with fire and with cyclone. But Australia now seems to always, during the Christmas period, suffer some sort of disaster that inevitably will have an im-

pact on the Australian budget. The question is: how prepared are we from a fiscal perspective for this challenge? How prepared are we? Over the next four years this government is going to spend \$45 billion on interest alone to repay the debt that has come as a result of deficit budgets over the past few years. And over the next four years this government is going to spend—and hopefully it will not get the opportunity to spend all of it—\$1.5 trillion, which is a huge amount of money.

At this crucial moment we are arguing the case that now is not the time to punish Australian households with a flood levy. Now is not the time to raise the burden on everyday households with an additional cost to the rising interest rates that are going to come about, which the government has contributed to with its reckless waste and spending, and the challenges associated with higher inflation, high vegetable prices and higher fruit prices as we have seen in recent months and will see over the next few months. Households are also going to face the impact indirectly, and in some cases even directly, of a mining tax and a carbon tax.

All of these factors coming together over the next 18 months will have a profound impact on the cost of living of everyday Australians. To add to that burden, more and more data indicates that electricity prices are going to rise substantially over the next 12 months, even without a carbon tax. Water prices are going to rise substantially over the next 12 months as states seek to recover some of the costs associated with infrastructure. In addition to that the states themselves, in their ever-growing search for new revenue, will be increasing taxes and charges on everyday Australians.

Even with an unemployment rate of around five per cent, even with a growing economy, the impact on every dollar of eve-

ryday Australians matters. It really does matter, because those people are now facing charges that their parents never had to pay—significant toll road charges, for example; additional costs of schooling that my parents, for example, never had to pay, yet my generation and generations beyond will have to pay; even university fees and so on. The additional cost on everyday households is something this government does not understand. That is best illustrated by the fact that when asked the simple question in question time today, ‘How many Australians are going to pay the flood tax?’, the Treasurer did not know. He did not know how many Australian households would be affected and how many individuals would have to pay an additional levy. He is the Treasurer of Australia and he did not even have the brief in his file. He turned to Jenny Macklin and said, ‘Do you know?’ and she shook her head. This guy is meant to be running the country!

No wonder the Prime Minister rang up John Fahey and said, ‘Help us to stop the waste.’ No wonder the Prime Minister rang a former Liberal finance minister and said: ‘Please oversee Wayne Swan. I don’t trust him with the money.’ If the Prime Minister does not trust the Treasurer with the recovery in Queensland, how can she have him deliver a budget in May? We know what is going to happen: ‘Hello, Peter, this is Julia. I need your help. We’ve given you an AC, but we need you to deliver a budget.’ I can see what is going to happen. The Prime Minister is going to be making a series of calls over the next 12 months. She will be ringing the Leader of the Opposition saying, ‘Come back as health minister.’ She will be ringing Peter Reith to come back and fix the wharves. She will be ringing Philip Ruddock and saying, ‘Come back and stop the boats.’ Oh my goodness! If the Prime Minister does not trust her own government, how can we trust her? With \$350 billion a year and an

economic recovery in Queensland, she proudly announces the Treasurer is going to lead the recovery effort. But because she does not trust the Treasurer, she rings up a former Liberal finance minister to make sure there is no waste. Only the Liberals stop the waste. It is as simple as that. Only the coalition has the courage to stop the waste.

And do you know what? What surprised me most was poor old Lindsay Tanner down in Melbourne with his abacus waiting for the phone to ring. He was the one that rang the bell on the BER, wasn't he? He was the one that said, 'Julia, it doesn't stack up.' Of course, we know what happened to him. It defies logic to expect that a government would have to revert to the integrity of its political opponents in order to survive on the treasury bench. Can you imagine John Howard after Cyclone Larry ringing up Ralph Willis and saying, 'Mate, I need your help. I don't trust my own Treasurer; I don't trust my own finance minister—I am going to ring up Ralph Willis or John Dawkins or Paul Keating.' We miss Paul Keating and I bet Julia Gillard does as well.

There are some economic challenges that we have to deal with. The first challenge is to get the budget back to surplus. Why? It is because that takes some of the upward pressure off interest rates. It is because getting the budget back into surplus means that you do not have to spend \$45 billion every four years just on interest. It means that for \$45 billion you can rebuild Queensland about eight times over. It also means that you can deliver the programs that you really want to deliver. The hypocrisy of this government is exceptional. The Treasurer stands up in this place and talks about our deferred spending cuts. You know what? The Treasurer has \$1½ billion of deferred spending cuts as some of his so-called cuts just like the \$80 billion of so-called savings when nearly half of the so-

called savings from the Labor Party in government have in fact been tax increases.

Now the logic of the Labor Party is that if it increases taxes for Australians it increases savings for those Australians. That is as illogical as the rhetoric of the government itself. Out of all of this, even with Australia's most favourable terms of trade in modern times, even with a strong growth rate, even with an unemployment rate of around five per cent and even with the coalition having the courage to lay down now \$52 billion of savings—even with all of that—this government does not have the courage to default to what every Australian family has to do. When it is facing a financial challenge every Australian family has to look at the family budget and work out how it is going to live within its means. That is what Australian families do, but not this government. The Labor Party defaults to a new tax.

That is the Labor way—default to a new tax. Over the last three years they have increased taxes on cars, they have increased the tax on alcohol, they have increased the tax on cigarettes and now, in this year alone, they want to increase the tax on people's income, they want to introduce a new tax on mining and they want to introduce and increase taxes on carbon and electricity. They want to do that in 12 months.

In the course of four to five years the Labor Party has shown its true colours—increased taxes. This government will be defined by its reckless spending. This government will be defined by its determination to increase taxes. This government will be defined by the fact that it has not got any ticker. The starting point for this government after the floods was not to say, 'We will cut first.' Its starting point was to say, 'We will tax first.' As the Leader of the Opposition said so eloquently, it has turned out to be a mateship tax.

There is no precedent whatsoever for a government to literally beg the Australian people to donate money to a worthy cause and then afterwards to tax them for the same cause. There are lots of precedents for levies and there are lots of precedents for cuts, but there is no single precedent where you ask Australians to be generous—they were generous and they are generous—and then after they have done that, when they have given their all, to go and hit them between the eyes with a new tax. There is no precedent.

I met a truck driver in Rochester who gave up his fuel and his truck for three days of income to carry away the sodden carpet, the wrecked fridges and freezers and the broken furniture from a home I visited there. That man is now going to have to pay that tax. He has already sacrificed thousands of dollars. As the member for Brisbane said a little earlier, a small business person in Queensland has had their business suffer substantial loss and yet now is going to have to pay the tax on top of that.

What was the reaction of the Prime Minister? She said, 'This is a personal income tax.' The Prime Minister was unable to set apart the big impact on a small business that has to pay out from the family income the pain associated with the flood and then has to pay out a tax. There are millions of Australians who do not differentiate between their business income and their personal income because they run small businesses, and that is a constituency the Labor Party will never understand.

We have had the courage to match our words with deeds by laying down a plan to pay for the \$2 billion that the government is going to have to raise with its flood levy. We have been fair dinkum with the Australian people. There can be a horde of critics about the composition of it, but we have shown the courage that the government does not have.

We have shown a determination to preserve the economic credentials not just of a nation but in particular of the family home because we believe a government should behave no differently in many ways to how Australian families have to behave. When there is a challenge, you have to meet it. When the money is to be spent, you spend it, but, most significantly of all, when you have to make hard decisions about your family budget, it is only the coalition that has the courage to do just that. We will not run away from hard decisions and now we will not let a weak and insipid Treasurer run away again from making the hard decisions that make life a little bit easier for Australian families. (*Time expired*)

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Treasurer) (3.37 pm)—I relish the opportunity to reply to the bombast and hot air from the shadow Treasurer, because that hot air is no substitute for policy and it is certainly no substitute for character. What we have seen in this House and in this country is a Prime Minister who has the character and the guts, and a government that has the determination, to do the right thing by the people of Australia and, most particularly, the right thing by the people of Queensland. In that endeavour, given all of the hurt and all of the damage, what we have been faced with from those opposite is a negative political campaign, where they have put their political interests ahead of the national interest. That is what this debate boils down to.

To be lectured by the shadow Treasurer about process is truly galling. Yesterday we had the spectacle of a press conference at which the Leader of the Opposition was there with the shadow Treasurer to announce another round of cuts, supposedly to help fund the recovery—and where was the shadow finance minister? The shadow finance minister was banished from that press conference. It reminded us of the farce of the

three stooges which occurred with the budget last year, where they were playing pass-the-parcel. Tony said, 'I'll do it.' He did not do it; he passed it to Joe. Joe said, 'I can't do it.' He passed it on to Andrew. Fair dinkum! There is no credibility. This has to be the weakest opposition frontbench when it comes to economics that we have seen in the history of the parliament, and it was on display yesterday when they were announcing cuts which are the responsibility of a finance minister and Mr Robb was not allowed into the press conference.

Mr Ian Macfarlane—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask that the Treasurer use the proper mode of address.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—The member for Groom is quite correct and I would draw to the Treasurer's attention the provisions of standing order 64, which states that no member can be referred to by his name.

Mr SWAN—We had been waiting for days. Day after day turned into weeks. The opposition said, 'The savings are coming; the savings are coming.' There was leak after leak after leak about the disunity in the coalition about this matter and what it produced was the banishment of the shadow finance minister from the press conference yesterday. After we saw the results of what they produced, I am sure he was pleased not to have been there, because they shone a light on the incompetence of the shadow Treasurer and the Leader of the Opposition when it comes to economics.

What we had was a rerun of the \$10.6 billion costings con job that was presented to the Australian people at the last election campaign and declared fraudulent by the Department of Finance and Deregulation and the Treasury. We had a repeat of that. Of course, in the middle of all of that, the

shadow Treasurer went to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and admitted that he only found out about the costings five minutes before they were presented. Could anybody imagine Peter Costello finding out what was in his budget five minutes before he delivered it? Well, that is what actually happened, according to the shadow Treasurer, with their election program in the lead-up to the last election. So we have bumbling incompetence.

Worse than the bumbling incompetence is the insensitivity—the lack of understanding not only about our national economic circumstances but about what has just happened in our country, particularly in Queensland, where it took the opposition days to even get there and to understand the importance of it. It took Mr Hockey himself days and days and days.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! I remind the Treasurer of standing order 64 once again.

Mr SWAN—What was so insensitive about all of that was that, when the Leader of Opposition had arrived, the Brisbane River had not yet peaked before he was playing grubby politics on the spot. He stands condemned for his behaviour. The opposition have not treated this with the seriousness that all of those people who have been affected really deserve. What we have had is a lack of appreciation, socially, of what has occurred dramatically in communities, a lack of appreciation of the size of the economic challenge it presents us with, and not the faintest idea about how you put a budget together and how you deal with these challenges.

Of course, this is not new. The opposition get all of the big economic calls wrong. They opposed in this House tooth and nail our fiscal stimulus, which saved this country and put it in the strong position that it is in now to deal with these natural disasters. We have had strong job creation: over 700,000 jobs

created in this country. Compare that to what has gone on in the United States. Compare that to what has gone on in Europe. We have a strong economy because this government had the guts and the courage to put in place a stimulus, to make it work, to keep the doors of small business open and to support households in their time of need. And guess what? We are doing it again in an economically responsible way. We are doing it in the way that the Australian people deserve. We are doing it in the spirit that we have seen in our community over the past four of five weeks, the likes of which I have never experienced.

It has made me proud to be an Australian. Australians out there do not mind paying a modest levy because, unlike the opposition, they understand that this has to be paid for. They know that there is not some magic pudding that those opposite keep recycling so they can pretend there is some way of funding this without a levy. There is no way of funding it without a levy and prudent preparation of budgets. For the reasons which have now been demonstrated by subsequent events in terms of Cyclone Yasi, we have demonstrated our capacity and our knowledge of the economic situation to put in place a responsible approach which will see communities rebuilt and which does the decent thing by those who are affected.

As to the sort of tacky question we had today from the member for Dawson, I could not believe that it came from a Queenslander, in the circumstances that we are in. I simply could not believe it. It was rank, and he will pay an electoral price for that sort of behaviour, given the damage that has occurred in North Queensland and Far North Queensland. This is a modest levy that Australians are willing to pay because they are coming together to help each other. They understand that there is not a magic pudding and that we have to do this responsibility. They understand we have a strong economy. It is going

to continue to be strong. We have a problem in the short term. We have to work on that problem. A temporary levy is the way to fund the rebuilding, but we have to make sure our public finances stay strong because the investment pipeline is so strong in this country that we still have an economy which is nearing the limits of its capacity.

That is why a levy is, once again, a responsible thing to do to send a message to the world—to markets—that we mean it when we say that we have strict fiscal discipline in Australia and that we know how to handle recessions on the one hand and natural disasters on the other. On this occasion, what is required is strict fiscal discipline. During the global financial crisis what was required was the courage to put a stimulus in place. What was also required was the courage to put in place fiscal rules to bring us back to surplus when the economy recovered. This is a government with courage. It is a government with conviction. It is a government that puts the national interest before the political interest all of the time.

But sadly we have not seen that in this House today. We have not necessarily seen it in the last week or so. The one thing that demonstrates it more than anything else is the attitude of the Leader of the Opposition to levies. Prior to now there was never a levy he did not support. He has been in this House and supported levies on six occasions. Let us go through them. On 17 June 1996, the Leader of the Opposition stood up in this House and supported a levy for a gun buy-back. So, too, I think, may have the shadow Treasurer. On 25 September 2001 there was another levy, to support Ansett employees. Who were standing up in the House supporting that? The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer. And there we were again in March 2000. We had the dairy industry levy. Who was standing up to support that? The Leader of the Opposition.

It goes on and on, but what demonstrates just how absurd, how divorced from reality, how stupidly political and how nakedly opportunistic those people opposite are is that they can seriously come in here claiming they are credible and keeping a straight face after they went to the last election campaign with what? A levy. It was a levy that raised \$6 billion, partly to fund maternity leave for people on \$150,000 a year, and they have the hide to come in this House and claim they are serious about dealing with waste. What fool would put that sort of program together? What fool would then come into the House and claim they do not support levies after only a matter of months? They walked around the country talking about the need for a levy—and it would not have been temporary when it started. It was permanent. It was only during the election campaign, when the heat was turned up, that it suddenly turned into a temporary levy that was going to be matched by a company tax cut. But the Leader of the Opposition had marched around the country, electorate after electorate, asking for a levy. All those members opposite who are now complaining about a levy were supporting him.

The Australian people can see right through the approach that is being adopted by those opposite. A nakedly political approach, it is not one that the Australian people respect. I believe it is not one that the Australian people will support. That is why I say the Leader of the Opposition is all opposition and no leadership. There is simply no leadership. If he has proved one thing during the events of the last week it is that he is absolutely not fit to lead a country during a time of crisis. His judgment has been flawed all of the way through, from his refusal to condemn the letter that went out in his own name to raise money on the back of the flood victims—quite extraordinary that he could not do that—to all of the other behaviours

we have seen in recent days. Then there was yesterday. What this shows is that the Leader of the Opposition does not have the judgment, does not have the temperament, does not have the knowledge and does not have the competence to be a leader of a major political party in this country.

If you wanted to see further evidence of that, it was in the press conference yesterday which the shadow finance minister was banned from attending. They were trying to count moneys that they had already accounted for in their previous discredited packages, so we had double counting. Yes, we had deferrals. The reason I raise deferrals is that we were promised a really big, really tough package. It did not come, because they are so internally divided and so without any knowledge of what must be done in circumstances like this that they just cobbled together a few bits and pieces. Most people simply laughed at it because it was not a serious piece of policy.

We are proud of what has occurred in Australia in recent years. We are proud of the fact that there has been record job creation in this country despite the fact that there has been economic carnage across the developed world. We are proud of what we have been able to do with our public finances. They are the strongest of just about any developed economy. Our net debt is low by international standards—6.4 per cent compared to 90 per cent across other countries. Yes, we went into deficit to support jobs, to support our people and to support our families. Now we are paying it down and bringing the budget back into surplus so we can continue to have a strong economy, so that the investment pipeline remains strong, more jobs are created and more families are secure and prosperous. You need a program in place to support all those things.

In the middle of all of this it came to a head in the last election campaign. They went out and said, 'We have got \$50 billion worth of savings.' What was the verdict of the Treasury? A \$10.6 billion costings con job. Some of it they have had the hide to recycle again. Some of those initiatives are described as 'savings' yet again when they are clearly not savings, and that is before you get to the fact that there is about \$4 billion or \$5 billion of savings they are holding up in the Senate right now. So not only will there be a bigger deficit under what they put forward yesterday; on top of that their starting point is way behind that because they are holding up billions of dollars in the Senate. They are fiscally irresponsible as well as politically irresponsible. What all that proves is that they are the last party you would want in charge in this country when there is a crisis. You certainly could not have had them in charge during the global recession, because if they had had their way our country would have gone into recession and we would not be in the position we are in today to deal with these natural disasters.

They also do not get it when it comes to community. They do not really understand the notion of community—that people want to pull together, people want to help each other and people do not mind paying a modest amount of money to support their fellow Australians who are in distress. But they cannot get over their social Darwinism and they cannot get over the fact that all they care about is the Liberal Party. They will take the cheap route every time. They have done it again and because of all of that they should be condemned and shunned by the Australian people.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (3.52 pm)—Over the last couple of months, Australians have witnessed flood, fire and cyclones. Their hearts have been touched by the damage that they have seen.

The destruction went on for two months and the losses have totalled billions and are in every state—at least \$6 to 8 billion in the agricultural sector alone. But perhaps the biggest real disaster that Australians have had to confront over the last two months is Labor's economic management. The real impact of Labor's disastrous economic management has been shown up in these days. When there is a need for the government to do something important for the country, to undertake and fulfil one of its core responsibilities to rebuild after a disaster, Labor has no money left in the till—there is nothing there. In spite of its proposals to have new taxes on carbon, new taxes on mining, new taxes on alternative fuels, new taxes on LPG and increases in other taxes, it has to raise a special tax to undertake one of its core responsibilities: to rebuild the country that has been damaged by natural disasters.

Natural disasters are not uncommon in Australia. Indeed, in every federal budget and in every state budget money is put aside in a contingency reserve to deal with the impact of the government's obligations to rebuild the country in those circumstances. Dorothea Mackellar recalls in her poetry that Australians have to live with disasters; they come almost every year. And almost every year—indeed, every year up until now—governments have responded as they should by funding them from their own budget, making cuts if they have to, but recognising the priority of rebuilding the country.

Previous governments did not require a new tax to fund the aftermath of Cyclone Tracy and previous governments did not need a new tax to repair the damage after Cyclone Larry. There was no special tax to fund the needs of a 10-year drought. There was no special tax to deal with the floods in 1974 or in 1955. They were major disasters and they were dealt with as governments should deal with them. Good governments

put aside in the good times so that there will be money for the bad. We save in the good times for the rainy day. We had a very big rainy day and we should have had the money to be able to do the job to make the repairs.

What is worse is that the money was there when this government came to office, the money was there when this government took the reins, but it has been wasted. It has been wasted through mismanagement. We know that this government has been completely incapable of insulating Australia against virtually anything, let alone natural disasters. Waste has been the theme of this government. It has failed in its policy development and there has been very poor administration of the programs that it has implemented. The government has presided over extraordinary waste, extraordinarily poor administration and extraordinarily poor policy. This government has been presiding over one mess after another.

I guess the icons or the symbols of this waste have been programs like the Building the Education Revolution—the overpriced school halls; the insulation programs; Green Loans et cetera. Let me go through some of the already recorded waste of this government since coming to office: \$8 billion, including a \$1.7 billion blowout in the Building the Education Revolution program; \$2.4 billion wasted on the pink batts program; and \$850 million wasted on the solar homes program. The laptops-in-schools program blew out by \$1.2 billion and it has only delivered half its intended purpose. The Green Loans program saw \$300 million wasted and the scheme scrapped. There was \$81.9 million wasted on the ETS we are now not going to have. What about the waste that accompanied the government's laptops-in-schools program? What about the waste that has been associated with its management of so many of its programs?

Labor has wasted seven times the amount of money it hopes to collect from this levy. It has wasted \$13 billion and it has the gall to ask the Australian taxpayers to pay up another \$1.8 billion to do core business of the government, the very things that the government should have been putting aside for over the years. It has squandered the inheritance and now it has to go and ask for another tax to undertake its basic core duties. The government has a \$350 billion budget every year, but it cannot find \$1.8 billion to repair the country after a chain of natural disasters; it cannot find \$1.8 billion without Australians having to pay another tax?

Who knows how much the government is actually going to collect from this levy? The Treasurer today could not tell us how many people are going to pay. We do know that, since the government announced that it was going to have a \$1.8 billion collection from this new tax, it has exempted about half a million more Australians from paying it. How can the government still be going to collect the same amount of money even though it has exempted an extra half a million people from paying this tax? Let us look at those people who are being asked to pay the tax and those who are being exempted. Everyone who received the \$1,000 welfare payment will be exempt from the tax. It does not matter how much you have actually lost, it does not matter whether your business is ruined, you have to have received this \$1,000 payment; otherwise, you will not be exempted from this tax.

What people need to be aware of is that there are probably one to two million Australians that are eligible to collect this payment. We saw in Cairns queues three blocks long of people lining up to get the payment. You know, you do not actually have to live in a flood area to get this payment. You did not have to have any water go into your house at all. You did not have to have any damage.

You did not have to have any real inconvenience other than that your power was out for more than 48 hours—or your gas or your sewerage. You did not actually have to have any losses to be eligible for this \$1,000 payment.

I heard the Treasurer say on one occasion that he hoped no-one would claim the \$1,000 just because they were without electricity for 48 hours. If that is what he hoped, his guidelines do not say that. They are all entitled to claim it. But many decent people did not. They did not bother to claim, because they felt they had no losses and were not morally entitled to it. But those people, if they do not claim the \$1,000, are now going to have to pay the tax. So that is a powerful incentive for people who are really not entitled to it or ought not to get it to go and claim the \$1,000 so that they can get out of paying Labor's new tax. Of course, that provides all the wrong incentives. Those who have given to public appeals and paid out of their own pocket significant moneys to help their neighbours—as good Australians do and as all of us who care for our fellow man do—will still have to pay the tax, but people who claimed a \$1,000 payment even though they had no personal discomfort will be let off paying this tax.

So the government has no idea how much it is going to collect, but what it does know is that, once the money is collected, it cannot trust its own bureaucracy to spend it wisely. It has at least learned that: that no Labor administration can be trusted to spend the money. There have been people in Queensland also worried about the Queensland fund. Anna Bligh has not shown much record in being able to capably manage her budget either, and people have been reluctant to trust the government because of Labor's poor record. Even Labor now acknowledges that it cannot deliver. So what it is going to have now is a new bureaucracy to oversee the bu-

reaucracy that is going to oversee the bureaucracy that is actually supposed to deliver the repairs. This is the extreme of another round of Labor waste.

The reality is that it is a government's responsibility to repair the country when there are problems. The government should be putting money aside in good times so that it has the money when it needs it in bad times. A government that has wasted \$13 billion of the taxpayers' hard-earned money has no moral right to ask for another dip from those people who have endured so much already. (*Time expired*)

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond—Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (4.02 pm)—I am very proud to rise today to speak about this government's economic record—our strong economic record—and what we have achieved to keep our country and our economy strong. So I am very pleased to be participating in this MPI today. It is not just the economic changes we have made since being in government but also our commitment to rebuilding. We have seen the massive devastation over the summer with all of these horrendous natural disasters, and we have a strong commitment and a strong plan when it comes to rebuilding, as opposed to the opposition, who do not have a plan when it comes to that.

Essentially, I want to talk about the strength of our economy and what we have currently: the fact that we are in such a good position. The fact is that our nation beat the global recession. We did that due to this government's strong action in the face of the worldwide economic downturn. It is because of that that we are in this situation. We took that very strong and decisive action in the face of the global financial crisis. In fact, that action has seen us become a standout performer in comparison with other nations. In 2009 the Australian economy grew by 1.3

per cent while the world's advanced economies contracted by 3.2 per cent.

Of course, that was because of our stimulus measures, and I would like to just revisit some of those measures for the opposition members across the chamber so they can be reminded of the action this government took during the global financial crisis. We took that action, of course, to keep our economy strong and protect jobs and small businesses. Our nation-building economic stimulus plan was targeted to support jobs right throughout Australia by building new projects and facilities. There were also cash payments to low- and middle-income families and additional investments in schools, social housing and local community infrastructure to support growth and, of course, to keep many tradespeople in work. There were also tax breaks for small businesses to help them grow their business, and there was investment in economic infrastructure. As a result of all that, the Australian economy came through the global recession in a much stronger position than any other advanced economy. We were the only major advanced economy to avoid recession, and it is very important to remember that. Remember the action this government took and look at the result of it. I certainly saw firsthand in my electorate, Richmond, the massive impact of the government's economic stimulus in protecting local jobs. It was vitally important.

Also, of course, since coming to office we have created 700,000 jobs while other advanced economies shed millions of jobs. We have supported small businesses and families, and some of that support for families is vitally important. We, of course, introduced the nation's first ever Paid Parental Leave scheme; we introduced the childcare rebate; and we are increasing family support by up to \$4,000 a year to encourage teenagers aged 16 to 18 to remain in school or at TAFE. So we have had massive support in that increase

for families and also massive support so that people can return to the workforce through our Paid Parental Leave and our childcare benefits.

Our public finances are among the strongest in the developed world. Our balance sheet is strong, which is very important, and our trade performance remains strong. In December 2010 we recorded our ninth consecutive monthly trade surplus. We have had the longest run of monthly trade surpluses since the early 1970s. Of course, as we have said, our budget will be back in surplus by 2012-13. We are getting the budget back into surplus because it is the right thing to do in terms of the longer term challenges facing the Australian economy. We are bringing the budget back into surplus so that it is in a position, we hope, to be able to deal with future events like the floods we have had if we do need to deal with devastating natural events similar to the ones we have seen. Of course, when we look overall at all the action that we have taken, it means that so many people have been able to keep and protect their jobs. That is the action we have taken that is vitally important.

Of course, we are very focused on investing in the future. Of the natural disasters that we have experienced of late, the floods particularly are likely to end up being the most costly disaster in Australia's history. Treasury's preliminary assessments are that they are likely to lead to a loss of about one-half of a percentage point of GDP. It will have a major impact on exports through the loss of coal production. We also know that agricultural production has been hit hard as the floods have wiped out a very significant part of the food bowl.

The need to rebuild and to put the infrastructure back in place to support the economy does not alleviate the need to address the long-term challenges faced by the Aus-

tralian economy. We certainly do acknowledge that. Australia's story right now is the story of a patchwork economy. Even before the floods and the reconstruction effort were required we were expecting to see the re-emergence of labour shortages and bottlenecks. Our challenge remains to create a flexible, high-productivity, low-pollution economy.

Our policy settings are already addressing the challenges through our record investments in training and infrastructure. Education is a principal driver of prosperity; a carbon price will encourage investment in renewable energy; and, really importantly, the National Broadband Network will boost the digital economy and build productivity. The NBN is so vital for our nation's future, and it is the Gillard government that is committed to making sure that we have a National Broadband Network to address all of those issues.

The government has a commitment to reforming the economy to make it even stronger as we rebuild after all these terrible disasters that we have faced in the recent months. We can just compare that for a minute to the opposition and the way they approach all these issues. They constantly engage in cheap political stunts that have no credibility whatsoever. We know that the opposition's \$11 billion worth of savings that were proposed during the election campaign were found to be fraudulent, and they have no credibility when it comes to making any comments about the budget or about any economic matters at all.

I would now like to turn specifically to the government's response when it comes to the natural disasters we faced. Our response was very swift, with our disaster recovery payments and our plan to rebuild after the devastation. Our plan is very balanced and very appropriate. The Prime Minister has outlined

the one-off temporary levy that will be in place. When we look at what we need to rebuild and at the extent of the devastation, it is estimated that the government will need to invest \$5.6 billion in rebuilding. As we have said, we will deliver this funding through the following measures: \$2.8 billion in budget savings, \$1 billion by delaying some infrastructure projects and \$1.8 billion from the temporary levy on people earning over \$50,000.

Of course, no levy is payable where the person has an income of \$50,000 or less. As we have said, in fact, 60 per cent of taxpayers will pay less than a dollar a week. Those who receive an Australian government disaster recovery payment for a flood event in 2010-11 will be exempt from the levy. When we look at that amount and we look at people's responses, many people have told me that they do consider it a minor amount when they look at the extent of the devastation, at what is required for rebuilding and at how important it is for our nation's future.

We have heard so much from the opposition in their political stunts and their whinging and whining about this. There is a very strong history of levies being used by the Australian government, and I think that for the opposition members we should outline the six that were proposed during the course of the Howard years. There was a levy on superannuation for high-income earners, levies to restructure the milk and sugar industries, a levy to buy back guns in the aftermath of Port Arthur, a levy to help meet the entitlements of former Ansett staff and a proposed levy to help the people of East Timor to rebuild. Then, of course, no-one can forget the Leader of the Opposition's proposed levy on Australian business to fund his paid parental leave scheme.

If a levy was good enough to pay for the coalition's election promises last year, and if

it was good enough for those six levies to be proposed under the Howard government, we want to know why a levy is not good enough to support rebuilding these regions that have been devastated so much. It is just pure political hypocrisy at its absolute worst. That is all we see time and time again from the opposition—just their pure political hypocrisy.

In the deferral package that they released yesterday they just seem to be chopping and changing all over the shop with the different things they are saying. Part of that does not make any sense at all. In fact, what was most bizarre was the Leader of the Opposition, who, in his election campaign speech, described water as probably the most urgent environmental challenge facing our country. But what did we see yesterday? Yesterday, he proposed to defer water buybacks.

They are all over the shop; they do not know what they are doing with this. When we look at the comparison, it is the government that is in a very strong, committed position to rebuild this country. The Gillard government is focused on doing that. We have had a strong economic record since we came into government, and we are very much focused upon rebuilding for the future of our nation. I will repeat the words of the Treasurer, who spoke earlier. He really summed it up when he said that the Leader of the Opposition is not fit to lead the country in a time of crisis. He is not fit, and does not have the skills or ability to do that.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (4.12 pm)—We have just heard quoted verbatim Labor caucus talking points on these issues but very little engaging with the subject that we are here to discuss today. This was about our economy's ability to handle and to respond to natural disasters. This is about the way in which the Gillard-Rudd Labor governments have run down our nation's capacity to have the resources to respond to these unexpected,

although almost certain to arise, natural disasters that our vast nation faces.

This is what this is about, and you did not hear anything from the speakers about the mere fact that our capacity has been diminished, and that the government has now had to turn to a lazy new tax to prop up its response to these recent disasters. You did not hear anything about the 300,000 jobs that have been lost in small business over the last three years. They are quick to mention jobs growth, but you do not hear them talk about how 300,000 fewer Australians are now securing their livelihoods through employment in small business because small businesses are doing it tough.

These are small business people, not some distant enterprise, which the government seems to think they are. These are small business people—people who invest, take risks and provide opportunities for themselves, for their communities and for people to pursue their livelihoods. That capacity has been run down. Just as our fiscal capacity has eroded under this government, our capacity to work with the small business community to bounce back and support livelihoods has also been eroded.

And the government is continuing to do it. You have heard the shadow Treasurer talk about this government still borrowing \$100 million a day to feed its spending binge. That spending binge and bad debt binge are also undermining our nation's capacity to respond to and deal with natural disasters. The small business community struggle to get a hearing in that kind of debt environment, where the government is the gorilla in the room soaking up available resources to feed its spending spree.

We hear case after case, and we have heard some today. Even the Prime Minister herself has acknowledged that the package the government has put forward to support

small business is not responding to the needs of many. But that is not the only problem we face. Small businesses are hurting, and they will hurt more as this nation responds to these natural disasters. They will hurt as the government crowds them out in their ability to access finance. They will hurt more as consumer confidence takes a hit from yet another tax at a time when they are struggling to balance their own budgets.

Households around Australia are adjusting their spending patterns to respond to the times, but this government will not. This government reaches into people's pockets to pull out more tax to respond to this disaster when it is not looking hard enough at its own budgets and spending priorities to respond to those needs. So what we are going to see is a nation that has been battered by natural disasters now having its confidence further eroded by bad policy-making and bad decision-making from this Gillard Labor government.

We have seen the reports about what is going to happen to our broader economy. The Reserve Bank has predicted a contraction of about half a per cent of GDP in 2010-11. Some people think that half a per cent is not much, but it is a very substantial amount of economic activity and it will hurt small business most. The small businesses are the ones that will hurt when consumers in this country hesitate to spend. It is the small businesses in our nation that will hurt most when people enter their enterprises demanding discounts and savings. There is one reason that the inflation rate is not higher than it is, and that is that small businesses have been absorbing cost pressures and consumer uncertainty in their margins. There are no sloppy profits around for small business. There are no easy sales. It is hard work. In the retail space the big guys, to maintain their turnover, have driven higher volume

sales at lower margins, and small businesses are left to respond to that.

This disaster will see many of the inputs into small businesses become more expensive. But do you think small businesses will have the capacity to push up their prices? No. They will not be able to pass those increases on to customers. Customers are already wary about their own economic circumstances and economic future. They have already had their confidence damaged by some of the decision-making of this government, which has made it all the more difficult for those directly affected by the floods. This is a time when confidence is crucial, and the last thing a national government should do is take further action to undermine that confidence. But that is precisely what this government has done. Those with a capacity to contribute have voluntarily donated to the relief effort. But now those who are struggling to pay their mortgages after, I think, seven interest rate rises under this government are going to have to face paying more tax to a government that has shown itself to be incapable of being resourceful with the funds it already has.

We heard the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the National Party, outline the waste, the misuse and the abuse of taxpayer resources by this Labor government. And do you know what those people who are prepared to make a further contribution are anxious about? They are anxious about how the government will use it, because this government has got form in misusing and underutilising the resources it has available to it. Those who are struggling to meet the rising cost of basics—electricity, housing, food, water, transport, sending their kids to school and paying higher and higher internet charges while waiting for the real peak to come along when the NBN arrives—are the ones who are going to be wondering how they are going to find the extra money.

And when they find that extra money, small businesses will not have that money coming through their front door, as it will be going into Treasury's front door here in Canberra.

As we respond to this disaster, we need to reflect that we are responding off the back of a diminished capacity to respond because of successive decisions, waste and misuse of resources by this Labor government. And if the government has to resort to an extra tax to respond to this disaster, where is the capacity to respond to the next disaster going to come from? Indeed, if the estimates that the government has produced are not right, where are the extra resources going to come from? The government says it has the capacity to cut spending. Why not do that work now so Australian households and small businesses right across this country can see that the government is reordering its priorities and better utilising the resources available to it to live within its means, as everyone else is expected to do, and not go and touch up the taxpayer for a bit more dough coming through the front door?

This is on the back of the Treasurer's dubious and, to quote the economists, highly risky mining tax—a mining tax that has written \$7.4 billion into the budget. Economists rightly describe this as a highly risky revenue scheme. The mining tax has been botched once, reborn and put back on the table. There is uncertainty about its application and who will pay. It is uncertain in terms of the international commodity market and what revenue streams will come. If that is uncertain you can kind of understand why the Treasurer is uncertain about who is going to be receiving money from the government to support the rescue after these natural disasters and who will be expected to pay the flood tax. These guys just do not know what they are doing, Mr Deputy Prime Minister—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I thank the member for Dunkley for the promotion!

Mr BILLSON—I dare say you would probably do a much better job, sir; and may I compliment you on your taste in your attire as well. These guys do not know what they are doing. The Gillard Labor government—and this is the underlying concern of the Australian public—do not know what they are doing. So why would people want to give them more money to misuse in the way that they have done? This is a time when small business is looking to have confidence built. Small business is suffering and finding it difficult—and, as the Prime Minister conceded today, small business is having its needs overlooked in some of the design of the support packages.

So what does the government need to do? The government can be just as lazy as it has been in the past and pick up the coalition's agenda to revitalise small business. We took to the election more than a dozen initiatives that would build confidence, vitality and viability in the small business community to put 'business' back into small business. That is why the electorate overwhelmingly endorsed the coalition, well and truly, in the best interests of the small business and family enterprise community. But you do not have to take it from me. The *Australian Financial Review* released FOI documents—the blue book, the incoming brief for a new government. Do you know what they said? 'Implement your small business plan; it will generate innovation and economic vitality.' This lazy Gillard government should at least follow the lead that has been set by the coalition and do something to help small business.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! Given the compliment paid to me by the honourable member for

Dunkley, I am reluctant to ask him to resume his seat, but his time has well and truly expired.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (4.23 pm)—It is in times of crisis and controversy that politicians and political leaders show their true spirit, their true integrity and their true character. I did not always agree with former Prime Minister John Howard on industrial relations, on the local issue of the Ipswich motorway and on other issues in South-East Queensland. There are a lot of issues that I did not agree with him on, but at times of crisis both locally and internationally, such as when the tsunami hit our friends in Indonesia, he was there and we supported bipartisanship. When it came to crises in our country, the former Prime Minister, to his credit, showed leadership and there was a bipartisan approach.

At the time of the greatest natural disaster in South-East Queensland, when so much of the Brisbane, Ipswich, Lockyer and Brisbane Valley communities are devastated, you would expect more from that person who sits in the chair just opposite and who wants to go across the table. You would expect more. You would expect that he would come and give a plan that he thought was good, appropriate and fair to the Australian community. You would not expect the procrastination we saw in the last few weeks. You would not expect ructions, rancour and rumblings in the coalition that you saw in the last few weeks on deferrals and spending cuts. You would expect there to be bipartisanship, and people in South-East Queensland, certainly in my electorate of Blair, would expect the opposition and government to come together to work in the national interest for the benefit of South-East Queensland. But what do we see? We see an argument today, raised as a matter of public importance, about the floods. I did not think I would see that happen. I thought there would be grace and hu-

mility from those opposite. Sadly, we are let down. The opposition alleges that we are a government of waste and big taxes when in fact it is not true. Those opposite know this is a government that has invested in their communities because they attended the opening of school halls in their electorates under the BER program and they know their communities supported the investment.

In this proposal from the Leader of the Opposition he wants to cull the money for those programs. I will tell you what those programs did. In the Brisbane Valley, in my electorate, the school hall in Esk and the school hall in Fernvale acted as evacuation centres. Without those school halls, built under the Building the Education Revolution, the people of Fernvale and Esk would not have had a place to go. In fact, they broke into the school in Fernvale because they were fleeing the floodwaters. Yet those opposite criticise us and purport to cut the funding for the BER. They would prefer to defer the funding to Indonesia when they know very well this was a bipartisan approach—an initiative of those opposite. They know after 10 years of drought in this country that this is the right time to do the water buyback. They know it very well. They know in their party room that they would blow a billion dollar hole—an economically irresponsible billion dollar hole—in the budget if the measures they announced just before the condolence motion yesterday were implemented. We also know that at the last election they came up with another black hole of \$10.6 billion. They said they could find easy cuts in the budget just a few weeks ago. Guess what happened? We saw the Leader of the Opposition on *Insiders* last Sunday. I came back from a run—I was not inspired by him to go for a jog—and sat in my house with a cold glass of water and looked at the Leader of the Opposition being interviewed. There he was saying it was

'hard'. The debate in the shadow cabinet in the coalition party room must have been very hard. He looked like a man under stress. Three times he was asked by Barrie Cassidy whether it was more important to donate to the flood victims or to the Liberal Party. Three times there was obfuscation and equivocation. Yet he comes in here and gives these political speeches at a time of national crisis in Queensland.

The record of those opposite is an absolute and utter disgrace. They know very well that when it comes to levies they have form. They have a record on levies. For example, the 1998-99 stevedoring levy surplus was \$3.9 billion, in 2001 there was the dairy levy at \$13 billion, in 2001-02 the airport levy was \$5.9 billion and in 2002-03 the sugar levy was \$7.4 billion. Then came the Paid Parental Leave Scheme. They are outrageous and extravagant and it was an attack on business that would have been passed through Woolworths and Coles to the average person. That was their Woolworths and Coles tax. What about the level of tax as a percentage of GDP? In this financial year it is 20.9 per cent.

They criticise us for being irresponsible when it comes to tax, but never once in the 11 years of the Howard government was tax revenue as a share of GDP below this. When Mr Abbott, Mr Hockey and Mr Robb—the Leader of the Opposition and his economics brains trust over there—were in power the highest tax rate was 24.1 per cent of the economy when it came to a percentage of GDP. It never, ever got as low as we have it now. We have stimulated the economy to save jobs. There are about 1.5 million people who work in the retail sector and about 250,000 who work in the construction sector. How many people in the construction sector have said to you that without the BER, without the roads funding, without all those

stimulus proposals and programs they would have been out of work?

There was \$37 billion in rail, road and port infrastructure in Australia, and \$22 billion went to rural and regional areas, including many in National Party seats. That is the reality; that is what happened—investment to get rid of capacity constraints, investments in important infrastructure, in coal towns, in mining towns and in rural parts of Queensland that are currently under flood. We did it because it was in the national interest—not necessarily because it was in our political interest but because we knew it was good for the national economy. But guess what? Those opposite are not prepared to put the national interest ahead of the political interest, and that is why the flood levy email is so outrageous and disgraceful, and that is why those opposite know in their hearts that ours is a modest levy.

If you were a public servant in the Ipswich City Council on 80 grand a year and you were not affected by the flood, and you came, for example, to my electorate, you would pay about \$3.50 at Cactus Espresso Bar or one of the other coffee shops. The truth is that, if you paid that for a cup of coffee, that is more than you would pay for the \$2.88 weekly flood levy. But you would be doing it to help your fellow Ipswichians and the people in the Lockyer Valley, in the Somerset region and in Toowoomba. You know you would do it, because it is a mateship levy. It is helping out fellow human beings who have suffered. It is a show of compassion and charity.

Many people have made great donations. Millions of dollars have been raised. But we need billions of dollars. It is going to cost us \$5.6 billion to get the economy back up and going. We know how important it is, and that is why those opposite are really acting irresponsibly when it comes to this. They were

not prepared to support the stimulus to sustain jobs, to keep the economy going, to invest in roads, rail and infrastructure, and now they say they will not get on board in a bipartisan way to support people in the flood-affected areas of South-East Queensland. They have no charity in their hearts, no compassion and no humanity with respect to this issue. They are not prepared to put affection for their fellow Queenslanders front and centre. That is the reality of what we are seeing from those opposite. They are not prepared to do it.

The Leader of the Opposition has been all over the place. I just cannot understand his attitude. Sometimes, I have to say, the Leader of the Opposition makes good speeches. Sometimes he makes fairly good speeches. But those opposite know very well his performance in the past 48 hours shows he is not fit for the role he is currently in. And many opposite would like to sit in the chair that the member for Bowman is sitting in and would argue that they are better performers, are better prepared and would make better leaders of the opposition. They know in their hearts that is the case. The Leader of the Opposition is not fit to sit in that chair because of his attitude with respect to the people of South-East Queensland.

I say to those opposite, the members for Ryan, Wright, Groom and Maranoa: tap him on the shoulder, tell him he is wrong and make sure he gets with the program in a bipartisan way. Put Queenslanders front and centre, put the economy of Queensland front and centre, put the Queensland community front and centre and support the flood levy.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—The discussion has now concluded.

COMMITTEES
Selection Committee
Report No. 11

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott) (4.33 pm)—On behalf of the Speaker I present the Selection Committee's report No. 11 relating to the consideration of committee and delegation business and private members' business on Monday, 21 February 2011. The report will be printed in today's *Hansard* and the committee's determinations will appear on tomorrow's *Notice Paper*. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.

The report read as follows—

Report relating to the consideration of committee and delegation business

and private Members' business on Monday, 21 February 2011, and other matters

1. The committee met in private session on Tuesday, 8 February 2011.
2. The committee determined the order of precedence and times to be allotted for consideration of committee and delegation business and private Members' business on Monday, 21 February 2011, as follows:

Items for House of Representatives Chamber (10.10 am to 12 noon)

COMMITTEE AND DELEGATION BUSINESS

Presentation and statements

1 Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts

Advisory Report on the National Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2010

The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.20 am.

Speech time limits—

Mr Zappia—5 minutes.

Next Member speaking—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

2 Joint Standing Committee on Treaties

Report 114: Treaties referred on 16 November 2010 (part 1)

The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.25 am.

Speech time limits—

Mr K. J. Thomson—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 5 mins]

3 Standing Committee on Education and Employment

Statement concerning the Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians.

The Committee determined that statements on the inquiry may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.30 am.

Speech time limits—

Ms Rishworth—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 5 mins]

4 Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Statements concerning the Inquiry into higher levels of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system.

The Committee determined that statements on the inquiry may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.40 am.

Speech time limits—

Mr Neumann—5 minutes.

Next Member speaking—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

5 Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

Statement concerning the Inquiry into the regulation of billboard and outdoor advertising.

The Committee determined that statements on the inquiry may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.45 am.

Speech time limits—

Mr Perrett—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 5 mins]

6 AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION TO INDONESIA, BRUNEI AND LAOS

Report of Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Indonesia, Brunei and Laos, 11 to 24 April 2010.

The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.50 am.

Speech time limits—

Mr K. J. Thomson—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 5 mins]

7 AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION TO the 31st AIP GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Report of Australian Parliamentary Delegation to the 31st AIPA General Assembly, September 2010.

The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.55 am.

Speech time limits—

Mr Murphy—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 5 mins]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**Notices**

1 MR ABBOTT: To present a Bill for an Act to establish a process for assisting victims of overseas terrorist acts. (Assisting the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Bill 2010). (Notice given 23 November 2010.)

Presenter may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.

2 MR DUTTON: To present a Bill for an Act to amend the Patents Act 1990 to prevent the patenting of human genes and biological materials existing in nature, and for related purposes. (Patent Amendment (Human Genes and Biological Materials) Bill 2010). (Notice given 18 November 2010.)

Presenter may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.

3 MR BALDWIN: To move:

That this House:

- (1) condemns the Rudd-Gillard Government for:
 - (a) reducing funding for Tourism Australia at a time when the high Australian dollar is putting pressure on local tourism operators; and
 - (b) increasing business costs for local tourism operators through:
 - (i) higher tourism taxes;
 - (ii) the bungled award modernisation; and
 - (iii) additional superannuation guarantee payments which will be entirely funded by employers; and
- (2) calls on the Rudd-Gillard Government to match the Coalition's commitment to increase tourism funding by \$100 million to:
 - (a) focus on high-yielding business events tourists;
 - (b) build stronger research foundations;
 - (c) encourage tourism infrastructure and product development; and
 - (d) boost domestic tourism marketing. (Notice given 26 October 2010.)

Time allotted—20 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Mr Baldwin—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

4 MS ROWLAND: To move:

That this House:

- (1) notes the:
 - (a) 19 September 2010 Declaration by the members of the Broadband Commission for Digital Development to world leaders attending the 2010 Millennium Development Goals Summit at the United Nations on the benefits of broadband as the transformational technology for employment generation, productivity

growth and the long term economic competitiveness;

- (b) OECD report of December 2009 which makes the case for investment in a competitive, open access national fibre network rollout based on benefits to four key sectors of the economy: electricity, health transportation and education;
 - (c) the positive externalities of broadband in providing increased opportunities to access Australian health and education services, and the linkages between disparities in broadband access and social disadvantage; and
 - (d) the technical limitations of non fibre approaches to national broadband development, particularly in respect of video and other 'real time' applications used to deliver health and education services; and
- (2) recognises the merits of the development of universal broadband access in Australia with an emphasis on options for niche broadband delivered content and applications to provide immediate benefits to areas and groups of identifiable need. (Notice given 19 October 2010.)

Time allotted—remaining private Members' business time prior to 12 noon.

Speech time limits—

Ms Rowland—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 1 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items for House of Representatives Chamber (8 to 9.30 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Notices

5 MS HALL: To move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) Australia has an ageing population;

- (b) age discrimination exists within Australia and that this discrimination impacts on the strength of society, economy and the lives of older Australians;
- (c) ageing should not only be considered as an economic and social cost to government, rather, the positives of an older population should be recognised and promoted by government;
- (d) all older Australians deserve to live with dignity; and
- (e) the knowledge, life experience and skills of older people provide enormous benefit to Australia and the social fabric of the nation;
- (2) acknowledges that:
- (a) older workers have the ability to make an enormous contribution to the economic prosperity of Australia;
- (b) most volunteer work is undertaken by older Australians and provides an enormous economic social contribution to Australia; and
- (c) older Australians provide an enormous amount of child care which provides economic value to the nation; and
- (3) calls on the Government to consider:
- (a) new and innovative approaches to engage older Australians and address their needs;
- (b) encouraging Government departments to introduce senior friendly practices, such as dedicated seniors phone lines and customer service officers;
- (c) Aged Care Accountants for all workers to fund their needs as they become older; and
- (d) highlighting and promoting the advantage of employing older workers. (Notice given 18 October 2010.)
- Time allotted—50 minutes.*
- Speech time limits—*
- Ms Hall—10 minutes.*
- Next 3 Members speaking—10 minutes each.*
- Other Members—5 minutes each.*
- [Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 10 mins + 2 x 5 mins]
- The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.*
- 6 MR MORRISON:** To move:
- That this House:
- (1) notes that:
- (a) Australia has a long and proud record of resettling more than 700 000 refugees since the Second World War;
- (b) there are 10.4 million refugees around the world and less than 1 per cent will be offered a resettlement place;
- (c) Australia's current refugee and humanitarian program is set at 13 750 with 6000 of those places going to refugees mandated by the UNHCR and referred to Australia for resettlement;
- (d) the current Government has lost control of our borders with more than 9000 irregular maritime arrivals to Australia since August 2008;
- (e) as a result of the failure to protect our borders, places in the offshore Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) are being taken up by onshore protection visa applicants and their families; and
- (f) women who have been identified by the UNHCR as being in danger of victimisation, harassment or serious abuse have been rejected by Australia because there are no longer any places left in our offshore SHP; and
- (2) calls for the Government to:
- (a) give priority processing to the following visa applications within the SHP:
- (i) offshore applications for subclass 201—In Country Special Humanitarian Program Visa which offers resettlement to people who have suffered persecution in their country of nationality and who have not been able to leave that country;
- (ii) offshore applications for subclass 202—Global Special Humanitar-

ian Visa for those subject to substantial discrimination and human rights abuses in their home country and who are sponsored for entry by an Australian citizen or permanent resident who is not, and has never been, a subclass 866 visa holder;

- (iii) offshore applications for subclass 203—Emergency Rescue Visa for people who are referred to Australia by the UNHCR and whose lives or freedom depend on urgent resettlement; and
- (iv) offshore applications for subclass 204—Women at Risk Visa for women who are registered as being of concern to the UNHCR;
- (b) confine immediate family members of sub class 866 protection visas holders, that includes irregular maritime arrivals, to eligibility for sponsorship only through the primary visa holder as a secondary applicant for a sub class 866 protection visa; and
- (c) cap the number of visas available in the refugee and humanitarian program in the following ways:
 - (i) 6000 subclass 200 visas for people identified by the UNHCR and referred to the Australian Government as mandated refugees;
 - (ii) 3750 subclass 866 protection visas for primary and secondary applicants, including irregular maritime arrivals and their immediate families; and
 - (iii) 4000 subclass 201, 202, 203 and 204 visas. (Notice given 15 November 2010.)

Time allotted—remaining private Members' business time prior to 9.30 pm.

Speech time limits—

Mr Morrison—10 minutes.

Other Members—10 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 10 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items for Main Committee (approx 11 am to approx 1.30 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS Notices

1 DR STONE: To move:

That this House:

- (1) mourns the tragic loss of young Chase and Tyler Robinson, who died at Mooroopna on 30 May 2010 in a recently rented home;
- (2) notes that Chase and Tyler Robinson were the victims of a faulty gas wall heater emitting carbon monoxide; and
- (3) calls upon the Australian Government to work with the State and Territory governments through the Council of Australian Governments to:
 - (a) urgently introduce legislation that requires:
 - (i) approved carbon monoxide detectors to be fitted in all homes that have gas appliances; and
 - (ii) landlords to arrange for suitably qualified contractors to biannually inspect all gas appliances and associated fittings in rental properties; and
 - (b) institute a national safety awareness campaign alerting all Australians to the dangers and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning and the need to regularly maintain gas appliances to ensure that they operate efficiently and safely. (Notice given 16 November 2010.)

Time allotted—40 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Dr Stone—10 minutes.

Other Members—10 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 10 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

2 MS RISHWORTH: To move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
- (a) support for a solution to return the Murray Darling river system to health is widespread across Australia;
 - (b) a poll by the Australian Conservation Foundation found that 77 per cent of Australians agree that environmental degradation in the Murray Darling Basin must be reversed;
 - (c) the Government is working towards an effective strategy for the integrated and sustainable management of water resources in the Murray Darling Basin; and
 - (d) this strategy includes purchasing water for increased environmental flows, setting sustainable diversion limits on the quantity of water removed from the Basin, managing water quality and investing in water-saving infrastructure; and
- (2) recognises that the Government:
- (a) has already began the task of returning the Murray Darling River system to health though the Water for the Future plan;
 - (b) is working towards ensuring the long term viability of this river system for all those who rely on its precious water resources; and
 - (c) will continue to consult openly with all stakeholders in the Murray Darling Basin. (Notice given 25 November 2010.)
- Time allotted—30 minutes.*
- Speech time limits—*
- Ms Rishworth—10 minutes.*
- Next Member speaking—10 minutes.*
- Other Members—5 minutes each.*
- [Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 2 x 5 mins]
- The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.*
- 3 MR COBB:** To move:
That this House:
- (1) requires the responsible Minister to:
 - (a) commission the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), with the assistance of ABARE, to prepare an information database on the foreign ownership of agricultural land and agribusiness, which should:
 - (i) show the level of foreign ownership for Australia as a whole, by state and for key regions, and for particular agribusinesses;
 - (ii) include an annual formal statistical release; and
 - (iii) recommend what steps need to be taken to establish and maintain a public register of foreign ownership of agricultural land and agribusiness;
 - (b) task the Productivity Commission, on the receipt of the initial ABS data, to:
 - (i) review foreign ownership of agricultural land and agribusiness, with an evaluation of its contribution to the national interest in terms of economic development, food and water security, and agricultural sustainability; and
 - (ii) recommend how the foreign investment policy on agricultural land and agribusiness should be modified, if necessary, to ensure the optimum outcomes for economic development and the national interest, including whether the Government needs to:
 - lower the threshold for notification to the Foreign Investment Review Board for rural land and agribusiness acquisitions;
 - introduce a national interest test for food security; and
 - ensure that foreign entities do not establish monopoly or near monopoly positions in key sectors.
 - (2) commit to establishing a Joint Parliamentary Committee to consider the information pro-

vided by the ABS, ABARE and the, Productivity Commission, taking into account public concern in this area. (Notice given 23 November 2010.)

Time allotted—40 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Mr Cobb—10 minutes.

Other Members—10 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 10 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

4 MS SAFFIN: To move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that the Government:
 - (a) deeply regrets recent reports of violence in Western Sahara, and allegations of human rights violations with respect to Western Sahara;
 - (b) urges parties to uphold international human rights standards, and to maintain their resolve to work peacefully through these issues in the United Nations led process currently underway;
 - (c) strongly supports the efforts of the United Nations to find an enduring and mutually acceptable settlement in relation to Western Sahara;
 - (d) welcomes progress made during the third round of informal talks here on 8-9 November in New York between Morocco and the Polisario Front, facilitated by the United Nations Secretary General's Personal Envoy Christopher Ross, including agreement to further informal talks later in 2010;
 - (e) calls on the parties to continue to work through these issues in the United Nations process underway; and
 - (f) hopes the next round of informal talks, scheduled for December 2010, will make further progress; and
- (2) fully supports:
 - (a) the efforts of the United Nations Secretary General, his Special Envoy, and the

United Nations to find an enduring settlement to the Western Sahara issue; and

- (b) these concerns, calls, hopes and actions. (Notice given 25 November 2010.)

Time allotted—20 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Ms Saffin—5 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

5 MS VAMVAKINO: To move:

That this House:

- (1) condemns the New Year's Day attack on the Al-Qiddissin Church, the Church of the Two Saints, in Alexandria, Egypt;
- (2) acknowledges the historical role of the Coptic Orthodox community of Egypt;
- (3) expresses its condolences to all victims of violence and terrorism;
- (4) reaffirms the Australian Government's call for fundamental political reform in Egypt and the protection of the rights of all Egyptian citizens; and
- (5) recognises:
 - (a) the contributions made by the Coptic Orthodox community of Australia under the leadership of His Grace Bishop Suriel of the Coptic Orthodox Church Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions;
 - (b) the value and role of interfaith dialogue in building a diverse and harmonious society; and
 - (c) the value of democratic rights and the right to freedom of religion and culture. (Notice given 8 February 2011.)

Time allotted—remaining private Members' business time prior to 1.30 pm

Speech time limits—

Ms Vamvakinou—5 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items for Main Committee (approx 6.30 to 9 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Notices

6 MR PERRETT: To move:

That this House:

- (1) recognises the conclusion of a great television police drama, *The Bill*, and thanks the ABC for its long standing commitment to the program;
- (2) acknowledges that since 1983, *The Bill*, has kept many of us from fully engaging with the broader Australian arts community on a Saturday night;
- (3) recognises the broad contribution that our local arts make to Australian society and culture;
- (4) reaffirms our commitment to the arts and to engaging with our local performers, artists and writers (particularly on our now *Bill* less Saturday nights); and
- (5) calls on the Minister for the Arts to lead Australia into a new era of artistic development and excellence and for all Australians to better support their local live performances. (Notice given 18 October 2010.)

Time allotted—20 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Mr Perrett—5 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

7 MR BALDWIN: To move:

That this House:

- (1) condemns the Rudd-Gillard Government for:
 - (a) reducing funding for Tourism Australia at a time when the high Australian dollar

is putting pressure on local tourism operators; and

- (b) increasing business costs for local tourism operators through:
 - (i) higher tourism taxes;
 - (ii) the bungled award modernisation; and
 - (iii) additional superannuation guarantee payments which will be entirely funded by employers; and
- (2) calls on the Rudd-Gillard Government to match the Coalition's commitment to increase tourism funding by \$100 million to:
 - (a) focus on high-yielding business events tourists;
 - (b) build stronger research foundations;
 - (c) encourage tourism infrastructure and product development; and
 - (d) boost domestic tourism marketing. (Notice given 26 October 2010.)

(See PMB Notice No. 3 page 6)

Time allotted—30 minutes.

Speech time limits—

First 2 Members—10 minutes each.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 2 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

8 MR HAYES: To move:

That this House:

- (1) notes the importance of public libraries in communities across Australia;
- (2) recognises that:
 - (a) various state based research provides clear evidence of the contribution and value of public libraries in terms of the triple bottom line: economic, environmental and social impact; and
 - (b) recognises that libraries provide access to information technology, research, educational resources and recreational materials for many people who otherwise could not afford them;

- (3) congratulates public library staff for their commitment to facilitating life long learning in the community;
- (4) supports the wide availability of public library collections as a way to help address disadvantage by ensuring free and equitable access to collections for all community members;
- (5) notes that in 2008 09, 7.7 million Australians visited a library and the total asset value of library collections in this country was \$4.3 billion;
- (6) expresses concern over the action instigated by Liverpool City Council to investigate the viability of closing Green Valley, Miller, Moorebank and Casula public libraries; and
- (7) specifically notes the community outrage and concern as a result of this decision, giving regard to the proven benefits of local public libraries as noted above. (Notice given 18 October 2010.)

Time allotted—20 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Mr Hayes—5 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

9 MR ROBERT: To move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) Defence Housing Australia (DHA) is the professional manager of Defence houses;
 - (b) the Department of Defence still retains over 1650 homes that have not been handed over to DHA; and
 - (c) the Government is using some of these 1650 homes, notably over 50 at Inverbrackie, as a detention facility to house Irregular Maritime Arrivals (IMA), rather than Defence families; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) cease using Defence housing as an immigration detention facility;
- (b) hand over all houses managed by the Department of Defence to DHA; and
- (c) categorically state that it will not acquire the homes of Defence families for the purpose of housing the ever increasing number of IMA arriving in Australia as a result of the Government's soft border protection policies. (Notice given 8 February 2011.)

Time allotted—40 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Mr Robert—10 minutes.

Other Members—10 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 10 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

10 MS A. E. BURKE: To move:

That this House:

- (1) notes:
 - (a) the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo continues to suffer from high levels of poverty, insecurity, and a culture of impunity, in which illegal armed groups and military forces continue to commit widespread human right abuses;
 - (b) that, according to a study by the International Rescue Committee released in January 2008, conflict and related humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo have resulted in the deaths of an estimated 5 400 000 people since 1998, and continue to cause as many as 45 000 deaths each year; and
 - (c) the mismanagement and illicit trade of extractive resources from the Democratic Republic of Congo supports conflict between militias and armed domestic factions in neighbouring countries; and
- (2) calls on the Government to promote peace and security in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo by supporting efforts of the

Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo, civil society groups, and the international community to monitor and stop commercial activities involving natural resources that contribute to illegal armed groups and human rights violations. (Notice given 18 October 2010.)

Time allotted—20 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Ms A. E. Burke—5 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

11 MR NEUMANN: To move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that in 2006, the Howard Government made sweeping changes to the Family Law Act 1975 in parenting matters, and that these changes:
 - (a) elevated the rights of parents above the need to protect children; and
 - (b) have been analysed and criticised in the following reports:
 - (i) ‘Family Courts violence review’ by Professor Richard Chislm, former Justice of the Family Court;
 - (ii) ‘Evaluation of the family law reforms’ by the Australian Institute of Family Studies; and
 - (iii) ‘Improving responses to family violence in the family law system’ by the Family Law Council;
- (2) acknowledges that on 11 November 2010, the Hon. Robert McClelland, Attorney General, released a draft bill Family Law Amendment (Family Violence) Bill 2010 (the Bill) for public consultation open to 14 January 2011, proposing amendments to the Family Law Act 1975 to provide better protection for children and families at risk of violence;

- (3) supports the Federal Labor Government in taking steps to protect children from abuse, neglect and family violence; and

- (4) urges the Federal Labor Government to proceed with the Bill to ensure that the best interest of the child is the paramount consideration in all court proceedings in relation to children. (Notice given 23 November 2010.)

Time allotted—remaining private Members’ business time prior to 9 pm

Speech time limits—

Mr Neumann—5 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

3. The committee recommended that the following items of private Members’ business be voted on:

Notices

Priorities for processing applications for visas (Notice of motion given by Mr Morrison 15 November 2010).

Carbon monoxide deaths (Notice of motion given by Dr Stone 16 November 2010).

Foreign ownership of agricultural land (Notice given by Mr Cobb 23 November 2010).

Tourism funding (Notice of motion given by Mr Baldwin 26 October 2010).

Defence Housing use (Notice of motion given by Mr Robert 8 February 2010).

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Commemoration of the 2nd Anniversary of the Black Saturday Bushfires

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (4.34 pm)—by leave—Mr Speaker, I rise to speak as the Commonwealth minister responsible for the Commonwealth Victorian bushfire reconstruction effort. Today the federal parliament marks the second anniversary of Victoria’s Black Saturday bushfires and, once again, we are

standing together as a nation to mourn and to rebuild after a natural disaster.

Yesterday our parliament reflected on this summer of extraordinary events. We mourn the lives lost; we recount the damage done. This summer, nature has again been relentless. All corners of our Federation have been in flood: Queensland and New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania. North Queensland withstood the most powerful cyclone we have ever seen. And fires are ravaging suburbs and towns on the outskirts of Perth, razing scores of homes. Yet again our nation bears witness to nature's fury. And yet again we see Australians bound together by courage, sacrifice and a generosity of spirit.

Two years ago, Victoria was tinder dry, forests and fields were parched by drought, there was below average rainfall and record high temperatures: ingredients for a catastrophe. Many Victorians will forever remember the extreme conditions on that Saturday. It was 40 degrees by 11 am, and the temperature climbed even higher throughout the day. On that day, authorities attended or patrolled 316 grass, scrub or forest fires. Furious wind, as if blasted directly from the furnaces of hell, whipped across the countryside—wind that not only accelerated as that day progressed but also cruelly changed direction to both intensify the fires and their danger.

7 February 2009 was a day that changed the lives of Victorians and indeed the nation forever. Black Saturday took the lives of 173 Australians. Parents lost children, children lost parents, families lost neighbours and friends and more than 800 people were injured, some with horrific burns. It will be forever etched in our memories.

People's livelihoods were also shattered—more than 2,000 properties were destroyed, 430,000 hectares burnt out and hundreds of businesses were lost or damaged. Their

losses were enormous. Today, we remember the loss. Importantly, we also pay tribute to the strength of survivors and recommit ourselves to supporting people and communities as they continue to heal and rebuild. The courage of these communities continues to be an inspiration. Many people are still coming to terms with their loss and the devastation and fear caused by the fires, but their determination is extraordinary.

On Sunday afternoon, I joined the Prime Minister, the Governor-General, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the Victorian Premier, Ms Christine Nixon and, most importantly, community members to commemorate, at Federation Square in Melbourne, the two-year anniversary of Black Saturday and the Gippsland bushfires. At the service, a poem from 14-year-old Maddy Bartlett was read. Maddy's poem is called 'The colour of my town'. It tells of an innocent summer day when 'blue sky was turned grey'. Maddy describes her world turning orange in the wake of disaster. Maddy lost her parents and her sister on Black Saturday. She was on life support for five weeks and in hospital for 16 weeks.

Like so many Black Saturday survivors, Maddy embodies the strength and courage that have seen people rise to meet these unfathomable challenges. Her poem describes the green shoots of hope that emerged after that grey and orange day. It is these green shoots of hope that we focus on as fire affected communities continue to rebuild.

The human spirit of strength and unity continues to underpin the reconstruction effort. I know that this spirit is widespread across bushfire affected communities. At the end of last year, I met with the Victorian Bushfires Bereaved Community Advisory Group. They are an incredible group who support and advocate for the bereaved community. They provide advice to government

and community leaders and, most importantly, provide a voice for those who lost loved ones on Black Saturday. They, like many others, are adamant that their journey of healing can help support people affected by the bushfire tragedy but also people affected by the latest disasters in Queensland. Just yesterday one of them said to me that they she wanted to know what she could do to help the people of Grantham.

Government Response and Recovery

After Black Saturday, the Australian government committed to standing by these communities to help them rebuild their lives, their homes and their communities, to be there with them every step of the way. The previous Prime Minister is here with us today and I acknowledge his extraordinary compassion and leadership at the time. While there is still a way to go, the Australian government continues to be part of the rebuilding effort.

We are working in partnership with local communities, local government and the Victorian government. Together, much has been achieved, but much more is to be done. We are working on putting back the bricks and mortar and, importantly, supporting the indestructible spirit of community. We know that governments cannot replace what has been lost. But we have supported and will continue to support individuals, families, communities and businesses with payments and services that they need to help them rebuild their lives.

Direct financial assistance went to around 59,000 individuals and families. Centrelink marshalled into action, and the defence forces mobilised. On the ground, we have, importantly, provided assistance to mental health services to help those deal with the loss and grief that they face.

For these communities, economic recovery is vital. Before the fires many of these

towns were thriving centres of small- and medium-sized enterprise. We have provided income support for employees, small business operators and farmers, and concessional interest loans for businesses. The Victorian Bushfire Business Investment Fund—to which the Commonwealth contributed—has helped existing businesses get through the recovery and is helping establish new businesses in affected communities.

As of today, over 2,300 building permits have been issued in bushfire affected areas. Of the 1,600 people who lost their principal place of residence, almost three-quarters have either rebuilt, are in the process of rebuilding or have purchased a new home. In Marysville, Kinglake and Strathewen, some of the worst affected communities, primary schools have been rebuilt. I am very pleased to say that children are back at their rebuilt schools and kindergartens.

More than 800 projects identified in community recovery plans are being delivered, with new affordable housing units built in Marysville and Kinglake, so that more families have a place to call home. We know that not everyone has a new roof over their heads, but the rebuilding work continues and determination is unabated.

The Australian government's role in the response and reconstruction effort has spanned across many government agencies. I would like to acknowledge my colleagues the Attorney-General and my former Parliamentary Secretary for Bushfire Reconstruction, the member for Maribyrnong, for their important work.

Many local members also played important roles in supporting communities, and I acknowledge the extraordinary work of the former member for McEwen, Fran Bailey, as well as the current member for McEwen, Rob Mitchell. So many people lost their lives in their communities.

I acknowledge the member for Indi, who is here with us today. Her community was seriously affected. I acknowledge the members for McMillan in the Gippsland fires and the member for Bendigo in the fires that affected his community. The member for Casey is here. The fires came right down very close to the city and I know it was very frightening for his community. Local federal members, along with their state colleagues, have played important roles working with their local communities, healing and rebuilding.

I would also like to acknowledge officials in Commonwealth, Victorian and local government agencies—in particular the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority—for their work as part the reconstruction effort. It is very important work that continues today. But we know that there is a lot more rebuilding to be done.

We know that it is not only governments that have been acting. Black Saturday opened up an unprecedented spirit of giving by Australians. The Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund raised more than \$392 million, including interest. It was the largest single charitable appeal in the country's history. The fund has now been fully committed, supporting individuals, families and communities affected by this disaster. I would like to also thank the appeal board, who oversaw the distribution of the funds, and the Australian Red Cross for their administration of the appeal that so effectively harnessed the outpouring of generosity in the wake of those terrible events.

Prevention and Preparedness

Current conditions across our nation show us that we will continue to face natural disasters. We cannot always escape these disasters, but we have to make a real effort to ensure that lessons are learnt and we are better prepared in the future. A national standard

for private bushfire shelters has been developed by the Australian Building Codes Board.

The Bureau of Meteorology is collaborating with fire agencies to improve disaster warning and response communications. New investment has been made in the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre to undertake research on the Victorian bushfires so we learn the lessons, to better prepare in the future.

What our agencies learned in 2009 is helping our response to the subsequent disasters—important lessons helping other Australians in their time of need.

Today

Today, Black Saturday survivors continue to rebuild their homes, communities and businesses and their lives. Finding the will to go on amidst deep grief is incredibly hard. It is the ongoing courage and determination of the Victorians who suffered on Black Saturday that serves as inspiration to us all. They are truly incredible people.

One of the things that I have noticed over the last few weeks is the way in which the Black Saturday survivors have reached out with empathy and compassion to fellow Australians that have been hit by natural disaster this summer. The residents of Kinglake held a 24-hour radiothon to raise money for Queensland flood victims. David and Lisa Robinson, both Black Saturday survivors from Kinglake, drove for days to deliver a truckload of supplies to flood victims in Warwick in South Queensland.

I think this comment from Kathy Stewart, really sums it up. She is the acting Vice President of the Kinglake community radio station. She said:

The bushfire survivors received unconditional love and support during 2009, especially from Queensland. We are all still grateful for the sup-

port post fires and we're more than happy to help others in their time of need.

It is this capacity for people across our nation to reach out to each other in the spirit of compassion and strength that gives us hope. It is this spirit that reflects the deep commitment that we all have for each others' welfare. Whether there are floods, fires, droughts or cyclones, we can and we will rebuild together.

And as we stand together in the wake of disaster again, we can draw strength and hope from the fire-affected communities of Black Saturday—communities that have shown us that, no matter how large the challenge of rebuilding after disaster strikes, we are up to it. Today we reflect on the unspeakable destruction of that very Black Saturday. We remember the tragedy of the 173 people who lost their lives. We pay tribute to the survivors. Their spirit inspires our nation.

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (4.50 pm)—I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for Menzies to speak for 16 minutes.

Leave granted.

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (4.50 pm)—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Mr K. J. Andrews speaking for a period not exceeding 16 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (4.51 pm)—Over the past few months our nation has been challenged. Australians have been confronted with a series of natural disasters; floods, cyclones and fires have caused devastation. Tragically, in some cases people have died. These natural disasters have tested our resilience.

It was only 24 months ago that the people of Victoria endured Black Saturday. It was 7

February 2009. Victoria was burning. Fires were engulfing the state. Victorians were fearful; the situation seemed perilous. In a week in which we acknowledge again the force of nature, lament the destruction of floods and fires and mourn the death of fellow Australians, it is also worthy of us to reflect on the outcome of another, earlier tragedy.

The resilience of communities has been evidenced throughout the fire-affected areas. And it is this resilience of country Victorians that has seen townships rise up from the ashes. The scorched earth is regenerating and life is starting to return to normal. But we should not forget the tragic loss of life. On Black Saturday, 173 people—including 23 children—lost their lives. Additionally, 20 children and 28 young adults lost one or both of their parents. While we reflect upon the tragic human toll, we should also remember the destruction that affected those surviving the bushfires. The reality is that many families went back to their properties to find them destroyed or severely damaged, with 2,133 properties completely destroyed and 1,500 more damaged. In all, 430,000 hectares were burnt on Black Saturday.

These communities are getting back on track but they still need our support. Providing real support to small business development, providing real support for job creation and ensuring real support for infrastructure projects should be key priorities for the Gillard government as it continues to work with the Victorian Baillieu coalition government. Equally, providing human support, counselling, and mental and spiritual assistance is crucial to individuals and families. In this context, I acknowledge the significant efforts of the member for McMillan, the member for Gippsland, the member for Indi, the member for Bendigo, the member for Casey and, in particular, the former member for McEwen, Fran Bailey, and her replacement, the current

member for McEwen, Rob Mitchell, for their dedication in helping local families to rebuild.

In a week when sentiment and emotions are raw, at a time when grief and loss are to the fore, and on a day when expressions of solidarity and concern for the victims of recent disasters are so real, it is timely to pause, to reflect and to acknowledge that it is the concrete work and actions of individuals, communities and governments that will rebuild cities and towns. A tearful voice, a heart-rending response, a noble sentiment is appropriate, but unless it is followed by real, substantial and practical efforts, it is ultimately hollow and superficial. What we have witnessed in Victoria has been substantive, largely because local communities have nurtured their own, protected the vulnerable, and worked together to rebuild and renew. And I have seen this work as I have travelled through the affected areas, as the members who represent those areas, some of whom are in the chamber today, know only too well.

The Victorian coalition government has announced that when the existing Victorian Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority is wound down in June it will implement a series of measures, including a new fire recovery unit to take its place. The fire recovery unit will operate under Regional Development Victoria and act as a one-stop shop for communities and individuals seeking assistance in all aspects of the recovery and rebuilding process. The last thing bushfire victims need is government red tape and bureaucracy standing in the way of access to real support.

On the physical reconstruction effort, some 94 per cent of all destroyed fences have now been repaired or restored. Some 764 building permits have been approved for new dwellings, commercial buildings, shops

and restaurants and accommodation. Seventy-two per cent of homeowners who lost their principle place of residence in the bushfires have rebuilt, purchased new property or are in the process of rebuilding. Seventeen per cent intend to rebuild, four per cent are undecided and eight per cent have decided not to rebuild. Currently, 91 households remain in temporary villages in Kinglake, Flowerdale, Marysville and Whittlesea.

The Victorian bushfires tested the resolve of so many Victorians. And now that resolve is being tested again in other parts of our nation: from the tragedy of the Queensland floods, which are also affecting New South Wales and Victoria, to Cyclone Yasi and the bushfires of southern Western Australia. Black Saturday demonstrated that at times of disaster, at times of need, Australians stand together and help each other out. The spirit of volunteering is alive and well, and recent disasters have shone a bright light on the true Australian value, a quality seen in communities from Queensland to Victoria, from New South Wales to Western Australia. One need look not only to the emergency service workers but also to the thousands of volunteers who answered the call in Queensland and elsewhere. And, as always, our emergency services professionals and our defence force personnel continue to serve our nation with distinction.

There have been problems with the recovery and with the reconstruction effort. People have confronted difficulties and challenges, and in some cases, authorities did not respond as quickly or efficiently as we would have liked. Recovery from disaster is not an easy process, nor is it an expeditious one, but the recovery and reconstruction efforts in Victoria following the devastating fires of Black Saturday are continuing and are progressing well. Sadly, our country will continue to see natural disasters that challenge us. That is why it is so important to ensure

we continue to develop our disaster planning and response. The coalition strongly associates itself with the federal government and the Victorian government in their continued support of the victims of Black Saturday and all of the bushfire affected communities. As we remember those who perished in the fires, the thoughts and prayers of all coalition members are with the families and the loved ones of those who tragically died on 7 February 2009.

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (4.59 pm)—by leave—I present a copy of the statement by the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs entitled *Commemoration of the 2nd Anniversary of the Black Saturday Bushfires* and I move:

That the House take note of the document.

Question agreed to.

MAIN COMMITTEE

Commemoration of the 2nd Anniversary of the Black Saturday Bushfires

Reference

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (4.59 pm)—by leave—I move:

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

Question agreed to.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Report from Main Committee

Order of the day returned from the Main Committee; certified copy of the report presented.

Ordered that the order of the day be considered immediately.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—The question is that the address be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

LAW AND JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (IDENTITY CRIMES AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2010 [2011]

Report from Main Committee

Bill returned from Main Committee without amendment; certified copy of the bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (5.01 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

AVIATION CRIMES AND POLICING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010 [2011]

Report from Main Committee

Bill returned from Main Committee without amendment; certified copy of the bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (5.02 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

**NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK
COMPANIES BILL 2010**

Cognate bill:

**TELECOMMUNICATIONS
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
(NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK
MEASURES—ACCESS
ARRANGEMENTS) BILL 2010**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 25 November 2010,
on motion by **Mr Albanese**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (5.03 pm)—The National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and related bill are the second large pieces of legislation relating to the establishment of the National Broadband Network, which is the government's plan to have a Commonwealth government owned, monopoly telecommunications provider of last-mile, fixed telecommunications to every home and business in Australia. It is intended to be a monopoly. Elaborate steps have been taken to this end in the legislation passed last year, in this legislation and indeed in the contractual arrangements with Telstra already announced and those with Optus which have been foreshadowed. The purpose of all of those is to eliminate any prospect of fixed-line competition with the National Broadband Network so that Australians who want to access the internet or simply want to make a telephone call on a fixed line will have no alternative but to use the government owned monopoly.

The opposition is fully committed, as I think all Australians are, to there being universal availability of fast broadband at an affordable price. We are all committed to that. The most important issue of difference between the coalition and the government on this is the fact that the government is proceeding to achieve this goal, so it says, with-

out any effort or attempt to determine whether the approach it is taking is the most cost-effective one.

This is a government that came into office led by the honourable member sitting opposite, the current Minister for Foreign Affairs. When he was Prime Minister he said, as did his Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Mr Tanner, that no major infrastructure project would be undertaken or funded by the government without the benefit of a rigorous cost-benefit analysis. The Secretary to the Treasury, Dr Henry, has written and spoken extensively and repeatedly about the need for rigorous cost-benefit analyses of government infrastructure.

The fundamental question here is not what the object is, which is getting everybody access to fast broadband, but what is the most cost-effective way of delivering it. We know there are a variety of technologies—wireless, DSL, HFC cable, the fibre-optic system and many other systems—that are available to deliver broadband and which are being used by Australians and indeed people all around the world to access broadband. The question is: what is the most cost-effective way of delivering it? What is the way that can get Australians access to fast broadband as quickly and as cheaply as possible? That is why the coalition has argued that there should be a Productivity Commission inquiry to look into this and determine the most cost-effective approach.

Were the government to take up that invitation—and, of course, it has refused to do so—it would be doing no more than honouring the principles that it stated as being fundamental to its approach to the management of public finances when it came into government. Not only did the then Prime Minister and the then finance minister say that no major infrastructure project should be undertaken without a rigorous cost-benefit analy-

sis; they went further and established Infrastructure Australia, a specialist expert body whose job it is to identify, prioritise and analyse through cost-benefit analysis major infrastructure projects. Yet this one, the NBN, the biggest in our history, is not being looked at by Infrastructure Australia—they are not allowed to examine it—and it certainly is not going anywhere near the Productivity Commission.

The absurdity and the recklessness of the government's approach were brought home to the members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works very vividly only last week. We were in Brisbane considering, as is our duty as members of the Public Works Committee, a proposal by the Department of Defence to spend about \$50 million on a variety of hangars for the reception, distribution and maintenance of wheeled vehicles for the Army at a number of locations. We considered that \$50 million investment proposed by the defence department and we heard from an official of the department about how he and his colleagues had conducted a cost-benefit analysis. They had looked at this from every angle: should they be leasing premises; should they be building these facilities at other locations? They justified everything on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis. In other words, they knew what they wanted to do—have facilities to receive and distribute a certain number of thousands of new wheeled vehicles over a decade and, of course, train people to operate them—and then they looked at the most cost-effective way of doing that. That was being done in respect of a \$50 million project, and the Public Works Committee, solemnly assembled there in Brisbane, was considering that.

Yet the government, who presumably believe that a cost-benefit analysis and the scrutiny of the Public Works Committee are appropriate for \$50 million worth of vehicle

hangars, are not prepared to perform a cost-benefit analysis on a project that will see the expenditure of around \$50 billion of taxpayers' money. Furthermore, they have taken steps—and it will be up to this House to determine whether those steps are successful—to prevent the Public Works Committee, which was established to monitor and investigate infrastructure paid for by the Commonwealth, considering that \$50 billion project. If the government have their way, the largest infrastructure project in our history will not be subject to a cost-benefit analysis, it will not be scrutinised by the Public Works Committee and, of course, in the most recent example of their efforts to prevent any proper scrutiny of this project, the government have even sought to exempt it from the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. So the public are to be locked out from scrutinising this project and there is to be no effort to ascertain whether this is the most cost-effective way of achieving this goal. These are all in the interests of politics and the government's desire to build this massive fibre-to-the-home network without any scrutiny.

The double standards here are extraordinary. I have talked about the contrast between the former Prime Minister's very responsible rhetoric when he came into government about performing cost-benefit analyses on major infrastructure projects and the failure to do one on this. Now, turning to the current Prime Minister, we see that she has announced that there will be a reconstruction inspectorate to oversee the public spending on the reconstruction in Queensland with a view to minimising waste. She said:

... it's appropriate to have these mechanisms to ensure that every dollar is a dollar that is spent effectively, and that every dollar spent from taxpayers' money goes to do work that is necessary to rebuild the nation

... ..
It's my determination to get value for money for every taxpayer dollar spent.

She has appointed a former coalition finance minister and Premier of New South Wales, the Hon. John Fahey, to chair that reconstruction inspectorate, and I think that is a very eloquent vote of confidence in the financial acumen and financial responsibility of the coalition as opposed to the members of her own party.

Nonetheless, this level of scrutiny has been established to oversee \$5 billion of spending which, in large measure, will be to repair roads, railways and other pieces of public infrastructure, yet there is no comparable body, no comparable effort, to oversee or monitor in any way the NBN \$50 billion—the expenditure of 10 times the \$5 billion. It is as though the government has developed an extraordinary blind spot with respect to this project and all of the principles of financial and fiscal responsibility are cast aside when it comes to the NBN. The thing that puzzles all Australians, and particularly members of this House, is that one can well understand a government saying to the people of Australia, 'We will ensure that everybody has access to fast broadband. We recognise there are some parts of Australia that do not. There are many parts that do, but there are some that do not for a range of reasons: distance, the history of the network architecture laid out by Telstra in years past—a range of reasons. But we, the government, will ensure that all of those inadequately served areas are served adequately and that all Australians get access to broadband at the fast speeds that are available in the adequately and well-served areas in our capital cities.' That would be a reasonable, respectable, responsible promise from a government.

But then, having made that promise, the taxpayers of Australia would expect the government to say, 'And we will deliver on that promise in the most cost-effective way possible, and we will make sure that the big vision—the big promise—is delivered at the least cost to you, the taxpayers.' Of course, that will not only mean there will be less burden in terms of the cost to the taxpayer and there will be more money available for all the other claims for public infrastructure; it will also mean that the less investment there is to deliver the service the less pressure there will be on prices. The more heavily capitalised any piece of infrastructure is, the more pressure the owner of that infrastructure will be under to raise prices. If, like the NBN, it is a monopoly, it will have very little disincentive or restraint in terms of raising prices.

It is a matter of public knowledge that the approach the government is taking here in Australia is unique in the world. There is no government in the world that is spending as much on broadband as Australia. Indeed, on my calculations a few months ago I estimated that the per capita differential between what the federal government is spending on broadband here in Australia and what the American federal government is spending is 100 to one. That is to say we are spending, on a per capita basis, 100 times as much as the Americans are spending. I saw an article in the *Australian* earlier in the week which suggested that the differential was only 65 times or thereabouts. Whether it is 65 times or 100 times, the difference is gigantic. Right around the world this project is being criticised as fiscally irresponsible. The most recent criticism is laid out in the report of the *Economist* intelligence unit published today: 'Australia's broadband plan fares poorly in new international ranking. Cost to taxpayer is exorbitant,' says the study. That is just one

of many objective reports that have questioned the responsibility of this project.

This legislation is designed to provide some rules as to how the NBN Co. will operate. One of the principles that it is designed to achieve is to define it as not a public authority. Of course, by defining it as not a public authority it is exempt from the statutory requirements to comply with the freedom of information legislation and means that it would not be subject to the normal parliamentary oversight of public works defined in the Public Works Committee Act 1969. I foreshadow that we will be seeking to amend the legislation. I look forward to the support of the members of the cross-benches, who are committed, as they have often said, to financial responsibility and accountability. We will be seeking to amend the legislation to make it subject to both the freedom of information laws and also the Public Works Committee Act.

The other principle the legislation is designed to achieve is to restrict the NBN Co. to business activities which are directly related to its core function of supplying wholesale communication services—that is, prevent it from operating as a retailer. That certainly is an admirable objective and one that we support, but we do not believe the proposed legislation will adequately achieve that. We will seek to amend the legislation in a number of ways to make it quite explicit that the supply of services by the NBN can only be on a wholesale basis and, in particular, to prevent the NBN getting around this provision to provide that it must not supply services to another person unless that other person is a carrier or service provider and is a carrier or service provider which will use its service to supply services to the public. That is to prevent, for example, a large corporation establishing its own bespoke carrier whose only job is to provide services to the corporation concerned. This is of consider-

able importance because the NBN, being so heavily capitalised, having such a crippling interest bill—as it will—and having so many billions of taxpayers' money invested in it, will be under enormous pressure to use its monopoly power to generate additional income. One obvious way of doing that is creeping further and further into the retail space.

We will also seek to amend the provisions of the legislation relating to the ownership of the NBN. The Gillard government is effectively a coalition, consortium or alliance with the Greens, and one of the prices that the Prime Minister has paid for the support of the Greens is the agreement to make the NBN virtually impossible to sell. The way the legislation works is that it cannot be sold until such time as it is complete. It cannot be sold when it is part built; it must be absolutely complete. Looking around the room, there are a few of the younger members that may still be here when it is built, but I suspect those of us here around the table probably will not be here by that time. That really fetters the future governments in a completely irresponsible way, and we will seek to amend the legislation to enable a future government to sell the NBN, if that is what it considers to be the appropriate course of action, subject to having a Productivity Commission inquiry and a review by a parliamentary committee. We do not have any objection to that.

We will also seek to amend the legislation to make sure there are no loopholes in terms of the NBN creeping into the retail space. In the legislation at the moment there is a provision, for example, that would enable the NBN to acquire and own a retail company in the telecommunications area but have an obligation to dispose of it within 12 months. There is no reason for that grace period. I think most members have either participated in or observed transactions where restructur-

ing of a company to be acquired is a condition of the completion of the acquisition. There should simply be a prohibition on the NBN acquiring retail businesses and, if it seeks to buy some infrastructure which has a retail business attached to it, the disposition of that retail business should be a precondition of completion. That is neither a complex nor a difficult thing to achieve, but it will maintain the principle of ensuring that the NBN is not in that retail space.

One of the big issues that the government has to face with the NBN is that because it is a monopoly, because it is so heavily capitalised and because it belongs to the government it naturally now wants to maximise its revenues and it wants to do so in a way that inhibits competition. So it has reached an agreement with Telstra to prevent Telstra offering broadband services on its HFC network. The absurdity and the wastefulness of that arrangement, which was supported by the legislation that was carried through the parliament last year, is worth reflecting on for a moment.

The government tells us the object of the NBN is to deliver 100 megabits-per-second broadband to 93 per cent of homes in Australia. Let us assume that that is a worthy and a necessary objective. The HFC cable network passes 30 per cent of Australian households now. All of it can be—and, indeed, in Melbourne already has been—upgraded to deliver broadband at 100 megabits per second. So where is the market failure? Where is the crying need for an upgrade in service? If the government were going to spend scarce resources to deliver 100 megabits-per-second broadband, surely it would focus on areas that were not served at all. But no, it is going to overbuild and render obsolete, for broadband purposes, a cable system that passes 30 per cent of Australian households.

Then we see the issue of competition from new cable systems. As the McKinsey implementation study set out very clearly and graphically, there is a risk to the NBN that the private sector might build cable systems in more densely settled areas and offer services at lower prices than the NBN in those areas, which would cause the NBN to lower their prices across the country and undermine the economics of the NBN.

But wasn't the NBN designed to enhance competition? Wasn't the NBN designed to ensure Australians get access to broadband at affordable prices or at lower prices? Apparently not. Apparently having created this government owned monopoly, this monolith—having made that mistake—the object of the government now is to compound it and prevent anybody from competing with it. So, as recommended by the implementation study, for no reason other than protecting the economics of the NBN, the government is proposing in this legislation to inhibit the building of any competitive cable networks, fast broadband networks, by providing that they must offer a layer 2 bitstream service on the same terms and conditions as the NBN. That is an entirely objectionable restraint on competition and it is designed to do one thing and one thing only. It is a product of the recommendation of the implementation study and it is designed, as McKinsey wrote in that study, to underwrite and underpin the economics of the NBN itself. We will seek to amend that as well.

The other issue related to the question of wholesale versus retail is the nature of the parties, the companies or the persons, to whom the NBN can sell its services. In clauses 10 to 16 of the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010—the first of the two bills—there are provisions to enable the NBN to sell directly to a range of utilities: electricity utilities, water utilities, sewerage utilities, transport utilities and others.

There is no restriction on the nature of telecommunications services the NBN can deliver to those entities. A number of those entities have said to us and to others, 'We would rather just deal with the NBN. We don't want to deal with a middleman. We don't want to deal with Telstra, Optus, iiNet or Macquarie Telecom. We want to deal directly with the NBN.' They want to cut out the retailer. So would all major customers for telecommunications services.

If that principle were to be supported by this parliament it would in effect be saying the NBN can move further and further into the corporate and institutional telecommunications business and perhaps not provide services directly to residences, to mums and dads at home, but move into providing telecommunications services directly to large institutions and large corporations—in other words, to become a large retail telco: a government and corporate retail telco and a wholesale telco for the rest of the market. So the government is either serious about the NBN being a wholesale-only telecommunications provider—in which case there should be a very clear limitation along the lines that we are proposing with no exceptions—or not.

Once this broadband network is operating, the temptation—and this will apply to any government—will be for it to creep further and further into the more valuable areas of telecommunications services, further and further onto the retail turf of other privately owned telecommunications companies. It will be under pressure to do that because of the massive amount of debt that it is carrying. You can imagine bureaucrats in the Department of Finance and Deregulation and Treasury saying to people running the NBN: 'Can't you find some additional revenue? You are bleeding red ink. This is an enormous expense. Why can't you find some revenue?' The only way they can do that is

by moving out of the wholesale-only business into providing telecommunications services directly to end users—in other words, becoming a retailer. We intend to hold the government to account there.

In terms of the threads of principle that run through our amendments, it is really a function of holding the government to account. We have amendments to ensure that the NBN is strictly a wholesale business. We have amendments to ensure that the NBN is truly, properly and thoroughly accountable to the Public Works Committee and to the public through freedom of information legislation. We have amendments to ensure that future governments are not fettered, as the Greens have demanded as the price of this deal, so the NBN is impossible to sell under almost any circumstance.

Finally, the other item consistent with that is that we will seek to amend the legislation, as recommended by the Senate Select Committee on the National Broadband Network, to provide that the NBN must not discriminate between access seekers—that is to say its customers, its retail service providers—on the basis of volume. There is a very real concern that the NBN, which is currently able to offer volume discounts under this legislation, will offer big volume discounts to the larger retail service providers—Telstra in particular—and give those companies an enormous competitive advantage over their rivals in the retail space.

So those are the amendments that I foreshadow. I look forward to debating them with honourable members opposite.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (5.33 pm)—We start the new parliamentary year where we left off. Over the break some things did not change. The first thing that did not change is Australia's world ranking when it comes to broadband. We are now trailing countries like Estonia, Latvia, the Czech Re-

public and Slovakia. We are edging closer to copper surely hitting its use-by date. Another thing has not changed. There has been no progress from those opposite on having a policy. I thought maybe over the break they would have developed a policy. But no, it was so good the first time around that it is still on their website. It was such a hot seller the first time around, they have still got it.

The member for Wentworth has foreshadowed some amendments. I look forward to discussing those in detail. We have again heard his constant catchcry that the NBN is some anticompetitive monopoly. He talked about existing networks being able to provide at less cost what the NBN can provide. I want to correct him on one technology point. He talked about cable. Cable is like spectrum; it is a shared resource and its capacity is not anywhere near that of fibre.

Why is it necessary for the government to take this course? Because the market has failed. Infrastructure based competition in Australia has failed. NBN Co. will be subject to the most rigorous, bespoke regulatory tools that are contained in the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and cognate bills and the legislation we passed last year. It would not be complete without going back to the cost-benefit analysis argument. I am actually very happy to take advice on this point from Vint Cerf, one of the fathers of the internet. He said recently that he is jealous of what we are developing here in Australia and he acknowledges that it is impossible to quantify all the nonprice benefits that the NBN will offer, because of all the future benefits that we do not even know about yet.

I refer the member for Wentworth to existing studies that have in fact attempted to quantify, as best as possible, the benefits. These are public documents, and I urge those opposite to read them. In health alone the

benefits will be between \$2 billion and \$4 billion per year. The NBN will pay for itself. That is per year in health alone.

We had the member for Wentworth talk about the lack of oversight of the NBN roll-out. He has a short memory. He forgets that late last year one of the last things we did was establish a joint committee on the NBN, which will report on a six-monthly basis. Its membership will mirror that of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit. So to suggest there is no oversight of the NBN rollout process is a complete furphy.

I ask those here: why is it necessary for Australia to make such a substantial investment in broadband? Why are we going down this path? Because we had 12 years and close to 20 failed plans from those opposite, who still did not come up with a new plan over the break. That is why we are in this territory.

The member for Wentworth also mentioned people criticising the NBN. Yet again, I prefer to rely on the father of the internet, Vint Cerf, who called the NBN 'a stunning investment'. He said:

I consider this to be a stunning investment in infrastructure that in my view will have very long-term benefit. Infrastructure is all about enabling things and I see Australia is trying to enable innovation.

For one of the world's leading minds in technological innovation not only to call the NBN 'stunning' but to envy us for what we are doing is all the evidence I need that this project is worth backing.

I will address some of the other issues that the member for Wentworth raised regarding the amendments he foreshadowed. I find it absolutely incredible for him to walk in here and lecture us about freedom of information. The previous, Liberal government was in fact responsible for ensuring that a number of entities which were established were ex-

empt from FOI requests. They include Medi-bank Private and the Australian Rail Track Corporation. These were both exempt from the authority of FOI. So to complain that NBN Co. lacks oversight and accountability also shows that the member opposite does not even understand the workings of NBN Co. as a company. It is plain to me that he is not aware of the provisions contained in the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997, to which NBN Co. is subject.

As a Commonwealth company, under this act NBN Co. is required to submit financial reports, directors' reports and auditors' reports on all its operations. The Minister for Finance and Deregulation has the power to require interim reports. These reports must be tabled. Its directors are required to develop a corporate plan at least once a year. That corporate plan, for the information of those present, is now on its website. It is required to present this to the relevant minister. The simple fact of the matter is that the existing statutory structure allows for full scrutiny and accountability on the part of NBN Co. and its activities. This is not about accountability, just as the member for Wentworth's pleadings about financial accountability were not about financial accountability at all. They were all about delaying.

I will also say, on the point of FOI, that it is not as though Mr Quigley, the CEO of NBN Co., has not been prepared to attend every Senate estimates hearing that has been relevant to NBN Co.'s operation. In reality, even if NBN Co. were not subject to FOI rules, it is certainly possible to use FOI rules for all the government entities dealing with it. It is entirely reasonable for NBN Co. to seek to protect from discovery certain information which is commercial-in-confidence. The other thing we need to bear in mind is that just because something is subject to FOI does not itself grant access to the documents being sought. I again make the point that

there are mechanisms other than FOI to which NBN Co. is subject.

I will also address the issue of regulatory creep which was raised. What I will say is this: the notion that NBN Co. will seek to move beyond its status as a layer 2 wholesale-only service provider is something that I consider to be absolutely absurd. The amendments to the trade practices legislation in December and the government's own statement of expectations make it clear that there is no expectation of anything other than NBN Co. being a wholesale provider of layer 2 ethernet. In fact, this is the very design that NBN Co. has been working to. It has not gone and designed a network whose architecture is based on anything other than layer 2 ethernet. So why on earth it would possibly want to go off and start doing something different from what it has already designed absolutely beggars belief. From the outset, over a year ago, I recall NBN Co.'s public presentations making it abundantly obvious that it wants to occupy the lowest tier in the stack, the lowest tier possible. That is reaffirmed by the statement of expectations.

I also want to say something about privatisation. It is interesting that the member for Wentworth thinks that the provisions in the bill regarding privatisation have been designed to make it impossible to sell. I find it absolutely laughable that those opposite come in here wanting to make it easier to privatise NBN Co. and remove the very sensible protections that have been devised for its privatisation. The people opposite are the same people who monumentally botched the sale of T2 and T3 in those massive fire sales for mum and dad investors, who all got burnt because it was simply an exercise in maximising revenue. The government will put in place a managed process, will act in the national interest and will not leave the stakeholders, the citizens of Australia, with a bungled sale. That is why we will ensure that

parliamentary scrutiny is applied to the sale of the NBN.

There are provisions in the bill to ensure that the government plays an important role in the sale when it does sell down its interests. The important issue is that we step away from NBN Co. when the environment is right. The steps in this assessment include reference to the Productivity Commission. There is a parliamentary committee recommendation, and the minister will determine whether it is appropriate to sell down. Importantly, the finance minister will need to declare that favourable market conditions exist for a sale. This is critical. There is the ability to determine what is an unacceptable ownership or control situation. It is an important constraint on the ownership of NBN Co.

Why are these provisions here? They are here because they reflect NBN Co. as a national piece of utility infrastructure. No prudent legislature would allow its biggest piece of national utility infrastructure to be privatised without considering the potential future structure of the sector. That is what we are doing in these provisions. We are thinking about the role of government early in the process and the role of the private sector later in the process. It is a well thought out process for a transaction, not a quick flog. These are necessary measures to protect us from what the previous, coalition government did to Telstra, which had one of the most unproductive outcomes. These provisions will ensure that the sell-down process is managed and protected and does not just become a race to sell.

I will also address the issue of the so-called cherry-picking provisions that the member for Wentworth seeks to amend. Firstly, I note his concern that the provisions will put the brakes on private investment and that this undermines competition. My first response is that there is sweet little to put the

brakes on in many parts of Australia, because of the failure of infrastructure based broadband competition, which necessitated the NBN being instigated in the first place.

It is at this point that I would like to raise the subject of a meeting I held. Last Friday, I held a street corner meeting with residents in Kellyville Ridge, in my electorate, who had consistently complained to me about their total inability to get broadband in this new estate. In this new estate, which is barely three years old, they are unable to get broadband or any signals in order for modern devices to function. Here is an example of some of the representations I have received from residents in this area:

I was interested to receive your letter regarding limited broadband access in Kellyville Ridge ... I can't make the meeting—

I will tell you about my meeting in a minute—

but fully support any progress you can make to improve service.

My wife and I ... can only use wireless broadband and our mobiles from the front, upstairs balcony of our house.

I ... have no choice on service provider ...

He goes on to say, of the service providers they use for wireless broadband:

None of these work with any level of efficiency.

And this is important:

I find it extremely frustrating that in this day and age in Sydney's largest growth area, we cannot access quality broadband/mobile service.

I totally agree with that constituent. And isn't it interesting that when I hold a street corner meeting on a Friday afternoon in Kellyville Ridge, when I think it was still about 30 degrees, I had residents queuing up to ask me, 'When is the NBN coming?' and queuing up to tell me the problems they have in accessing broadband?

So, to the member for Wentworth, who came in here and started lecturing the House about why we do not need the NBN, I suggest he goes out and talks to those people. I suggest he tries to understand that there are parts of Sydney which have not benefited from infrastructure based competition, just as many regions of Australia have not benefited.

The bill is designed to address certain cherry-picking provisions. The non-cherry-picking provisions mean that anyone building a fibre network must provide wholesale access. Yet again, this is relevant to facilities based competition. The NBN will cover 100 per cent of the population, the vast majority of that being by fibre, and there will be differing costs of the network in different parts of the country. The ubiquitous nature of the NBN raises the issue of cross-subsidisation between high-cost and low-cost areas, and the imperative that NBN Co. can best cover the cost of services in higher-cost areas such as regional areas and the bush.

There is a very sound reason for this, something that only a ubiquitous fibre broadband network of the nature of the NBN can do: it can ensure equal pricing, regardless of where you live or work in Australia—equal pricing. Opposition to these provisions is opposition to equal pricing and the uniform national pricing requirement imposed on NBN Co. It means that the incentive to invest in purely lucrative areas will be diminished as a result of this bill. Again, this reflects the true nature of the network. It is one ubiquitous access network with internal cost-recovery mechanisms, it looks far more like a utility than a standard wholesaler and it is formulated to ensure that services in the bush are affordable and achieve NBN Co.'s mandate of uniform national wholesale pricing.

Indeed, these provisions are designed to counter inefficient investment. The NBN

creates a national network where all players are created equal, and that equal treatment extends to whether they are in the city or in the bush. Those investors who seek to cherry-pick in low-cost areas do so for one reason: for profit. But, under the new arrangements in this bill, investment will be incentivised only where it is efficient. This is in contrast to the cherry-picker, the person who comes in not charged with a mandate to serve the national interests—unlike the NBN—but interested only in making a profit, and the easiest cherries to pick are in those low-cost areas, not in the bush and not on the outskirts of north-west Sydney.

In conclusion, I look forward to the debate that will arise later in this place. Before parliament rose at the end of the last sittings, I issued a challenge to members to go back and talk to the people in their electorates and listen to what they think about the NBN. I certainly did that. That is why I am able to stand here today and contribute to the debate on this bill in a positive manner. (*Time expired*)

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (5.48 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the access arrangements bill, because the government is racing both of these pieces of legislation through the parliament in order to continue the rollout of its wasteful National Broadband Network. The companies bill is designed to outline the ownership, operations and legal status of the NBN, and outlines arrangements for its potential privatisation. The access arrangements bill amends competition policy laws to require the NBN to provide open and non-discriminatory access to retail carriers using its wholesale services. The bill also places similar rules and technical requirements on non-NBN fibre rollouts.

We are told that these bills must pass through parliament quickly so that Telstra can put its deal to shareholders and to enable the government's \$13.8 billion purchase of the wholesale copper network to go through. We know that the National Broadband Network will be the biggest government infrastructure project in Australia's history. But it is also becoming clear that the NBN is the most unscrutinised infrastructure project in Australia's history, and this legislation we are debating here today confirms the government's intention to avoid scrutiny and analysis at all cost.

The NBN Companies Bill formally exempts the NBN project from the provisions of the Public Works Act. Exempting NBN Co. means that the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works will not be able to conduct oversight of the NBN rollout. It is just another stage in Labor's pattern of deception and avoidance of scrutiny at all cost. Just a few weeks ago, we had it confirmed that the NBN would be exempt from freedom of information requests—on top of the government refusing parliamentary scrutiny by a joint committee. We are going to have a sham committee established, which of course will not start its operations until the middle of the year—hardly the type of scrutiny that the taxpayer is entitled to, given the length, breadth and cost of this project.

So the parliament, the Productivity Commission and now the public are being refused any direct information about the project that the government does not wish to release voluntarily. If the government really intended to improve broadband services across Australia, then surely independent analysis would be the best way to ensure we had the right plan to provide the best services at the best prices available. The lengths to which the government is going to prevent potential criticism of this project are unprecedented. I have said before that any reasonable analysis of the

government's actions to avoid scrutiny suggests that Labor and NBN Co. have something to hide. They have a great deal to hide. As we slowly receive more information, as more legislation is introduced, as we continue to analyse the government's unbelievable business case, it is becoming clear that the government does have a great deal to hide.

The big danger for taxpayers is the probability that we are seeing only the tip of the iceberg. Reports suggest that the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has been working around the clock to finalise its \$13.8 billion deal with Telstra so that NBN can acquire the copper network. But the parliament is being asked to consider this legislation and to approve the safeguards legislation without the details of what the deal will contain. We do not know what the Commonwealth is gaining, we do not know what the liability of the Commonwealth to Telstra will be. There is just more and more hiding of the facts from the Australian people.

At the same time as we have that elaborate web of deception, we see that Telstra's revenue from the copper network is declining rapidly. Deutsche Bank analyst Andrew Anagnostellis forecasts that Telstra's half-yearly results are expected to show:

... underlying earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation will decline by as much as 12.5 per cent ... as growth in mobile and data revenues is offset by the continued decline in its fixed-line telephony revenues.

So Telstra are experiencing big declines in revenue from fixed-line telephony, which are being offset by strong growth in mobile data.

Yet this government is in denial that revenue from fixed-line services is in decline and that the demand for wireless services is growing rapidly. Not only are they in denial but the NBN business case is modelled upon

the basis that the growth in wireless services will dramatically decline. Wireless-only households currently account for 13 per cent of the market and these penetration rates have grown 225 per cent since 2003. Ignoring these trends, the NBN's business case estimates that wireless-only households will increase to just 16.3 per cent by 2025. That is, despite the future release of 4G spectrum and the possibilities created by Long Term Evolution technology, the government believes that wireless penetration will only increase by a total of 25 per cent over the next 14 years.

The business case estimates that 12.4 per cent of households will not have a fixed-line connection and that 70 per cent will be connected to the NBN. This assumes that the growth in demand for wireless will slow and that more households will choose to access fibre services. Yet less than one year ago, the minister recognised the growth in wireless services. The minister told the AMTA in March last year: 'Looking to the future, in terms of demand for wireless broadband, it looks like there will be exponential growth for some years to come.' Why isn't it in the business case if there is 'exponential growth for some years to come'? Now forced to sell the NBN during and after the election, the minister is arguing that wireless is no longer a substitute for fibre, but the statistics show that there is exponential growth in the number of households substituting wireless for fixed-line services.

What does this say about the market? What greater feasibility study does the minister need than the market's comparative growth between fixed-line services and wireless services? He only needs to look at the market in relation to young people, the consumers over the long term and into the future. They want the freedom of wireless devices. They do not want to have to plug into the wall when they want to operate their de-

vices. They want the freedom; they want high-speed broadband where they are. They do not want to have to plug into the wall.

On Monday of this week, the company Vividwireless were testing download speeds for their 3G spectrum using new technologies soon to become available to customers. The tests undertaken by Vividwireless achieved peak download speeds of 128 megabits a second, which is faster than the 100 megabits a second apparently available under the NBN. These speeds and opportunities will only increase with the release of 4G spectrum. The government is simply denying that these technological advances will exist and that customers will substitute them for fibre.

Unlike this Labor government, other countries are not in denial about their broadband policies. India is following a plan to connect 60 million customers—almost three times the population of Australia—to wireless broadband, offering speeds of about 100 megabits per second at a fraction of the cost of the NBN rollout. In the United States, President Barack Obama announced in his State of the Union address just two weeks ago that he will be investing in wireless technology to provide high speed broadband to 98 per cent of the American population over the next five years. President Obama said in June last year:

... we are now beginning the next transformation in information technology: the wireless broadband revolution ...

He continued:

Expanded wireless broadband access will trigger the creation of innovative new businesses, provide cost-effective connection in rural areas, increase productivity, improve public safety, and allow for the development of mobile telemedicine, telework, distance learning, and other new applications that will transform Americans' lives.

Yet the Gillard government is refusing to even consider the possibility that technolo-

gies such as wireless can compete with a fixed-fibre network. The government is in denial and that denial is going to cost \$50 billion.

The coalition believes that it should not be the government's intent to push one technology over another. The coalition believes that we should be using competition to determine the best outcome. But this government is systematically trying to prevent competition through its monopolistic fibre network. By decommissioning Telstra's copper network, they are destroying a valuable asset that currently provides high-speed broadband at acceptable speeds for many people around the country. They will also prevent Telstra and Optus providing competition through their HFC network, which can deliver 100 megabits per second using DOCSIS 3 technology, and that currently passes 2.9 million homes. Why would you bypass an existing technology that will service, or potentially service, one-third of your market and just junk it, effectively, just ignore its existence and overbuild and duplicate that service at great cost to the taxpayer? And today's legislation further entrenches the NBN monopoly by forcing other fibre owners—potential competitors—from offering services at different levels to those provided by the NBN. The bill forces people to provide access for level 2 bit stream services.

But the real concern in this is the viability. The business plan is an elaborate deception. There has been much talk about the IRR of seven per cent and we see the government crowing about the fact that the seven per cent IRR is going to provide an appropriate return to government to cover the cost of the interest payments on the debt. Let me tell you that the reality is that the majority of the value contained in that IRR of seven per cent does not come from the marginal income derived from spending \$35.7 billion on fibre. It actually comes from the existing copper

network. That is where the value is. They are going to spend \$35.7 billion and get marginal revenue for a typical subscriber equivalent to the value of about a cappuccino a month.

The reality is that any company director that was going to acquire the Telstra copper network and effectively abandon it and then spend another \$35.7 billion to overbuild it would probably be thrown in jail for destroying shareholders' funds, because the marginal IRR of the additional expenditure over and above the copper network is actually negative. It is a negative IRR on the marginal funds invested, which is the appropriate analysis. It is in fact the copper network that is buttressing the business case, not the value generated by the fibre network. You will actually see a massive capital loss to the taxpayer. For the Australian people there will be an incredible opportunity lost, an opportunity forgone, through investing \$35.7 billion to gain only a marginal revenue per subscriber of around a cappuccino a month. It is a pretty stark figure: a negative marginal IRR and a loss to the taxpayer for the benefit of a service that many people would want to use over wireless.

Just today the Economist Intelligence Unit released their report on broadband and it said that, out of 16 developed countries, despite spending the \$50 billion, the Australian National Broadband Network would still be ranked 10th. One of the major arguments for the NBN is to make us roar up the rankings and to make us top tier in relation to the internet. The government are going to blow \$50 billion, they are going to make a massive capital loss and, at the end of all of that, we are still going to be ranked 10th.

It is interesting to see who was ranked No. 1. It was South Korea. It is interesting to note that in South Korea there were 24.84 million households who have subscribed to wireless. How many do you think would have sub-

scribed to their version of the NBN? If 24.84 million households in a country that is ranked No. 1 in the world for broadband have subscribed to wireless, is it 30 million households? Is it 40 million households? The fact is that in South Korea, according to the reports given to me, only 11.6 million households have subscribed to fixed line services—less than half. This is the flagship country that is quoted by Senator Conroy as being a leading light. Less than half the households are actually connected to a fixed line service as compared to mobile wireless. What we see is that the NBN project is a massive illusion. It is a political fraud. It is an economic fraud on the Australian people. We will see a massive destruction of value. We will see a massive capital loss.

We have debated in this House in the last two days the terrible floods and the natural disasters that have occurred around the country. Many of the losses and the impact of those losses on the Australian economy have been chronicled in this place. When you look at the sort of capital loss we are facing by investing \$35.7 billion to receive a negative internal rate of return, the capital loss that will be imposed on the taxpayer as installed by this bungled and wasteful project is going to make the losses to the Australian economy as a result of these natural disasters seem cheap, because we are facing a massive capital loss. The marginal revenue on the \$35.7 billion does not justify the additional funds invested. It is a loss that will be borne by the taxpayer to try and prop up Labor's failed political project.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (6.03 pm)—It is a very courageous representative for regional Australia who comes to this place and defends Telstra's ageing copper wire network as the Rolls-Royce that is going to drive us into the 21st century in technology. I suggest he give that speech in his electorate somewhere because I know for a

fact that there are parts of that electorate where on a damp day if you spill your drink you will lose not just your broadband connection but your telecommunications connection altogether. I suggest that the member for Cowper go out to some of the more remote parts of his electorate and give the speech he has just given. Go out there and defend the copper wire network that Telstra currently runs and see the response that he gets from his constituents.

I have had the benefit of sitting in and listening to the speech by the member for Wentworth on the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010. He has the toughest job on the opposition front bench because he has been seen out there day after day championing a cause that he simply does not believe in. He is championing a cause to bag and hopefully kill a visionary policy, a policy long overdue, to roll out for the first time in our nation's history a fast, reliable broadband network to every Australian household and business.

There are only two reasons why he has been sent out there to oppose this policy and to oppose the NBN. The first is that his boss only knows how to oppose things. He has not got a positive policy, as the member for Greenway has pointed out. He does not have a positive policy in any area, let alone in relation to broadband. The second reason is that the market fundamentalists, those who champion the cause of the market for everything it would seem except for tackling climate change, when it comes to economic theory, have a huge economic blind spot to market failure. We know that the need to build the National Broadband Network arises from the fact that after 20 years and, as the member for Greenway pointed out, after

nearly 20 failed broadband plans we have a market failure of tragic proportions.

The only answer for this is for the government to intervene and ensure that we have a fast, reliable, high-speed broadband network which is available on a universal basis to 100 per cent of Australian households and businesses. So it is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010, a bill that, together with the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010, will enshrine in legislation some policy and governance arrangements for the operation of the NBN Co. to reflect the Gillard government's historic commitment to build and operate a superfast, fibre-to-the-home telecommunications network. The National Broadband Network Companies Bill will limit the operation of the NBN Co. to wholesale-only telecommunications activities and it sets out the Commonwealth ownership arrangements, including providing for the eventual sale of the NBN Co. following the completion of the project and the approval of parliament. The legislation will lock in the obligation on the NBN Co. to offer wholesale-only services on open and equivalent terms to all service providers. This measure alone will guarantee a level playing field for all service providers—something that we have not seen since the deregulation of the telecommunications industry in 1991. In the history of telecommunications policy in this country, these bills are particularly significant because they deal with the structural problems that have been at the heart of so many failed broadband plans of the previous government.

The measures in the bill will do the following things. They will define the NBN Co. to include NBN Tasmania and any other company that NBN Co. controls. They will limit NBN Co. to wholesale-only telecom-

munications activities. They will establish powers to enable functional separation, and transfer or divestment of assets. They will enable the minister to make licence conditions, including to require or prohibit NBN Co. providing specific services. They will require the Commonwealth to retain full ownership until the NBN is built and fully operational. They will require a Productivity Commission and a parliamentary committee review prior to any sales process, and that parliamentary committee, as the member for Greenway pointed out, will inquire and report to parliament on a six-monthly basis on the operations of the NBN and the rollout process. The bill will establish the framework for the eventual sale of NBN Co. and establish regulations to be made to set limits on private control of NBN Co. following privatisation. It will also establish reporting obligations and exempt the NBN Co. from the Public Works Committee Act 1969.

Much has been made about the change to the bill which means that it is no longer a requirement set out in the legislation that the NBN Co. is to be sold within five years of being declared built and fully operational. Even though the stipulated five-year period would have allowed some flexibility for the government of the day to complete the delivery of the project through the sale of the NBN Co., it is also entirely appropriate to now leave it to the parliament of the day and the government of the day to make this judgment as to the sale and the timing of that sale.

The Gillard government is embarking on this nation-building infrastructure project as an investment in Australia's economic future. It is very disappointing indeed that the member for Wentworth, the member for Cowper and all those opposite appear to have a total failure of imagination when it comes to understanding the economic potential that this project will deliver for this country. The

problem for the shadow minister is that the Australian people can clearly see the benefit of the NBN and what it will deliver for them, even if he cannot.

In this regard I note that the shadow minister for communications paid a visit to the South Coast of New South Wales recently. He drove through my electorate and spent some time with the good residents of the electorate of Gilmore, taking the opportunity to make some of his spurious claims about what the NBN will and will not do. A leading local newspaper, the *Illawarra Mercury*, quite astutely was not fooled by any of Mr Turnbull's ridiculous claims. I would like to read from an editorial of the *Illawarra Mercury* on the day after Mr Turnbull's visit to the Illawarra. It goes under the heading 'Mr Turnbull's internet plan short-sighted' and it says:

MALCOLM Turnbull is off the pace if he thinks the Australian people will accept a tiered system of broadband connection in which regional and suburban residents are treated as second-class citizens.

The Opposition's communications spokesman was a long way from Vaucluse when he dropped in at Barrack Heights yesterday to talk all things NBN with some of the Liberal faithful.

The Liberals' opposition to the National Broadband Network hurt them at last year's election but Mr Turnbull is doggedly sticking to his line that Labor's plan is overpriced and unnecessary. While he advocates improving internet access to those areas where it is poor, in his view town centres should get a super-fast internet connections at 100 megabits per second, while those logging on in the 'burbs are forced to settle for a slower rate.

Even if the average residential user of the internet doesn't need a 100 megabits per second connection at the moment, Mr Turnbull's plan lacks vision. The internet is used in ways unimagined just a few years ago. No-one, including the Liberal Party, can predict what new uses are around the corner.

And whether they need the speed or not, no-one likes the idea of being lumped with a B-grade option.

I think the editor of the *Illawarra Mercury* has really belled the cat in that well-crafted editorial.

The people of the Illawarra were not taken in by the shadow minister's misleading assertions about the NBN project, nor his claims that if the coalition's OPEL broadband plan had continued then just about everyone in this country would by now be enjoying access to broadband. The coalition now claims its defunct OPEL project would have extended high-speed broadband out to 99 per cent of all households and small businesses. This is delusion on a grand scale. The OPEL plan was in fact meant to reach 90 per cent of just half a million underserved premises, which is less than five per cent of all premises in Australia.

That is not a point that the member for Cowper will be out spruiking around his electorate. I suspect the member for Wentworth was not out there sprouting that when he visited Gilmore the week before last either. But this very low-ball plan failed even to reach that coverage objective. Instead, independent analysis showed that, if it had proceeded, it would actually have covered fewer than 380,000 premises; that is around 3.5 per cent of premises, or 72 per cent of the low-ball promise that they made to the electorate. It was just one of 19 failed broadband projects the coalition put up, and it is time that we all moved on from these failed plans.

I live very near the trial pilot rollout site in Kiama Downs and Minnamurra, and it is exciting to see those trucks rolling the cable through the suburbs. Transformational projects of the magnitude of the NBN do not happen overnight, and they certainly do not happen every day in our region, but it is pleasing to know that steady progress is hap-

pening every day. In one of the first release sites in Kiama Downs and Minnamurra, which is adjacent to my electorate of Throsby, the take-up of the NBN is proceeding at extraordinary levels, as is consent to fibre connection to the premises—and this is important. Households were invited to preselect, if you like, whether they would like to get the NBN connected to their premises, and over 75.9 per cent of premises in Kiama Downs-Minnamurra have signed up to that, indicating that they want to get high-speed broadband from the NBN retail providers connected to their premises, which just shows that there is a lot of excitement in the local region for this project. Transfield, the local construction company, in its first release site has completed the majority of the passive infrastructure for the underground deployment despite very poor weather conditions—although we will not complain about that given that we are a long way from the floods of Queensland, northern New South Wales and northern Victoria.

Some issues to do with the laying of cables will arise during this rollout process. I believe it is important to keep our focus on the big picture here. The network is expected to be activated progressively, with live services becoming progressively available through retail service providers in the coming months. It is great news for the Illawarra and it is my intention, together with my colleague the member for Cunningham, to do everything that I can do to work with local councils in the region to encourage NBN Co. to roll out the NBN into the high-population centres north of the first release sites and eventually to Wollongong and the entire Illawarra-Southern Highlands region.

As you can see from the quotes I read out from the editorial in the *Illawarra Mercury*, this has the support of the entire region. Regional Development Australia Illawarra is very, very keen. This is a body made up of

business leaders, government agencies both state and federal, unions and local government representatives. It is very, very excited about the prospect of getting the NBN rolled out into the Illawarra, because we can see that the 67 per cent of small businesses in the Illawarra and the Southern Highlands which are home based will benefit enormously from this project. The 20,000 people who daily make the trip from the Southern Highlands of New South Wales or from the Illawarra to Sydney in search of work or for employment might be able to spend a little bit more time off the train platforms and in their communities, because they will be able to telecommute or work in the new businesses that will grow up around the NBN—the much-needed new businesses in the Illawarra. So I commend the bill. It is an exciting project and one that the entire community is behind.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (6.18 pm)—I rise to speak on the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Access Arrangements) Bill 2010. As I said when I first arrived in this place, the NBN Co. proposal is a grand promise produced to generate votes regardless of the real cost to taxpayers and regardless of the typical Labor shambles this monopoly will create. Yes, Australians will benefit from the provision of high-speed broadband across the nation; nobody disputes this. What is completely outrageous, however, is Labor's claim that high-speed broadband can be produced only by an outdated, monopolistic telco model such as NBN Co.

The National Broadband Network Companies Bill before us governs the ownership, operations and legal status of NBN Co., Labor's builder and operator of the broadband network. It limits NBN Co. to business activities directly related to supplying whole-

sale communications services and sets out some arrangements for its eventual privatisation. The telecommunications legislation amendment bill, on the other hand, amends the Competition and Consumer Act 2010 and the Telecommunications Act 1997. It requires NBN Co. to provide open and non-discriminatory access to retail carriers using its wholesale services and imposes similar access rules and NBN-compatible technical requirements on non-NBN fibre rollouts.

But it seems the government is intent on being blindsided. It is determined to build an enormously expensive, outdated telco monopoly model that will lack flexibility and management capacity to adapt to changing times and changing technologies. Its eyes are wilfully closed to sensible, market driven alternatives such as Brisbane City Council's i3 project. Some would ask why. Why is Labor so blinkered? Perhaps because its politics gets in the way. More to the point, this is a program crafted and controlled by Labor mates, and we all know about Labor mates in my home state of Queensland.

We know this government is in crisis mode. Its promises are broken day by day, one by one, and broadband and the NBN are no exception to this. This government asks the community to trust it, but its record in government is that trust and the Labor Party are two separate and non-compatible planets. This government refused to publish a business plan for months on end and then produced a document that highlighted that it would cost taxpayers even more than its early estimates. The Gillard government estimates that NBN Co. will require around \$27 billion in equity funding and will need to borrow a further \$10 billion to roll out the network. In addition, if the NBN Co.-Telstra deal currently under negotiation is completed, NBN Co. and the government will make payments to Telstra worth \$11 billion in present-day post-tax terms, equal to ap-

proximately \$16 billion in actual transfers, for use of its conduits and migration of its customers. The commonly used \$50 billion price tag for the NBN adds these sums—equity, debt and payments to Telstra—together. It is far too much and, quite simply, does not need to be anything like this amount.

Perhaps what is most alarming is that fibre can offer download speeds of up to one gigabit per second—1,000 megabits. However, in 2020 the NBN Co. business plan forecasts that two-thirds of users will pay for speeds no higher than today's top ADSL speeds of 25 megabits per second over Telstra's existing copper network. Fixed wireless and satellite download speeds will be around 12 megabits per second. This is yet more damning evidence of Labor's NBN Co. charade. They are indeed giving us a B-grade option.

The coalition has proposed amendments to Labor's bills to highlight the misguided nature of their agenda. We must ensure that NBN Co. remains legally defined as a public authority and remains subject to the full oversight of the Public Works Committee Act. Supporting our amendments will ensure this. The coalition amendments will also ensure that it is specified in specific language that NBN Co.'s supply of wholesale communications services be restricted to layer 2 products provided to retail service providers for the purpose of providing services to end customers. They will also strike out exemptions to the wholesale only rule for NBN Co. deals with utilities.

Along with my coalition colleagues, I am very concerned about several elements of Labor's bill. This bill will prevent appropriate parliamentary and public scrutiny of NBN Co. Labor has always been determined to hide the real facts, and now they are determined to achieve it. At a time when we need to tighten our belts and rebuild devas-

tated communities across the country—importantly, in my home state of Queensland and my electorate of Ryan—the government should engage with some of the many reputable companies providing broadband solutions in many countries throughout the world, including companies like Huawei, who have recently launched their *Connecting communities* white paper. This paper is an independent review of the impact of broadband communities in Britain and also for Australia. The report identifies significant health, education and environmental benefits of ever faster broadband in UK communities. Importantly, it shows that this can be achieved through private enterprise and without government made monopolies.

It was interesting to learn about their report and their experiences in the United Kingdom, where they are working to deploy the 21CN network. Huawei are also building next-generation broadband networks in Singapore, Malaysia, the UAE and Brunei. And, as I have previously mentioned in this House, the Brisbane City Council, through the leadership of Lord Mayor Campbell Newman, is introducing the i3 project. This project will provide residents and businesses with superfast optic broadband within four years at no cost to the ratepayers. It may even deliver a return to Brisbane ratepayers.

Australia cannot afford to waste \$43 billion on this project when we have private enterprise prepared to do it for considerably less and to provide open access, encouraging competition and flow-on cost benefits to the consumer. It may be easy for the Gillard government to hit the taxpayers, but it is smarter to use established, well-credentialed private sector providers who have the skills and innovations to deliver these types of projects. The private sector is better placed to create investment and to drive efficient delivery of infrastructure.

The NBN will be the largest public works project in Australia's history and, most alarmingly, the government has already rejected calls for it to be subjected to a cost-benefit analysis by Infrastructure Australia or review by the Productivity Commission. The question has to be asked: what are Minister Conroy and the Labor government trying to hide? In addition to this, only 160 pages of the 400-page NBN Co. business plan were made public. To top it off, the Labor government—shamefully—asked members of parliament who viewed the whole business case to sign confidentiality agreements. The NBN Co. is a monopoly, and the Gillard government intends to legally prevent any fixed line competition. How on earth can its business plan be commercial-in-confidence? This is just further evidence of a government that, to use Prime Minister Gillard's words after she knifed the member for Griffith, has 'lost its way'.

It concerns me greatly that this bill will seek to have the NBN Co. defined as a corporate body rather than as a public authority, thus exempting it from FOI laws. This is despite the fact that the NBN will be 100 per cent owned by the Commonwealth. This is not productive and furthermore does not provide the Australian community with any assurance that the government will not once again waste its money or that the government will even be accountable.

This bill, most worryingly, attempts to remove the NBN Co. from the oversight of the Public Works Committee Act 1969. Major government infrastructure projects have been subject to joint parliamentary committees since Henry Parkes introduced reforms in New South Wales in 1888 to end corruption. Apparently, that no longer suits the agenda of the Gillard government. Even the Snowy Mountains scheme was subject to extensive oversight by the federal, New South Wales and Victorian parliaments. But

Labor wants its NBN Co. charade to go under the radar.

The coalition's amendments also seek to ensure that ministerial directions to NBN Co. regarding NBN Co. asset transfers or divestiture, or regarding the provision or nonprovision of services, are subject to disallowance by the parliament. This is justified, given the government's track record of attempting to prevent scrutiny and oversight of the NBN Co. to date.

This bill may also hurt private retail service providers by allowing the NBN Co. to extend its mandate. When the National Broadband Network policy was devised, and NBN Co. was set up, the Labor government assured the market that it would only provide a wholesale layer 2 bit-stream service to retail service providers, and would not deal directly with end customers. But the restrictions placed on NBN Co. in this bill are unclear in some places and unduly expansive in others. For instance, the NBN Co. will be able to supply network services directly to gas, water and electricity utilities, transport operators and road authorities, even though provision of such services to these entities is an existing and valuable business opportunity for Telstra, Optus and other carriers.

The bill does not specify in clear language that NBN Co. must limit its products to layer 2 services supplied to retail service providers for the purpose of providing services to end users. This concerns me greatly. This bill will also stop competition by preventing private competitors from entering the market. It is like giving all our roads to Ford and allowing them to regulate which cars can use the road.

The so-called level playing field provisions, or cherry-picker provisions, will mean that any company building a new network offering services of 25 megabits per second or higher will have to meet the same technical standards as NBN Co., make available

the same basic layer 2 wholesale services as NBN Co. and allow competitors non-discriminatory access to their networks at prices set by the ACCC. By mandating prices and reducing returns, this will prevent private investment in new networks that could otherwise lead to many Australians getting faster broadband much sooner than if they wait for the NBN. It also stifles innovation in the telecommunications sector by mandating which technologies must be used. Yes, this is typical Gillard Labor, but it is simply not good enough when so much money is going to be wasted.

The coalition remains committed to the policy objective of providing all Australians with high-quality affordable broadband regardless of where they live. This means greatly improving services in regional and remote Australia and in the black spots that stop around one million premises in the cities from getting good connectivity. We have never walked away from this and never will. Furthermore, pouring \$50 billion into the NBN at a time when reconstruction after natural disasters and a once in a century mining boom are desperate for resources and the economy is near full employment is a guaranteed way to ensure taxpayers do not receive value for money.

The Gillard Labor government has attempted to prevent parliamentary scrutiny and oversight of the NBN at every turn, even though taxpayers are funding the entire project. It is simply not good enough and the government stands condemned. To make matters worse, the government is now attempting to tie the hands of future parliaments by placing unreasonable impediments to a democratically elected future government choosing to pursue a better policy course for broadband. This is deeply reprehensible.

Given that the NBN is being rolled out and NBN Co. now exists, the coalition is moving these amendments to restrict its scope of operation to ensure it does not fall victim to the 'mission creep' that often infects public monopolies. Attempts to hinder parliamentary or public scrutiny of such an expensive and risky project are not reasonable and should not be supported.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (6.32 pm)—I rise to oppose the amendments and support the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010. I do understand that the member for Ryan was not a member of the parliament when the Howard government was in power, but I would like to remind her that the proposal that was put out by the then Howard government would have totally and absolutely disadvantaged the people of my electorate of Shortland and condemned them to second-class broadband internet access. The member for Ryan has put forward quite a misleading contribution in this debate and does not tell the full story. This is very much in line with a lot of the propaganda that has been put out by the coalition on this legislation. I think it is really important to state that the NBN, high-speed broadband, is absolutely about the future. The countries and communities that have it will be the countries and communities that have the opportunities of the future. It is the same as electricity was when it was first introduced. It is groundbreaking technology and something that each and every community should be fighting very hard to have access to.

The legislation before us today limits the focus of NBN Co. to wholesale-only telecommunications activity, consistent with its mandate, sets out the Commonwealth ownership arrangements and provides for the eventual sale of the Commonwealth stake in the NBN. The bill delivers on the government's commitment to regulate the NBN so that it operates according to the principles that the

government has set for it. It will be wholesale only, offering access on open and equivalent terms, and be subject to transparency requirements and ACCC oversight—something that the previous member did not share with the parliament. As a wholesale-only operator, it will not be conflicted by selling downstream retail services in competition with its customers, as has been the case with Telstra. As such, it will provide a fair and stable platform for retail competition. The eventual sale of NBN Co. will be subject to processes that will give the Productivity Commission and the parliament an ability to look into the impact of the sale and the appropriate regulatory framework needed for it to proceed. There will be scope for the parliament to disallow the sale of the company.

I have been associated with a joint Hunter-Central Coast RDA NBN priority rollout project. This joint project has been working with the business communities of the Hunter and the Central Coast and 13 local government areas—two on the Central Coast and 11 in the Hunter—to develop a cooperative approach to NBN Co. and its rollout contractors. The two Central Coast councils have all passed resolutions in their council chambers supporting the proposal, and it is my understanding that Lake Macquarie Council, which is the other council that falls within the Shortland electorate, will be passing a motion next Monday evening putting its support behind the project. This is about local councils working together cooperatively to identify appropriate corridors for cable rollout; to identify new developments for inclusion in the NBN infrastructure; to assist contractors to minimise and manage the disruption to local communities; and to develop the capacity of the regions to provide the skilled labour required to carry out the rollout functions.

There have been meetings of all Hunter and Central Coast members. In addition,

there have been meetings that I have been involved in with Central Coast members and some of my Hunter colleagues. This is about a cooperative approach, which I think in itself is unique. It is about the two regions of the Hunter and the Central Coast working together to see that our regions benefit from the NBN rollout. It is all about being prepared for that. It is about having the capacity and it is about cooperation. It is very important.

I will lay on the table the importance of the NBN to the Shortland electorate. The Shortland electorate takes in part of the Central Coast and part of Lake Macquarie. They are areas where most people have to travel to work. It is an area of some size and the NBN will be such an advantage to the people of the area. People will be able to work from home. It will make that distance factor negligible. It will help with education. Another important factor is that the people of the Shortland electorate have the skills and the expertise to embrace the NBN rollout. As part of the joint Hunter-Central Coast NBN priority rollout, the people of the Shortland electorate are ready to go and are asking that their proposal be viewed sympathetically.

Another aspect that makes it a very important region to be looked at favourably for the NBN rollout is the Smart Grid, Smart City project based in Newcastle. There has been an investment of \$100 million by the government in that trial project. One important aspect of that project is to have fast-speed broadband. When it is developed to its fullest and is available to communities throughout Australia—and I know there is a trial project in Newington in Sydney—people on the other side of the world will be able to operate their appliances and will be able to turn their security lights on and off. It is giving people access to utilities that they have not had in the past. This is energy efficient and cost saving and is something that should be em-

braced not only in the Hunter, Central Coast and Sydney areas but throughout Australia. All Australians should have access to this facility and fast-speed broadband will deliver it to Australians.

With the Hunter-Central Coast project, the RDA is focused on providing data that will be relevant to the NBN. It will play a vital role in ensuring that the region's approach is consistent. I think that is really important when we are looking at the NBN rollout. It is also important to note the expertise in both areas. What I feel is very special about this joint RDA Central Coast-Newcastle project is the way businesses on the Central Coast have hopped on board and made such an enormous commitment to it. They have a coordinating broadband group, which includes members from Gosford, Wyong, the Hunter and the Central Coast, and there is business and community representation. Businesses on the Central Coast have joined together and have been extremely supportive of the proposal. Businesses on the Central Coast have given me the strong message that they are ready—they are NBN-ready—and they are very keen to see the NBN rolled out through the Central Coast and through the Hunter. They are committed to the joint approach. On the other hand, the Central Coast is putting together and making sure that business and the Central Coast community are on board, and I have been overwhelmed by the way the community there has come together to support the project.

Similarly, the Lake Macquarie Council, as with the Wyong Council, has offered to open up its infrastructure plans and to work constructively with NBN Co. to ensure that rollout in that area proceeds smoothly and that there are absolutely no hiccups along the way. It is a highly skilled council which has excellent knowledge in the area of data transfer. The council is committed to working as part of this joint RBA rollout to ensure that

the area and the people of Lake Macquarie can benefit from this joint project.

The project across the Hunter and the Central Coast has now been going for over 12 months. As I said earlier, it is about cooperation, capability and ensuring that the ministers and NBN Co. are aware of just how ready our areas on the Central Coast and in the Hunter are for the rollout to take place. On the Central Coast, David Abrahams led the push from the business community. He worked with councils across the Central Coast, meeting regularly to discuss how our area could benefit from and be ready for the next round of the broadband rollout. Being NBN-ready is really important, and the Hunter and the Central Coast are.

Another proposal that the Hunter and the Central Coast link into is the National Broadband Network, spanning Australia's eastern regional corridor. I would encourage people to have a look at the proposal the Southern Cross University put together. I congratulate the member for Page, who was involved in that as well. It talks about the benefit of creating a spine along the eastern coast of Australia and about the reasons that area should be a priority. Once again, it talks about the Hunter and the Central Coast joint proposal.

This is good legislation. This is legislation about the future; not legislation about the past. This is legislation that will deliver not to a few Australians but to all Australians, and it is legislation that should be supported by all members of the House.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (6.47 pm)—I am grateful for the opportunity to rise to speak on the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010. Listening to the contribution of the member for Shortland highlights why we in the opposition have grave concerns about the idea of a massive, legislated government monopoly being able to do the job

that the market could do, and probably should do, in this instance. If it were up to the member for Shortland, for instance, we would pass a motion that Lake Macquarie council send out a few council workers and all of our problems in life would be fixed!

The story of Australian progress, ingenuity, innovation and risk and return is that of the market and the operation of the market. In Australia today, most Australians access the broadband that they want and that they need at a reasonable price. The economy has developed to a point where most businesses access the broadband that they need and that they want at a speed that suits their business. Of course, what government is for is to deal with those situations that the market cannot, a concept that seems to be totally foreign to those opposite in this legislation before the House. This bill is not to deal with black spots in major cities. This is not a bill to deal with rural and regional areas that cannot be funded by market risk and return. This is a bill to create a massive government monopoly across the entire country, to 10 million homes.

The member for Shortland spoke about the ACCC. The provisions of this legislation effectively cripple any form of competitive tension or process in this market space until its eventual privatisation—and I will get to that in a minute. What this bill will do is mandate that you cannot compete. Prices will be regulated. Technology will be regulated. Let us go over that one more time: technology will be regulated by this bill. You would dare not invest your capital in a new form of emerging technology in broadband provision because there would be a massive government monopoly which says you must maintain a technical standard equivalent to the National Broadband Network. What the legislation is doing is effectively putting a lid on innovation, on advancement in technologies.

When we see articles from the United States, we see that President Obama—and this is something which those opposite should take careful note of—is talking about innovative, forward-looking wireless solutions. I am not simply talking about wireless solutions. But he is talking about new technologies and the advancement of a modern economy. I regard Australia as a modern economy that should be allowed to advance. Investment should be encouraged in broadband, internet and other technologies to allow new and emerging technology to flourish. Jeffrey A Eisenach wrote an article in the *Australian* last week highlighting three differences between Obama's plan and the National Broadband Network. He says:

The most obvious difference is that the NBN is focused almost exclusively on fibre, while Obama spoke of deploying "high-speed wireless".

... ..

A second ... difference is that the Obama administration's broadband plan depends almost entirely on private funding. While the NBN will cost Australian taxpayers about \$36 billion ...

He then points out that Obama's whole stimulus plan was only about US\$7.2 billion. Jeffrey Eisenach then points out, and this is what I want to highlight:

The third, and perhaps most profound, difference lies in the US decision to let technologists and markets, rather than politicians, choose the most efficient technologies.

Listening to the contribution of the member for Shortland, I am reminded why we would allow technologists and businesspeople to make these decisions rather than politicians. When I hear the contributions of those opposite I am reminded that the expertise in this House in terms of the broadband provision is of such a low level that the pontificating remarks of government members about the technology in this bill amount to very little. They really know very little about the provision of infrastructure in this National Broad-

band Network—how to do it effectively and what it requires to provide for, in a commercially acceptable way, the needs of the market in Australia today.

Today we have seen that the National Broadband Network will cost taxpayers 24 times as much as South Korea's and deliver just one-tenth the speed. I am not simply raising these concerns to say, 'This will be a total disaster and it is a pie in the sky'. I think these concerns are valid, because the structure of the government's bill and the structure of what the government is doing in the Australian marketplace is taking what is a reasonably working, effective market based system and turning it into a massive government monopoly underwritten by the taxpayer. That is a key concept: it is underwritten by the taxpayer. That is a big risk.

The government refers in this bill to the 'eventual privatisation' of this asset. It is acknowledging that it is probably a worthy goal to allow the market to recommence provision of broadband in Australia one day—one sunny day in the future. The government is acknowledging that one day, when this government is well out of office, it will be a good idea to privatise it. Maybe it will be Bob Hawke or Paul Keating reincarnated going on a privatisation splurge, but not this government. This government says it is the government's role to take the risk on behalf of the Australian taxpayer, to put people like the member for Shortland in charge of national broadband network policy, not the experts, the technologists and the business investors, the people who make these decisions every day for a living. That instinct in the Australian Labor Party is completely and utterly foreign to me, and I think it is foreign to the success of the Australian market and our emergence as a modern and dynamic economy.

We have proposed a series of amendments to this bill and I support these amendments. I think at a minimum we can try and make a bad bill better. I think these amendments do that. If you are going to accept that the government will be the single biggest provider of this technology and this service to the economy, you must have the appropriate scrutiny—not ‘should’, not ‘could’; you ‘must’. If you are asking the taxpayer to take the risk on \$36 billion of infrastructure investment, then you must have proper scrutiny of this massive government asset. But what we have seen from this government is a continual attempt to evade scrutiny on this, the biggest single investment in Commonwealth history. We have seen a continual attempt to evade the opposition’s comments that we should have the highest levels of oversight on this particular asset. This is a warning to the future. Without the highest levels of oversight, of government scrutiny, on the biggest single investment in Australian history, you will have very unsatisfactory outcomes.

We have seen their evasion of the proposal to have a review by the Productivity Commission; yet ironically this legislation calls for a review by the Productivity Commission. When we get to that one sunny day when the Labor Party says it is now a good time to privatise the asset, we will call in the Productivity Commission, but not before we ask taxpayers to take on the risk of this massive single monopoly, the biggest investment in Australian history. If this sounds like a compelling argument to anybody out there, this is a compelling argument. It is no good to the Australian taxpayer to call in the Productivity Commission when attempting to privatise this asset in the future and not have them look at it now. If you can sense a little outrage in my voice, I can tell you that I am against big government monopolies when we do not need to have them.

This bill restricts the ability of anybody to invest in the future of broadband provision, and that is another one of my great criticisms. Finishing on that scrutiny point—my colleague the member for Ryan raised this point quite accurately—the NBN Co. will be removed from critical pieces of government legislation designed to provide an adequate level of scrutiny, such as the Public Works Committee Act 1969 and, of course, freedom of information laws. These are tenets of our democracy, things that make us Australian and democratic, unlike many of the countries we see deteriorating around the world. This big government monopoly, funded to a level that has never in Australian history been sought from the public purse, will not be subject to key scrutiny pieces of legislation like the Public Works Committee Act and freedom of information laws. It sounds awfully bad for the Australian taxpayer. It sounds like somebody is trying to hide the level of risk. And you wonder: why the rush to evade all of this scrutiny?

Our amendment seeks to prevent the damage that will be done by the so-called level playing field provisions, or what is termed the ‘cherry-picker provisions’. I have spoken to people in the market space and I have read contributions from voices such as the Alliance for Affordable Broadband who have a lot of common-sense things to say about what you need to do and what kind of structure you need to have in your legislation to ensure that you do not stifle innovation in this space. Governments do not innovate. I have never been a believer that government is the way to produce advances in technology or innovation. It is the market that provides these innovative forces, and competitive tensions are one of the best ways to produce these. But here we have a bill before us that mandates prices and reduces returns, preventing private investment in new networks. We have a great concern about this.

Over time, if this legislation goes this way, what you will see is Australia falling further behind. It may make an initial leap on somebody's ratings around the world but, if you do not have encouragement and incentive to invest, innovate, create and move forward in the technologies of the future, you will fall behind. And we know today's world moves so fast—much faster even than when I was growing up or when most members here were growing up. Mandating to 2020 the kind of technology that Australia will have and, importantly, preventing other technologies from emerging, I think is a critical mistake in this legislation. It is something that will take Australia backwards.

Of course the bill will make it harder. When we reach that one sunny day when Paul Keating is reincarnated and wants to privatise assets—not this Labor government, because 'privatisation is bad'—when privatisation is 'good' again, when we get some more free-market Labor Party members, which is a day I look forward to, this bill will make it almost impossible to sell. In the coalition's amendments the member for Wentworth has come up with the right formula in terms of preventing the government from shooting itself in the foot and making this asset very difficult to sell.

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! It being 7.00 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Marriage

Petition: Australia Post Shop at Darch

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (7.00 pm)—I will take this opportunity to table two petitions regarding matters of great concern to my constituents. Firstly, I have a petition from the parish of the All Saints Catholic

Church in Greenwood, a suburb within the electorate of Cowan. That petition relates to the current national debate surrounding gay marriage. I say at the outset that the coalition has a position on this issue, and that is to stand by the current definition of marriage being a convention, an institution, between a man and a woman. I also stand by that position wholeheartedly. I know that many, indeed perhaps the majority, on the other side do not agree with that and instead wish to allow persons of the same sex to marry. I know that the fringe party of Australian politics, the Greens, also wish to undermine the standing and the strength of the family unit with this and other social engineering measures.

On Saturday, 5 February, I visited the All Saints church and met with Michael and Mary Rose; Father Vinh, the parish priest; Sharren Cordina and many other members of the parish. Michael handed me a petition of over 650 names. I note that those who signed it asked me, as the federal MP for Cowan, to 'protect the unique institution of marriage as traditionally understood and actually lived as the complementary love between a man and a woman'.

It is right that the parliament takes note of this document and, most of all, takes note of its intent to support the institution of marriage, as it is rightly defined. I seek leave to table this document.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I understand that the document will be forwarded to the Petitions Committee for consideration and will be accepted subject to confirmation by the committee that it conforms with the standing orders.

Mr SIMPKINS—The petition and the other points of contact that I have had as the member for Cowan have been overwhelmingly supportive of the maintenance of the definition of marriage. I know that that

comes as a great disappointment to many in this place, including some on the cross benches. I admit that I have had 22 constituents who have contacted me in favour of allowing gay marriage. I have had almost 400 against any change. In light of those figures, when I read emails or comments from some who support gay marriage saying that the majority of Australians are on their side I would say that the evidence is clearly against that position.

I thank the members of the All Saints Catholic Church in Greenwood for presenting this petition to me and I say to them that I will do everything in my power to 'protect the unique institution of marriage as traditionally understood and actually lived as the complementary love between a man and a woman'.

I move to a different topic and take this opportunity today to speak again of the need for improved Australia Post services in the Cowan Electorate. I do so because I have another petition, which relates to the ongoing disappointment with Australia Post services in Cowan. Although I have personally had some success with improvements in Australia Post services in the past, with street posting boxes being installed in Banksia Grove and in Ashby, it is clear that the people of Darch, Landsdale and Madeley believe that services remain inadequate for them. I know Australia Post are aware of this problem because I have made them aware. Australia Post shops are being sought for Landsdale and Darch.

Last year Australia Post replied to my representations and said that they believe services are appropriate in the area and that they will continue to monitor demand. That is very interesting. I hope that they being authentic, because today I seek leave to table an in-order petition from Mr Steven Butler asking for the establishment of an Australia

Post shop in the Darch Plaza shopping centre.

This petition is substantial. It is not just a couple of pages of names of friends helping out a mate with a petition. It is a significant statement. It is a petition of thousands of local people saying that they want better services—almost 2,500 local people saying, 'Here is a problem and here is the solution that is required.'

To state it plainly and clearly, this petition means that 2,465 local people are saying to Australia Post that their services are inadequate and that there is overwhelming demand for an Australia Post shop. The petition, in due course, will go to the minister and I ask the minister to have Australia Post initiate a tender process for a shop facility in the area. I thank the members of my community for both these petitions, for their commitment to good causes and for their dedication to doing the right thing within the electorate of Cowan. I am therefore pleased to present this petition.

The petition read as follows—

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

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the house:

The need for an Australia Post Shop to be established at the Darch Plaza Shopping Centre. Darch is a suburb of more than 1,500 homes. The establishment of a Post Shop in Darch will meet the needs of all local residents and from nearby suburbs such as Lansdale which will in the near future more than double in size to more than 3,000 homes.

We therefore ask the house to:

Initiate such actions as to ensure the immediate establishment of an Australia Post Shop at the Darch Plaza Shopping centre. The establishment of a Post Shop in Darch will then provide the provision of services and Australia Post products for the residents of the significant suburb of

Darch who seek such services and products in one location.

from 2,465 citizens

Petition received.

Ms Connie Nungulla McDonald

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (7.05 pm)—As I have total respect for her family and culture I only propose to mention the name of the deceased once, for the purposes of the *Hansard* record, in the comments that I am about to make. Connie Nungulla McDonald passed away on 30 September 2010 and I was able to be part of the service in Revesby which remembered her remarkable life. She was 77.

Auntie, as she was known, was living in Revesby when her book, co-authored by my friend, Jill Finnane, was written. That book, *When You Grow Up*, was written for a variety of reasons, not least, in Auntie's words on page 2, because:

Every person needs to belong and I am no exception. Not knowing very much about my family has weighed heavily on my mind all my life. It was government policy that Aboriginal mission children were not told where we came from or who our parents were.

Auntie was born in the Kimberley to an Aboriginal mother, Biddy, and a father who was part Aboriginal. Biddy and her daughter were taken to the Forrest River Mission for 'protection' when Auntie was four months old. Auntie was diagnosed with osteogenesis imperfecta—chalky bones—as a toddler and spent vast amounts of time over the rest of her life in hospitals. It seems that the restrictions she suffered as a result of that condition led to her determination and strength as an adolescent and later as an adult.

Auntie became an assistant teacher at the mission during the war and later assisted the nursing staff. On page 55 she said of that period:

I became conscious that despite my disabilities, I could use my intelligence to help people. ... The

relative freedom we had during the war gave me ... the opportunity to learn tribal Law, something every dormitory child longed for.

In 1949 Auntie went to Alice Springs to continue her education as a teacher. She eventually left to live in Yarrabah in Queensland. From there she went to train for the Anglican Church Army, which enabled her to work in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. Subsequently Auntie worked as a social and welfare worker, which involved her with many of the problems experienced by urban Indigenous Australians. Auntie was a committed Christian who became an Aboriginal elder and entitled to be called 'Auntie'. She was very proud of her title and she lived up to all the responsibilities that the title encompasses.

Her memorial service was held in Revesby on 29 October 2010 and organised by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It was a celebration of the life of an extraordinary woman. Her story was told by Mary Eatts, Jill Finnane and Arthur Roy; Carol Carter read a prayer. Auntie's family and friends were invited to share their memories and to pay tribute to her.

Shortly after I became the shadow minister for Aboriginal affairs in 1996 I went to Auntie's book launch for *When You Grow Up*. She added a PS to the notation at the front of the book: 'PS. I'll expect you to work hard for us Kooris.' I hope I did not let her down in the period that I was Aboriginal affairs spokesman for the Labor Party.

A very significant event also took place in the late nineties at the Revesby Workers Club when I organised a night of reconciliation. Between 400 and 500 people were in attendance that night. It was an opportunity for people to tell stories. We had a number of very important guests as well as members of the community. Auntie was given an opportunity to tell her story. She was only sup-

posed to talk for 10 minutes; she went for about half an hour and she had the audience riveted with her story. She was a woman who was a complete joy and her exuberance was infectious to the audience. There was no sense of bitterness or even of sorrow about what had happened to her. She was very philosophical and a lot of that was her Christian beliefs that she had picked up over time. We could not get her off the stage; people did not want her off the stage. That is my memory of Auntie. Whenever I met her—she was a constituent of mine for a very long time before she went to the Kimberley, where she passed away—she was always infectious with her good humour. She always challenged you in a nice sort of way and you just could not help but notice her presence. She was the life of the party. Whenever she was present at any function or gathering we all gathered around her and were consumed by her. (*Time expired*).

Cairns Mental Health Carers Support Hub

Mr ENTSCHE (Leichhardt) (7.10 pm)—I rise tonight to express serious concerns about the future of a fabulous support organisation in my electorate and to call on the government and the relevant minister to reconsider a decision to discontinue funding for the Cairns Mental Health Carers Support Hub. This is an organisation I helped to establish in 2006. I got some funding for a wonderful lady by the name of Adrienne Hicks, who was a carer of a son with schizophrenia. Such was her commitment to her adult son that she took a university course and got a degree in that field and she wanted to pass on her experiences et cetera. I was able to secure a grant for a pilot program in 2006.

So successful was this particular program that the Cairns Mental Health Carers Support Hub was launched in October 2009. The hub is accessible. It is a one-stop shop, and its

approach has been a fantastic success for families and services alike. Amongst many of the achievements it has seen there has been a threefold increase in families contacting the service, a 300 per cent increase in referrals from other services, a 350 per cent increase in referrals from the hub to other service providers and a tenfold increase in their ability to provide counselling support to carers and families throughout the region and not just in Cairns. My understanding is that there is something like 350 carers at the moment who are very heavily reliant on this service.

Such is the success of this service that there has been a plan to look at extending it. They were looking at opening a similar one in Rockhampton. They were also looking, through the Mental Illness Fellowship, at opening this Australia wide. We all know the desperate need we have in the community to be able to support the carers of people with mental illness. We also know the huge saving this is for government resources when these carers dedicate, in many cases, their entire lives to providing this service.

I just want to go through a couple of emails and letters I have received. The first one I am going to read from is from Christine Coop. She is a senior occupational therapist and director at Enable Occupational Therapy in Mental Health in Cairns. This is what she said:

Occasionally a pilot program comes into being that hits above its weight in terms of positive impact on a community. The Cairns Mental Health Carer's Support Hub is such a program...

... ..

On a carer-by-carer basis, I believe I have made a significant difference. However, in all the years that I have been plugging away at changing the system to be proactive and utilising carers effectively (and for carers to look after themselves so they can last the distance), I have NEVER seen results from any program/service that comes even

close to the effect that the Cairns Mental Health Carer's Support Hub has produced. For the first time, carers are acting powerfully, the system is listening, clients with mental health conditions are receiving better quality of care and a whole heap of angry people are using their anger productively to make the world a better place for those who are unable to advocate for this themselves.

I have another email here. I cannot mention her name, unfortunately, but she said:

My son, Sam, was diagnosed with Schizophrenia and ABI some time ago. I am his carer. I was despairing of getting any long-term and stable support.

... ..

I suffer from anxiety attacks and related ongoing anxieties. My health and well being has been much better since I have had the support of the people at the Hub. Having someone who understood our individual and collective needs, who could provide information which was relevant and understandable, who could support and guide us through the MAZE of services, saved our lives and our sanity.

I heard today that the Hub is having to close. My anxiety levels went through the roof immediately ... I believe I am still alive today as a result of the support of the Hub.

These are the sorts of impassioned pleas that we are getting begging that we keep this service. It is absolutely crazy, it is insane, that a government that says it is committed to mental health and raising issues there and supporting carers could take away \$160,000 from this outstanding service. It is the best of its kind that we have seen in this country. It is a disgrace. (*Time expired*)

Chinese and Vietnamese New Year

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (7.16 pm)—Australia's cultural diversity gives us the opportunity to enjoy more than one New Year celebration. Last weekend was the Chinese and Vietnamese New Year. Since almost 30 per cent of my electorate, according to the ABS, speaks either Vietnamese or a Chinese

dialect at home you can imagine the size and vibrancy of the New Year celebrations in my area.

Over the last week I have tried to learn as much as I can about Vietnamese and Chinese culture so I can better understand the values and beliefs of my constituents. I wanted to do more than just read about different customs and so I decided to immerse myself in Asian culture over that particular week. One of the well-known Vietnamese New Year traditions is to visit 10 temples during the New Year. I started my pilgrimage on the Wednesday night, New Year's Eve, when I visited the Phuoc Hue Temple in Wetherill Park to say my New Year's best wishes to the community, followed by a visit to the Australian Chinese Buddhist Association Mingyue Lay Temple in Bonnyrigg.

The more temples I visited the more stories I was told about the history, culture and religion of the Vietnamese and Chinese people and the closer I felt to the Fowler community. On Saturday I had the pleasure of attending the Vietnamese Community in Australia, New South Wales chapter's opening ceremony for the annual Tet festival. My congratulations go to the president, Mr Thanh Nguyen, as well as the internal vice president, Mr Than Nguyen, on a fantastic festival.

Despite the unusually hot weather over 40,000 people attended the festival over the three days. I strongly believe the success of the event was due to the hardworking nature of the VCA committee, who, I might add, are all volunteers. At the opening ceremony 27 Vietnamese students were recognised for achieving HSC scores in excess of 99 per cent. I think this is an incredible achievement and strongly applaud the students, their parents and their families.

On Saturday I also had the pleasure of attending two functions held by the Chinese

community. During the day a New Year's celebration luncheon was organised by Mr To Ha Huynh and Fairfield councillor Dennis Huynh for the New South Wales Indo-China Chinese Association. During the evening I attended the Timor Chinese Association's New Year dinner organised by their President, Mr John Phillip Jong. The organisers of both functions advised me that New Year celebrations were held as a way to pay their respects and say thank you to their elders both past and present.

However, this year the associations were deeply saddened by the Queensland floods and wanted to raise funds to support Australians suffering, particularly in Queensland. Thus they used their New Year celebrations as a way to say thank you to Australia and to give back to a nation which had given so much to them. I felt very touched by the actions of the Chinese and Vietnamese communities.

As I spoke to more constituents I realised that they very much share a sense of gratitude to their adopted country. Mr Mieng Nguyen, a man who has been an active volunteer for the last 15 years and president of the New South Wales Friendly Elderly Vietnamese Association, stated at a luncheon I attended the other day that he and his association wanted to give as much as they could to their adopted country. They are keen to ensure that all their members become immersed in our shared culture and they went to quite an extent to assist me in their practices and traditions. One of things that the elderly association is looking at at the moment is setting up an internet cafe for elderly Vietnamese people so they can be in communication with their relatives but also so that they can participate in the benefits of modern technology.

Modern Australia is an integrated society of many backgrounds. I feel extremely fortu-

nate to be able to represent such a multicultural community. In closing I would like to wish everyone in this Year of the Rabbit and, in the case of the Vietnamese, the Year of the Cat every happiness and success.

Male Parliamentarians for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (7.20 pm)—I rise to note the very successful meeting that was held in Port Macquarie on 18 December of the Asia-Pacific Regional Standing Committee of Male Parliamentarians for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls. In September 2009 I got involved in the formation of this committee through the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians for Population and Development.

That group has designed a blueprint for action to drive its work in engaging men in the elimination of violence. One action arising from that blueprint was to establish national groups with the same focus to complement and shape this regional group at a country level. Countries represented at the establishment meeting were Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Iran, Laos, Malaysia, the Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

In upholding commitments made at the September 2009 meeting of the regional standing committee, the Parliamentary Group on Population and Development launched a subcommittee in Australia, and that is the male parliamentarians for the elimination of violence against women. It was launched on 24 November last year and is co-convened by me and the very honourable Dr Mal Washer, the federal member for Moore. The parliamentary group has taken up this issue, as it is fundamental to any gender equity agenda and has deep implications for Australians, both men and women, in

terms of achieving sexual and reproductive health and rights. I also put on the record for the economists that an economic assessment of this issue in Australia reveals that the cost of violence against women and girls to Australia reached \$13.4 billion in 2009 and is expected to increase to \$15.6 billion by 2021 if substantial work is not done on this issue.

As a member of this subcommittee I have pledged, as have many other male parliamentarians, to never commit, condone or stay silent about violence against women, to discuss the issues within my personal networks and family, to raise awareness of this issue with my constituency, to meet with members of community groups within my constituency to discuss and support this work on the issue, and to use my position as a national policy maker to ensure strong implementation, monitoring and policy outcomes on eliminating violence against women and girls.

I have also maintained a close relationship with the Asia-Pacific standing committee and was pleased, on 18 December last year, to host the second meeting of the standing committee in Port Macquarie. Friends at the local airport believe it is the first time over the decade that they have worked at the airport that they have seen a passport from Bhutan. That was an example of the cultural experience for members of parliament visiting a regional location like Port Macquarie. As well, it was a cultural experience for many in Port Macquarie to meet people from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Iran, Laos and the many countries now involved in this work.

As a group, the members of the 13 countries represented recommitted to further work and have now all committed in detail to doing the following: to be role models who speak up against all forms of gender based violence and who promote a zero tolerance

approach, to actively engage with public awareness campaigns on violence and raise our voices in support of approaches to violence prevention that are led by men and boys, to advocate for other male parliamentarians to join the network, to enact and support legislative and policy changes that will have stronger outcomes for violence prevention and elimination for women and girls, to support work in partnership with community groups and NGOs to promote good practice and effective engagement, and to provide and share information across the regional network and within our parliaments.

Statistics report that in Australia one in three women and girls will experience physical violence from the age of 15, one in five women and girls will experience sexual violence in their lifetime and up to one-quarter of Australian youth will witness sexual or physical violence perpetrated against their mother or stepmother. We as a parliament have work to do. While in-principle support for the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children was received from all jurisdictions in mid-2010, it is imperative that a fully-funded and endorsed national plan which addresses all six target areas for action be rolled out, implemented and reported on through COAG. (*Time expired*)

Walk in my shoes challenge: Big Steps in Childcare

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (7.26 pm)—Last year I had the honour of taking part in the LHMU's Big Steps in Childcare campaign. Big Steps in Childcare is a campaign to get reforms which provide a higher quality sector and recognise the critical role of childcare professionals. It aims to address key issues in the sector including the severe shortage of childcare staff, high turnover, and poor wages and conditions. Many families now need both parents to work in order

to make ends meet, and those same parents are also working longer hours. That means that the demand for child care has never been greater, yet over the years those childcare workers to whom we have entrusted our children on a daily basis have not received the support or recognition that they deserve. Big Steps in Childcare aims to change all of that.

For me, supporting the Big Steps campaign meant taking up a challenge given to me by childcare workers from within my electorate. The challenge was called Walk in My Shoes, and it aimed to give parliamentarians firsthand experience of what it is like being a childcare worker by actually spending time in the childcare centre being one. I undertook my challenge at the Camden Park Child Care Centre, which is at Camden Park in my electorate of Hindmarsh. The director of the centre, Karen Drysdale, and her co-director, Michelle Brock, welcomed me into their workplace to experience some of the challenges firsthand that they face in their day-to-day jobs. I found that there were many challenges.

First of all, I was introduced to just some of the rules and regulations which were to be followed at all times by staff in the childcare centre. Being introduced to the administrative side of the centre really opened my eyes to the amount of behind-the-scenes work which goes on just to keep the centre running smoothly on a day-to-day basis. I know that Karen and Michelle were quite easy on me, but I could see that there was much to learn and many aspects of the job which would take a significant amount of training to fully understand. It was a very powerful example of the many competing priorities childcare workers are faced with every day—I only had to do it for one hour—such as looking after the children, managing the expectations of parents and ensuring all of the relevant paperwork is completed on time and in the right way.

Despite the high level of responsibility placed upon them, childcare workers have historically received low wages and little recognition. After I had completed my shift at Camden, which involved a craft session with the children, story reading to the children and some time helping to supervise in the playground, had I been a childcare worker I would have earned only \$14. That is the average hourly rate of a childcare worker who has no qualifications, of which there are many thousands, because the incentive to get qualified is also low. Obtaining a diploma-level qualification will only increase your salary by about \$4 per hour, working out to around \$37,500 per year.

To add insult to injury, perceptions in the community about what child care involves and, therefore, the recognition childcare workers should be afforded are often wrong. Many people think of child care as simply child care and babysitting. It is not. Child care is a complex, stressful and demanding job—as much as any profession. That is why Big Steps in Childcare aims to have childcare professionals recognised as such. They are just that.

Karen and Michelle told me that one of their main challenges was covering the shifts of new childcare workers who fall sick more often until their immune system builds up, which can take between six and 12 months. As we all know, children pick up all sorts of illnesses. This adds further pressure to an already overstretched system, so I was very grateful to have the opportunity to take the Walk in My Shoes challenge, because it really drove home the need for reform—and soon—in the sector. So I would like to thank the staff at the childcare centre at Camden Park and all the childcare centres right across my electorate of Hindmarsh for the important work that they do on a daily basis.

I am proud that I took part in this childcare incentive for the LHMU and will continue to work hard for the childcare workers in my electorate to ensure that they are supported in doing this very important job. I am also proud that the Gillard government has recognised many of these challenges facing the sector and placed early childhood reform and education at the forefront of our social and economic agenda. Among other things, the government is helping more workers to reach qualifications at certificate III and, particularly, the diploma level. (*Time expired*)

Longman Electorate: Health Care

WYATT ROY (Longman) (7.31 pm)—On 10 February a community health forum was run in my electorate of Longman. I thank the shadow minister for health and ageing, Peter Dutton; the state shadow minister for health, Mark McArdle; and the state shadow parliamentary secretary for mental health, drug strategy and health personnel, Mr Andrew Powell, the member for Glasshouse, for their attendance and support in addressing the concerns expressed by the attendees. The forum was organised in partnership with Lisa France, LNP candidate for Pumicestone, and was also attended by Darren Grimwade, LNP candidate for Morayfield.

This was an opportunity for the community to directly raise their concerns about health with the alternative state and federal government. It represents the approach I said I would take during the last election campaign. I said I wanted to bring the concerns of my constituents to Canberra rather than impose Canberra on my constituents, and I continue to strongly believe that that can be my role. Many of the issues raised related to the shortcomings of the Caboolture Hospital. Waiting times, unrealistic nursing workloads, insufficient funding, the services available to

mental health patients, hospital administration and an onerous bureaucratic system were among the matters discussed.

It is a fundamental right of Australians to expect access to quality health services. The hardworking medical staff at the Caboolture Hospital in my electorate do a fantastic job, but they need more resources and fewer bureaucratic constraints. Longman is one of the fastest growing regions in Queensland, and demands on local health services are clearly strained. We know that the demand will only increase with population growth. Under the Department of Health and Ageing's own population projections, by 2026 the region's population is expected to reach some 200,000. We know that people want to move to our region—it is one of the best places in the world to live—but we also know that we cannot put a gate up on the Bruce Highway and tell people to stop coming. But, unlike the Labor Party, we do not want to play catch-up with health. We want to put more than a bandaid on what are very real problems.

At present there are 187 beds available in the Caboolture Hospital and 21 bays in the emergency department. An estimated 600 beds and 52 emergency bays are required to service the region by 2026. The *AMA public hospital report card 2010* states that the Caboolture Hospital 'operated on average at over 100 per cent occupancy, showing significant overstressing of capacity'. A safe occupancy rate is of an average of only 85 per cent.

It was again made evident that mental health is a major issue for my electorate. We have one of the highest suicide rates in the country. Mental illness affects more Australians, particularly the young, than nearly all other health issues. At the last election the coalition developed a mental health policy in consultation with Patrick McGorry and John

Mendoza designed to improve mental health care throughout Australia. For Longman this would have had very real and practical outcomes. A coalition government would have committed \$60 million for the establishment of an early psychosis prevention and intervention centre. The centre was designed to service the Moreton Bay region and the northern suburbs of Brisbane and would have had up to 20 acute and subacute beds for mental health patients. It was also designed to provide 24-hour care and outpatient services.

This forum provided a great opportunity to listen to the concerns of my community. The coalition is committed to finding practical, real solutions to health problems working at a grassroots level. The coalition's health plans would deliver health services to local hospital boards and eliminate bureaucracy, enabling doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals to focus on patient care. We believe that a doctor or nurse at the Caboolture Hospital understands the health needs of our local area better than a bureaucrat in Brisbane or Canberra. A focus on patient care is needed. A health system where patient care is valued is needed—where a dollar spent on hospitals is a dollar for patient care. We want a health system that values taxpayers' money and empowers healthcare professionals instead of restraining them with an excessive bureaucracy.

Mr Norm Gibbs

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (7.35 pm)—Often, when you read the list of honours on Australia Day you wonder how or why someone gets them. I marvel at times at people who are awarded them, especially when ex-politicians get them for their service to the House. I figured that was what we got a salary for! But in this case a member of my constituency, Norm Gibbs, is an absolute epitome of somebody who should have been

recognised in these honours, and I am absolutely delighted that Norm has received the Medal of the Order of Australia. At a spritely 83 and about to embark upon his 60th wedding anniversary with the magnificent Topsy, Norm is Mr Waverley. He is our community, and I am absolutely delighted that he has been recognised in this way. He is a person where nothing is too small and nothing is too hard. He started off his work within the community many years ago as a Sunday school teacher and a gym instructor at the Hughesdale Community Centre, where his involvement lasted 15 years. When Norm and Topsy married and moved to Mount Waverley, he became a charter member of the Waverley JCs. He is one of the oldest and longest serving honorary probation officers and still participates in the probation office in an honorary position. He is the sort of person who will visit somebody in their home and, if they are out of food, drive round the corner and bring it back. Through this work he has ensured that many people have stayed on the straight and narrow.

Norm is heavily involved with the Rotary Club and was recognised with a Paul Harris Fellowship in 1998 and a companion of the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund for his amazing work within the Rotary system. The motto of 'service above self' is the epitome of what Norm is. He started the Zodiac Dance and the Zodiac Youth Group, where he gave countless years.

After Cyclone Tracy in Darwin many years ago, Norm saw that there was a need and travelled to Darwin at his own expense. He spent three years working and helping in the rebuild process. This led Norm to think that he needed to do more with his life and so he applied and became a welfare officer within the Waverley City Council. He was one of the very first to adopt that role. Norm has been a tireless worker within the council

and still attends many of the council meetings.

Zodo the Clown was born in 1978 and continues to this day. Every week, Norm, as Zodo, attends the Monash hospital to entertain children. Zodo has entertained everybody from the frail elderly to the disabled. For many years, Norm and his magic MG were seen. Sadly the MG has had to go—it was a sad day when Waverley lost its Zodo MG. Time is catching up with Norm a little, but certainly not in his activities or sprightliness. He is also Santa and the Easter Bunny at countless activities for kinders, schools, nursing homes and hospitals.

He dedicates a lot of time to supporting those in need. One example was when the Kosovo refugees came to Melbourne and were stationed at Portsea. He thought nobody would be entertaining the kids, so Zodo the Clown spent several days entertaining the Kosovo children at Portsea. Norm is still heavily associated with Very Special Kids, the Down Syndrome Association, Camp Quality, Copeland Street, the Variety Club, the Rotary Club of Waverley, Child Family Care Network and the Monash Volunteer Association, where Norm has taken on many roles in a volunteering capacity.

Norm's dedication and service to the community are simply outstanding. He has assisted me greatly with my work within the community. When I first became the member for Chisholm he had been appointed by the previous member, Michael Wooldridge, to head up a committee. Someone said, 'You can't work with Norm; he'll obviously be a Lib and won't want to work with you.' Norm works with anybody. He is one of those individuals who does not have a political flavour. He is dedicated to his community and he served well on that committee. For many years now he has headed up the Caroline Chisholm Award committee that I estab-

lished. He tirelessly goes through all the nominations and picks out the winners. On the awards night he is the MC, a role in which he is just fantastic as literally everyone in our community knows him. He is the best MC to have on the day because every recipient knows Norm in some capacity through his work with their many organisations.

Norm has been recognised in the past with a 2006 Victorian Seniors Award. He had the honour of carrying the Olympic torch in 2006. He is a Salvation Army volunteer and he co-founded the Zodiac Youth Club. The list goes on and on. He is also a delightful father of two beautiful girls who are now getting older, a grandfather and a justice of the peace. If there were more Norms in the world, it would be a better place.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—On behalf of the House, I pass the congratulations of the House to Norm.

Indi Electorate: Australian Natural Disasters

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (7.40 pm)—As we grieve the recent flood tragedies, it is appropriate to reflect on the tragic events of 7 February 2009, when a series of bushfires swept across the state of Victoria, burning over 450,000 hectares and taking the lives of 173 people. The unspeakable horror that tore through communities was life changing for many and will continue to haunt the memories and the lives of those who were touched by the disaster for many years to come. It is important that we do not forget those who are still suffering and that we remember the hardship that families have been through. In my electorate of Indi, we remember the deaths of John and Sue Wilson who, like so many residents of north-east Victoria, stayed to defend their home, in Mudgegonga. To their children, Grace and Samantha: we

know it still hurts and we will not forget the tragic loss of your parents.

The flooding events of this summer and the fires that have been witnessed in Western Australia this week remind us that we do indeed live in a nation of extremes where floods and fires are unfortunately the norm. We are also a nation of extreme generosity and selflessness and it is these qualities that should and do make us all so proud to be Australians—from the emergency services personnel, to service clubs and their volunteers, to a helpful neighbour who helps their community member or even a stranger, to all those people who dropped everything to do something for people they did not even know. That is what makes us a truly lucky nation.

I am talking about people like brave local police officer Cameron Caine, who is still part of the Kinglake community and still working below the radar helping to rebuild a scarred and wounded community. People like Lesley Bebbington and Vicky Mann are just two examples of this unique Australian spirit. Using their own funds they started a much needed youth group and their local leadership and big hearts have made an enormous difference to local young people in the Kinglake area. The impact on children and young people appears to have gone under the radar. They have watched their parents and other adults try and cope with the trauma. Some unfortunately have turned to alcohol and medicated drugs and some young people are sadly doing the same while some are coping through self-harm.

We need to face the raw human tragedy that is still reverberating in these affected communities. Much good work has been done since the Black Saturday fires, but there is so much more to do. It is extremely important that a royal commission was established, but even more important is the adoption of

the commission's recommendations. It is a natural human instinct to feel our neighbours' pain. The test for politicians is to be driven by that empathy to make tangible improvements long after the cameras have left and front-page stories have gone. Numerous inquiries in the seven years leading up to 2009 fires were ignored, and this cannot happen again. We have seen the previous state Labor government dismiss previous inquiries and recommendations, and this cannot be allowed to happen again.

I am buoyed by the election of a new government and encouraged by the words of the new Victorian Premier with his commitment to real recovery and to adopting each and every recommendation from the bushfires royal commission. I ask the federal government to support him in every way in this objective and to remain committed to the rebuilding effort in Victoria. Lessons are always relearned rather than learned, and inquiries and their recommendations seem to be deferred until obscured by the passage of time. Let us not let that happen again.

We have many issues. Only 41 per cent of principal places of residence that were burnt down are in the process of being replaced. We see many families struggling through the planning process because the bushfire attack level regulations make it very difficult to build a new home. There are still telecommunications black holes that are hampering the delivery of vital information to bushfire-prone areas, hamlets and towns across Victoria, and it is not new; we have heard about telecommunications problems in the past. I spoke today with a local from Kinglake who advised me that Kinglake and Kinglake West CFAs still cannot communicate with each other. This is not good enough, and we need to be able to ensure that these issues are remedied, that there is adequate fire mitigation and preparation and that we continue to

rebuild these communities and not forget them. (*Time expired*)

Australian Natural Disasters

Local Government

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (7.46 pm)—Travelling around the local government areas affected by floods in my electorate of Wannon—including in Northern Grampians shire, Ararat rural city, Pyrenees shire, Corangamite shire and Moyne shire—the massive scale of the disruption to daily life is plain to see. While the flooding experiences showed the strength of local communities, I genuinely fear that the devastation to road and bridge infrastructure in all of these local government areas will prove to be a lasting legacy of these floods unless swift government action is taken. The devastation to the road and bridge network has a major impact on these local communities. People are prevented from directly accessing their workplaces. Access of schoolchildren to bus services is hampered. If we add to this the difficulty of accessing fire and emergency services and farm and freight transport, we see the desperate need that some communities in my electorate and elsewhere, particularly in Queensland, face.

These are not just roads and bridges but key economic assets, connecting local communities to the broader road network and getting people to work and from school. Prior to the floods, some councils were already struggling to afford maintenance and upgrades on these assets. This is reflected in a recent Australian Local Government Association report which found that local councils' asset bases to be maintained had almost doubled during the decade following 1999-2000. Coupled with other expenditure outside this road infrastructure, the increase in local government revenue has been insufficient to meet its demands. This has resulted in a gap now totalling some \$1.2 billion per

annum between actual local government expenditure and the expenditure necessary to maintain roads at their current standard.

Having been impacted by the recent floods, in some cases for the second time in four months, ratepayers are not in a position to face further rate hikes. This fact is made even clearer when the capacity of ratepayers to afford increased rate payments is considered. The Whelan report on *Local government financial sustainability*, produced by Merv and Rohan Whelan of Cobden in my electorate, paints a stark picture of local councils' financial sustainability. Under the Whelan model, the sustainability of small rural councils is rated negative or very negative in 14 of the 15 councils of this size considered. All but one of the local councils in my electorate that I have mentioned belong to this group. The recent flood damage places local councils in my electorate in an even more precarious position.

To assist local government areas across Australia, including Wannon, I support a one-off federal government 'roads and bridges to recovery' payment paid directly to flood affected local government areas to assist councils with the necessary and urgent road and bridge infrastructure repairs. This is not a case of throwing money at one project over another but a recognition that communities can only start to get back to normality when life as normal is possible. I urge the government to give favourable consideration to this proposal, which has the support of all the mayors I have spoken to affected by floods in Wannon—and, I understand, of all the mayors affected by floods in Mallee and in Murray. This is an opportunity for the government to show real leadership in the reconstruction following the hardship of recent times. I urge the government to embrace the opportunity. This is why I have written to the Prime Minister outlining this proposal, and I look forward to her response, which I

hope will be a positive one. This will have an enormous impact not only in Victoria—and western Victoria in particular—but in Queensland, because local government otherwise will become a victim, like the communities that have suffered at the devastating hands of the floodwaters that we have seen over the last four to six months.

Child Care

Mr CROOK (O'Connor) (7.51 pm)—I rise tonight to bring to the attention of the House my concern over the provision and sustainability of childcare services in regional Western Australia, largely as a result of changes in government policy. Continuing on from question time today, when I asked the Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare if the government would review their decision to cut funding to the neighbourhood model occasional care centres, I want to detail to the House some of the challenges that these small centres are facing.

In May 2010 the government withdrew funding from the neighbourhood occasional care model, which was previously a joint venture between the federal and state governments—52 and 48 per cent respectively. With so little notice given of the impending funding withdrawal, the state government of WA initiated emergency funding to allow these centres, often established by local governments or not-for-profit organisations and run by volunteers, to remain open and functioning. The state has stepped in to allow these centres more time to prepare for this change and to seek assistance from the federal government to again support this program. The state has agreed to fully fund these programs until 1 July 2011. However, funding is not guaranteed beyond that point.

From the minister's response earlier today I understand that the government has increased but reprioritised funding in child

care and early childhood education. Whilst this increased funding might benefit some centres in cities or large centres, I must impress on the House that these changes need to be undertaken in consultation with the community, childcare operators and state governments. The federal government cannot develop a plan—its plan—and then sail off into the sunset leaving other stakeholders to align themselves to the new strategy and appropriate budget funding according to the new strategy and what is no longer considered important. Working families, which includes those families working in regional WA, need more certainty than that. Childcare operators need more certainty on which to base their business decisions.

Some current neighbourhood model occasional care centres have expressed an interest in transitioning to part-time long day care, explicitly to allow them to access funding under the childcare benefit. However, current family assistance legislation requires long day care services to operate five days per week, a model that is not sustainable in many regional communities where demand for such a service is low, or the nature of the regional employment and composition of regional towns is such that requires some flexibility in the care model. Often it is a simple matter of practicalities; the local playgroup or other community groups might share the facilities, meaning that child care cannot operate full time. It has become apparent to me that the one size fits all approach does not work in regional WA and, whilst it may make sense on this side of the country, many of those affected that I talk to are struggling with these decisions.

This brings me to the issue of long day care. I have mentioned already the inflexibility of the current legislation in mandating a minimum number of operating hours and days to be eligible. I understand that exemptions can be granted by the Secretary of the

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to exempt a service from meeting all of these requirements and allowing the centre to operate as a part-time long day care centre. However, it has created much uncertainty for families over the future of existing centres, let alone for the communities and families that would like to establish childcare services in their town.

I have extended an invitation to the minister to visit Western Australia and to meet with some of these communities, childcare centres and families that need flexible government policy and appropriate funding. It is my belief that these centres provide a vital first-class service to working families in regional WA. I appreciate the minister's response in question time today that she will visit my electorate to meet with some of these centres that I have mentioned.

My state National Party colleagues and I are fighting hard to retain families and workers in regional communities. A part of this fight is to retain amenities and services in these towns so that families, in particular, can feel they have the appropriate resources to raise a family. Central to this strategy is to ensure that we have good health systems, good communications, good education, a strong local economy and adequate childcare provision, amongst other factors.

I appreciate the need for regulation of an important community service like child care. However, common sense must prevail so that all Australians can access the child care they need. Not all communities have large populations to sustain a five-day-a-week operation. Some communities have special circumstances, such as seasonal or unique operating conditions. Government needs to be flexible to ensure that operators of child care—whether an individual, small business, local government or not-for-profit organisa-

tion—are sustainable and continue to provide this essential service to our community.

I look forward to the minister's visit to O'Connor, and I acknowledge the interest she has taken in the concerns of families and childcare operators in Western Australia. *(Time expired)*

Surf Life Saving Clubs

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (7.56 pm)—Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I take this opportunity to wish you and all other members in this place all the best for the new year.

The Australia Day awards in the East Gippsland region were a time of great celebration for my community. In particular, I would like to take the opportunity tonight to congratulate our Citizen of the Year, a lady by the name of Kristine Cordery. Kristine is well known to the people in the Lakes Entrance district for her involvement with the Lakes Entrance Surf Life Saving Club. Those members who have a surf lifesaving club in their electorate will understand well the important role that the surf lifesaving movement plays right throughout Australia.

In our club in my home town of Lakes Entrance, where my four children are actually involved in the surf lifesaving program, we are very passionate about our surf lifesaving club. We are very proud of the achievements of the young people in our ranks and also in this case our more mature members of the club and our office bearers.

Kristine is one of a great team at the surf lifesaving club in Lakes Entrance. Having taken on the role of treasurer for many years and a range of important positions in the club, she has been instrumental in our club lifting itself in terms of professionalism for a volunteer organisation and also in lifting its professionalism to go on to be recognised as the Australian Surf Life Saving Club of the Year just a couple of years ago. That came about after Lakes Entrance hosted the Victo-

rian junior titles in 2008. Then, in 2010, the club hosted both the junior and senior Victorian titles—the first time in history that those two titles have been held on the one beach on the one weekend. In just a few weeks time, on the March long weekend, Lakes Entrance will again host the state junior and senior titles. As I said at the outset, Kristine Cordery, our Citizen of the Year, has been instrumental in helping our club deliver those programs.

I believe that the surf lifesaving movement is, without doubt, one of the great movements across Australia. What I particularly like about the surf lifesaving clubs is the structure that they provide for young people. Many of our other community organisations do not have that capacity to get young people involved at a very early age. We have nippers on the beach from the time they are seven years old, and from that they progress through the ranks and learn skills. By the time they are 13 these young people are actually doing patrols on the beach and have the capacity to save lives if they are called upon. I think that is a great thing to teach young people at such an early age. It is a fun way for them to get out and enjoy the beach but also to make a contribution to their community. I am particularly impressed with the way the Victorian surf lifesaving movement operates.

In my electorate I am fortunate to have three surf lifesaving clubs: the Lakes Entrance one, of which I am a member, and also the Seaspray club and the Woodside club. I happened to be present in Seaspray on Australia Day, when the club hosted their own junior carnival. It was a great occasion for the Seaspray club as it was also the day that the new Victorian police and emergency services minister visited and announced funding for an upgrade of their clubhouse. I think that is a great thing, and I think it is a great thing that the current Victorian government has

actually taken up what the previous Victorian government was doing in investing in new facilities for our surf clubs. It is such a critical thing for the young people involved and also for the senior members to realise that the government actually recognises the contribution they make to the community by being prepared to give them decent facilities.

Our surf clubs not only rely on government funding but also rely very heavily on the goodwill of donors and businesses in our community. There are many businesses that go out of their way to make a contribution to the surf lifesaving movement because they recognise how important it is to provide safe patrolled beaches in our coastal towns. (*Time expired*)

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 8 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 8.00 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Ms Macklin to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to family assistance, social security, taxation and veterans' entitlements, and for related purposes.

Mr Snowdon to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004, and for related purposes.

Mr Gray to move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report: Development and construction of housing for the Department of Defence at Muirhead, Darwin, NT.

Mr Morrison to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the floods in Queensland, Victoria, NSW and Tasmania have devastated

- critical infrastructure, including roads, railway, housing, schools and service infrastructure;
- (b) the cost of re-building this critical infrastructure will be many billions of dollars;
 - (c) the Australian labour market is currently experiencing critical shortages in a number of skilled occupations;
 - (d) demand for workers in these occupations will increase substantially in order to rebuild critical infrastructure across the country;
 - (e) almost 1 million people are currently in Australia on a variety of temporary visas;
 - (f) more than 400 000 people are in Australia on student visas;
 - (g) there is a backlog of more than 140 000 applications in the skilled migration program;
 - (h) the current Government has been unable to process in a timely way, offshore visa applications across a range of categories, especially in the skilled categories; and
 - (i) current processing times for subclass 457 Business (Long Stay) Visas is between 3 to 12 months; and
- (2) calls for the Government to:
- (a) introduce, for a prescribed period of time, a regulation which allows the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship to waive all visa conditions which would otherwise prevent the holder of a temporary visa resident in Australia from making an onshore application to undertake paid work, where the:
 - (i) Minister has declared a state of emergency for the purpose of the operation of these provisions;
 - (ii) applicant has the support of a relevant employer or is sponsored by a State government; and
 - (iii) applicant is seeking employment in an occupation nominated on the Skilled Occupation Lists or any other such occupation nominated for the purpose of these provisions by the Minister; and
 - (b) re-instate all pre-existing visa conditions at the end of the specified period.
- Mr Entsch to move:**
- That this House:
- (1) notes:
- (a) the judgment of the Federal Court of Australia in *Comcare v The Commonwealth* (FCA 1331), and the report of the Queensland Coroner *Inquest into the loss of the Malu Sara* and in particular that:
 - (i) the Court found that the respondent admitted liability;
 - (ii) the Coroner found significant aspects of the investigation into the incident were severely flawed; and
 - (iii) a number of agencies of both the Queensland Government and the Commonwealth Government were strongly criticised for their involvement in events leading up to and during the incident; and
 - (b) the Court fined the respondent \$242 000, the maximum penalty;
- (2) in light of both the judgment and the Coroner's report, calls on the Government to:
- (a) legislate to establish a Trust for the benefit of the families of the victims to commemorate the tragic loss;
 - (b) transfer the fine imposed by the Court to the Trust, as well as allocate additional funds to provide continuing financial support to the victims' families and provide a lasting legacy to the community;
 - (c) fully examine the Court's judgment, including the contractors and others named in the report of the Queensland Coroner into the same incident; and

- (d) construct appropriate memorials on Badu and Thursday Islands to properly commemorate this tragic event and provide respectful places for the families of the victims to pay their respects and remember their loved ones;
- (3) strongly encourages the Government to ensure that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's contract and tendering procedures are fully reviewed to ensure that lapses such as this do not occur again; and
- (4) expresses its deep sympathy to the victims of this tragedy.

Mrs Moylan to move:

That this House:

- (1) appreciates that meaningful employment is essential to the financial security, physical and mental health and sense of identity of all individuals;
- (2) remains concerned with the low workforce participation rate of individuals with a disability;
- (3) recognises the challenges faced by people with a disability in successfully obtaining work, particularly in surmounting barriers;
- (4) notes that:
 - (a) eighteen and a half per cent of all Australians suffer from a disability;
 - (b) data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveals that since 1993, workplace participation for people with a disability has steadily decreased to 53.2 per cent, compared to the continual increase of participation in those without disability to 80.6 per cent; and
 - (c) the Australian Public Service Commissioner's Statistical Bulletin shows employment of people with a disability in the Australian Public Service has linearly dropped from a high of 5.5 per cent in 1996, to 3.1 per cent in 2010;
- (5) acknowledges the findings of chapters 2.4 ('The employment experience of people with disabilities') and 2.5.2 ('Lack of Access to Transport') of the National Disability Strategy Consultation Report, *Shut Out*, that:
 - (a) there are still widespread misconceptions and stereotypes influencing the attitudes and behaviour of employers, recruiters and government;
 - (b) there is considerable misunderstanding in the community and overestimation about the cost of workplace adjustments for people with a disability;
 - (c) there is confusion about the impact of occupational health and safety requirements on people with a disability;
 - (d) inflexibility of the Disability Support Pension acts as a disincentive to employment and the loss of healthcare benefits is a particular disadvantage; and
 - (e) without access to transport, participation in critical activities such as education, employment and healthcare is difficult, if not impossible; and
- (6) calls on the Government to provide leadership and improve participation rates of people with a disability.

Wednesday, 9 February 2011

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)** took the chair at 10.30 am.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Higgins Electorate

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (10.30 am)—Yesterday it was one year ago that I delivered my first speech as the federal member for Higgins in the House of Representatives. It is a true honour and privilege to serve as the local member for Higgins in such a diverse and culturally vibrant electorate. I am grateful for the renewed trust that the people of Higgins placed in me following the federal election on 21 August 2010. I know that that trust is not to be taken lightly and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the hundreds of Liberal Party volunteers and friends who work so hard to deliver good government for this country. In particular, I would like to especially pay tribute to my federal electorate conference in Higgins, led so well by chairman Mark Stretton. It is their support of me that helps me to do my job in this place even better.

The past 12 months have proven momentous in terms of the changes we have seen in our nation's parliament. For me, as the local member, they have been equally important as I have gone about delivering on the goals set out in my first speech. I made a promise to the people of Higgins that I would focus on their issues, both big and small, and ensure that the people of Higgins had a voice in the nation's capital that was dedicated to improving their lives—that they would have in me a member of parliament who they could come to with their views and concerns, whether local or national, who would fight for them and ensure that they receive the assistance they need.

Strong local representation is the key to a strong and vibrant democracy. It is vital that people have a mechanism through which they can convey their thoughts on policy to their representatives. To this end, I have convened seven community forums throughout Higgins over the past year, across different parts of my electorate. Some of these forums have focused on key issues such as education, seniors and aged care, small business and the economy, as well as on community safety. Others have been open forums where people could raise any issue they felt was important to them and their community.

I will continue to conduct these community forums in my electorate; they are a vital tool. I will also continue my mobile electorate office program throughout Higgins to make it easier for my constituents to communicate directly with me.

Over the past year, I have had the privilege of delivering a number of speeches in our parliament—from issues as important as economic regulation to the critical issue of the importance of funding bowel cancer research, amongst many others. I have also had the privilege of directly helping many constituents within Higgins.

I am excited to have taken on new roles in the Australian parliament since last year; as a member of both the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics and the Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office. Both of these committees allow

me to directly shape public policy and to pursue a move towards a more competitive and productive economy that provides for all Australians. (*Time expired*)

Same-Sex Relationships

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Human Services and Minister for Social Inclusion) (10.33 am)—Last year the Gillard government passed a motion calling on members of parliament to gauge the views of their local communities on the issue of same-sex marriage. Over the parliamentary break, I launched a formal consultation on this issue and I received over 2½ thousand submissions from residents in the electorate of Sydney. I am pleased to present the results of this consultation to the parliament today. The main argument from most of those who made submissions in my electorate is that Labor's task of ending discrimination against same-sex couples is not finished yet. Whilst my constituents gratefully acknowledge the historic reforms made by the Labor Party which delivered complete equality for same-sex de facto couples in 2008 in every piece of Commonwealth law, in areas as diverse as superannuation, social security, veterans affairs, Medicare, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and many others, 89 per cent of respondents believe that the government should legislate for further relationship recognition for same-sex couples. The clear preference from residents in the Sydney electorate who made a submission to me is to amend the Marriage Act so that same-sex couples can get married. Eighty per cent of survey participants supported same-sex marriage, 57 per cent supported a national civil union scheme open to both same-sex and opposite-sex de facto couples. Only nine per cent supported a national civil union scheme which was open to same-sex couples alone. Obviously, Mr Deputy Speaker, you would see that a number of people were happy with any one of those three suggestions, while some people were focused only on marriage as a suitable solution.

In addition to the survey responses, I received a number of very moving comments and stories from people about their own relationships and the relationships of their family and friends. One woman said to me, 'We live an extraordinarily normal life, as though we were married. We cry together. We argue about the kids. We do school drop-offs. We garden. We clean. We cook. Why then can we not get the basic recognition of getting married?' Of course this belief is supported not just by the gay and lesbian community in Sydney, not just by their friends and family members, but much more broadly throughout the electorate of Sydney. The residents of Sydney who wrote to me in support of same-sex marriage came from many different backgrounds. What they shared was a belief that no law should discriminate against people because of their sexuality, a belief that I share.

The Prime Minister has indicated that this issue will be debated at the Labor Party's national conference later this year. I believe that that is the right time to renew Labor's program to deliver this final measure for full equality for same-sex couples, and I will be making a case for change at that conference.

Bonner Electorate: Solar Hot Water Rebate

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (10.36 am)—It is with regret that I rise today to expose the government's failures in administering the Solar Hot Water Rebate. The climate change portfolio has been plagued with implementation and administrative failures ever since the government took office. Under Labor we have seen the disasters that have occurred in the Home Insulation Program, the total failure of the Green Loans scheme, the discontinuation of the solar panels program—which had a significant budget blow-out—and now the Renewable Energy Bonus

Scheme-Solar Hot Water Rebate program. The administrative failures that are now occurring are having a real and significant impact on the budgets of families and pensioners in my electorate of Bonner, families and pensioners who in good faith made the financial commitment to replace their electric hot water systems with solar systems on the basis that they would receive a \$1,000 rebate from the federal government within a reasonable time of outlaying their money.

It is evident now, nearly eight months after lodging their rebate application, that people like Mr Peter Lovrinčević of Mount Gravatt East are still waiting for a rebate to be forthcoming from this government, yet the state government managed to pay Mr Lovrinčević their rebate contribution within six weeks. His is a single-income family which made a significant outlay on the basis that the \$1,000 rebate would be paid by the federal government. At a time when all families are feeling the pinch of higher prices, with the total cost of living rising, it is an insult for the government to delay, due to incompetence, people's rightful rebate. This is also true for Mr Denny Lagos of Mount Gravatt, a pensioner who was trying to get the department to acknowledge receipt of his rebate application nearly four months after he submitted it, let alone being given any idea of when the rebate might be paid. So far I have not had any legitimate explanation for this administrative failure.

I ask this government to honour its commitment to Mr Lovrinčević, Mr Lagos and all other rebate applicants, who have made their commitment in good faith, and pay the rebate that they are entitled to immediately.

Corio Electorate: Blokes Day Out

Mr MARLES (Corio—Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs) (10.39 am)—I would like to talk today about an issue in my electorate which benefits not just Geelong but the entire Barwon region. It is a celebration of family and friends and of the ties that bind us as a community. At its heart it is a celebration of boys and men as fathers, sons, grandfathers, work mates, team mates and neighbours—in fact, all men of all ages and all backgrounds who make up our community. The initiative is called Blokes Day Out. It is a Geelong initiative and it is on again next month. Blokes Day Out was run for the first time last year, but this year it promises to be bigger and even better. One of the reasons I think it is so fantastic is that it is so completely supported by many of our community groups, services, businesses and organisations that have put up their hands and become involved.

Blokes Day Out kicks off with a blokes breakfast on 25 March. It seems fitting to me that this will be held at Christ Church, as this Geelong institution for years made sure that people facing hard times in our city did not have to start the day on an empty stomach. So breakfast at Christ Church is a wonderful way to celebrate a nourishing of our community and our relationships. Then there will be a week of activities, from art classes, dads' playgroups, fitness classes, cooking classes, forums, health screenings and workshops—the list goes on. The final event will be on Sunday, 3 April. It will be a festival in Johnson Park. The focus here is on boys' and men's health and wellbeing. There will be entertainment, activities and health checks for blokes and their families.

Men often do not give much thought to their health and the pressures they face caring for their families. They often are not good at sharing their emotions, talking of their stresses and seeking help. This is a concern to me because many chronic illnesses and conditions can be prevented with information, support and lifestyle changes. Really that is what Blokes Day Out

is all about. It is a great opportunity to look at how blokes, their families and their friends can live their lives in a healthier and more fulfilling way. It is also about encouraging blokes to take up their critical role in raising their children and enjoying their family.

The support from the Geelong community has been overwhelming. Already more than 40 organisations are committed to making the festival a great day. The Care Leavers Australia Network will be there. That is an organisation that I am very proud to be associated with. Also community organisations like Parks Victoria, Bethany, MensLine, Diversitat, St Laurence and the Men's Shed will be involved on the day. I congratulate the City of Greater Geelong and Barwon Health for their contributions. In recent weeks across many parts of Australia, particularly Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia, we have seen how communities that support each other are communities that survive and thrive. The willingness to support each other is clearly in evidence here in Geelong with the Blokes Day Out. It is something I am very proud to see.

Dairy Industry

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (10.42 am)—The recent marketing gimmick by supermarket giant Coles has made something of a mockery of the Australian dairy industry, the supermarket's claims at recent Senate inquiries and anything that has come before the ACCC. Jim Cooper, a spokesperson for Coles, was reported to have dismissed industry concerns in relation to reduced milk prices as 'hysteria'. We have seen an example of arrogance in the extreme. This is a complete insult to people within the dairy industry trying to stay afloat.

After suffering one of the worst droughts in living memory, recent flooding, rising costs of inputs and price cuts, dairy farmers across the nation quite often are seriously questioning their future. Those with fresh milk contracts in particular will be forced to wear the cost of Coles' latest marketing ploy. Over time they will have to renegotiate contracts at below the cost of production or leave the industry. This undoubtedly could be the straw that breaks the back of family dairy farms in Australia, particularly in north New South Wales, Queensland, WA and anywhere else they have fresh milk contracts.

In the last couple of weeks we have seen the home brands 40 per cent cheaper than the marketed brands we have all grown up with. You cannot blame people for buying these products. There are huge costs of living. The member for Bonner just talked about the cost of living. It is going up. The Rudd government and now the Gillard government, against everything they promised, are not dealing with it. They are certainly not dealing with it in this instance.

The figures put before the Senate inquiry last year just do not add up. The supermarkets have a 22 per cent mark-up. How can they then have a 30 per cent reduction and claim that they can absorb this? Obviously, they cannot. That is why those with fresh milk contracts know that at the end of the day they will wear this.

In the long run it will be the consumers who lose out. Consumers in Northern Australia may not have access to fresh milk. Perhaps they will have to go to processed UHT milk, in which case there will be an opportunity for supermarkets to bring it in from countries that do not have the same quality assurance that we do. Our farmers and consumers in the long run deserve better from the supermarkets, especially Coles. They claim to have an ethical sourcing policy; however, their arrogance lately would belie that. (*Time expired*)

Melbourne Electorate: Paid Parental Leave

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (10.45 am)—For the first time this year, many Australian parents were able to access paid parental leave. I and the Greens have welcomed this change, especially as my electorate has one of the highest proportions of working women anywhere in the country. However, as my constituents have reported to me, there are a number of concerns with its current form, particularly the requirements of the work test currently in place.

The scheme came into effect on 1 January. It provides primary carers with 18 weeks of pay at the national minimum wage rate, to be taken within the first year after birth or adoption. Eligibility is determined by several criteria including a Paid Parental Leave work test. To meet the work test, you must have both worked for at least 10 of the 13 months prior to the birth or adoption of your child and worked for at least 330 hours in that 10-month period.

Paid parental leave has been a long time coming in Australia, and I support the effort being made to implement a government subsidised program that establishes the right of an employee to take paid leave to care for a newborn child. But I do have concerns about a number of aspects of the program as it has been implemented, especially the requirements of the work test. By restricting eligibility to parents who have been at work for 10 of the last 13 months, the program excludes women, including many constituents of Melbourne, who have returned to work for a period shorter than 10 months between pregnancies.

For example, one of my constituents has written to me that she has been at her current workplace for five years, during which she has had two children and worked part time between each pregnancy. She is due to have her third child in March. At the time she takes parental leave, she will have worked a great deal more than the required 330 hours but will not meet the requirement of having worked for 10 of the last 13 months. She will not be eligible for paid parental leave. Another constituent will have worked 668 hours over 6½ of the last 13 months, but she will not be eligible for paid parental leave. Both women should be entitled to paid parental leave, as they are removing themselves from the workforce to care for newborn children, but the requirement to have been working for 10 months prior restricts their entitlement.

This requirement makes it difficult for parents, particularly women, to manage the timing of work commitments and pregnancies to make the most of their workplace entitlements. The work test requires parents to ensure that there is at a minimum a 14-month break between children. With all the family planning in the world, this is not always possible. We do not want eligibility for paid parental leave to be subjected to an arbitrary time line for staggering the births of children, nor do we want parents to feel pressured into returning to work after the birth of a child to ensure that they have been working for 10 months prior to the birth of their second or subsequent child.

There is enough evidence out there supporting paid parental leave as a real workplace entitlement over a welfare handout, but unfortunately, despite the rhetoric from government about supporting women in maintaining their connection with the workforce and boosting workforce participation, the fact that this scheme fails to provide a proper entitlement to take leave for many parents is going to impact very unfairly on the constituents of Melbourne. (*Time expired*)

Mr Maurie Ellemor

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (10.48 am)—As members of parliament, we often hear of illnesses and medical problems that afflict our constituents. Such moments are reminders to us that there are many people in Australia who, through no fault of their own, are struck down or who have a loved one or friend struck down by health problems. Their circumstances are tragic, and we can understand that the situation can become too much for them and they cannot keep going on. In the case of relatives who require high levels of care after a health problem, many people seek permanent care, but some do not. Some are determined not to succumb to the adversity and the difficulties of providing care to their loved one. Today I will speak of one such person, my constituent Mr Maurie Ellemor.

Last Thursday, Steve Ellemor, the son of Maurie and Angelina Ellemor, told me that his parents had been married for 40 years. He told me that in July 2008 Lina had brain surgery to remove a small growth at the back of her brain. Although the outlook initially looked positive after the surgery, she needed another operation within 24 hours to deal with the swelling of her brain. It was determined that Lina had suffered a brain stem stroke, and she was in a coma for nine weeks. The prognosis looked bad, and it was suggested that Maurie look for permanent care such as a nursing home. Maurie and Steve determined that they would not give up, and Maurie instead pushed hard for a bed at the Shenton Park rehab hospital. From November 2008 to September 2010, Lina was there. Although some limited progress has been made, Lina still requires full-time care.

Maurie is a small business owner and, like so many small business owners, faces fairly significant bank debts. In spite of such challenges, Maurie has left the business in the hands of his son Steve while he modifies the family home and provides care to Lina himself.

Since this tragedy occurred, Maurie has had a range of additional challenges to overcome. He endured a home invasion whilst Lina was still in hospital; and late one night, after returning from the hospital, he drove past his business to check on its security only to find a hit-and-run victim lying on the ground outside with a serious head injury. If that man had not been found by Maurie, he certainly would have died that night, with his skull split open.

Steve Ellemor and family friend George Rumenos describe Maurie as a patriot who loves the flag and his country. Maurie is the sort of friend who would give the shirt off his own back just to help. They describe him as a great dad and a great husband who at times struggles with the weight of his responsibilities, yet he is clearly defined by his great love for his wife and his determination to do the right thing for her.

I believe that the wider community, beyond Cowan, would benefit from hearing the story of Maurie's inspiring dedication. Today I take this opportunity to honour Maurie Ellemor as a great role model for our community. I hope that in the future there will be better days for Maurie, Lina, with her health problems, and the entire Ellemor family.

Shortland Electorate: Awards

Ms HALL (Shortland) (10.51 am)—On 28 January, the recipients of the 2010 Shortland awards were presented with their awards. This year it was a little different because we also gave awards to three groups. The first is the Belmont Neighbourhood Watch. The second is the Catherine Hill Bay Surf Lifesaving Club, which was formed in 1923. It was originally known as the Wallarah Surf Club. It reformed in 1927 and it has cared for that community and

that beach and been involved in a number of very important rescues. The third is the Charlestown Caring Group, which was formed in 1979. It is in James Street, Charlestown. It was first funded by a Hunter Area Assistance Scheme grant as a neighbour aid group and it provides a number of services, including home visits, home respite, shopping, group activities, bus outings, transport to medical appointments—a fantastic group. Three people from that group received awards: Eileen Steel, Robert Steel and Brian Cherry.

I will also mention some other nominees, who were not part of groups. Peter Brennan from Tingira Heights was nominated by the Salvation Army for the work that he does with Pete's Kitchen. Pam Meatheringham was nominated by Lake Macquarie residential parks homeowners. Don Spence was nominated for his work with the men's shed at Windale. Sue Barker was nominated as founder of Dog Rescue Newcastle.

The people at the Catherine Hill Bay Surf Lifesaving Club who received awards are Russell Bax, Richard Black, Nathan Hall, Robert Hall, Steve Marley, Mick Mottley and Alex Rainford. They were involved in the search and recovery of missing fishermen who died at Catherine Hill Bay. That was a very traumatic event.

Belmont Neighbourhood Watch was formed in 1987, and it is the last remaining neighbourhood watch group in New South Wales. It delivers monthly newsletters to residents. Those nominated for awards were Pat Anstey, Ruby Nielson, William Stephenson, Drew Davies, Bill Johnston, Christine Gray, Keith Hudson, Bruce Brander, Patricia Brander, Robert Burton, Beryl Moloney, Robin Potts, Brenda Russell, Beverley Simpson, Anne Haslam, Keith Purcival, Christine Fletcher, Beverley Wrixon, Kenneth Wrixon, Brian Jacks, Leanne Papadopoulos, Elisabeth Cockerell, Clarrie Ferguson, David Brown, Yvonne Brown, Robyn Alcorn, Cheryl Brothers, James Brothers, Kelvin Harrison, Joyce Hancock, Jenny Haslam and Beryl Naughton.

I thank them all for their enormous contribution to the Shortland community. (*Time expired*)

Australian Natural Disasters

ABC Local Radio

Mr CROOK (O'Connor) (10.54 am)—Since parliament has resumed, we have seen an outpouring of emotion over the disasters of this summer, with many members relating heart-rending accounts of what they and members of their electorates have lost and endured. As for me, I have watched and listened from afar and cannot begin to imagine what these communities have gone through. I offer my heartfelt condolences for their losses.

Closer to home, there have been the Gascoyne floods, the Lake Clifton bushfires, the severe thunderstorms in the wheat belt and the recent fires in the Perth Hills. Although I have not been directly affected by these events, I do have friends close by and so I have seen first-hand the impact and the anxiety, and that has been compelling. I would like to recognise the role that the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia, in conjunction with ABC radio, made to the natural disaster events in my state. I have no doubt that the timely and accurate information provided by the FESA website and the regular ABC emergency warning bulletins contributed largely to the preservation of life during these emergencies. Often lack of information is a regular criticism of those involved in emergencies; however, for the first time

on talkback radio I listened to callers praising our media outlets and FESA for the role they played in managing the information released to the community.

Like most Australians, my information came from the same forum—local ABC radio during the day and TV at night. Many members have thanked the media for their commitment to this tragedy, and I take this opportunity to do the same. However, it is local ABC regional radio that I want to talk about today. This service is vital to regional areas, and it is the local content that is critical to ensuring the longevity and integrity of regional ABC radio. We must ensure that local content continues at the highest level and that we do not allow our regions to become too widespread and lose the local edge that the ABC, particularly regional ABC, has. It is too easy to have non-local news bulletins that have no local relevance. The state based *Country Hour* programs are a classic case in point. They provide regional Australia with up-to-date agriculture and resource information, weather and market reports as well as stories of interest to regional Australia. Entered in the *Guinness Book of Records* as Australia's longest running radio program, the *Country Hour* continues to offer invaluable information and news to rural Australia.

The ABC is a renowned training ground for journalists, producers and technicians, and this should be continued. In my home town of Kalgoorlie, new staff have come from all parts of Australia to deliver our ABC. These people bring a new dimension to many local communities and often a different view of the world. The events of recent months have further highlighted the value of our local ABC radio stations across the nation, and I applaud them for their service.

Australian Capital Territory: Hospitals

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (10.57 am)—On 21 December last year, my three-year-old son became ill. After a fall, he began vomiting, and it soon became serious enough that my wife took him to the emergency room. He stayed in hospital for three days until the doctors finally worked out that he had septicaemia and began to administer the right drugs. On Christmas Eve, when we had almost resigned ourselves to bringing the presents and the tree to him, the doctors decided that he was ready to be discharged, and we went home together.

I want to thank the nurses, doctors and other hospital staff who took such good care of Sebastian while he was in hospital. He was originally admitted to Calvary Hospital, where he received careful attention before being transferred to paediatric health services at Canberra Hospital, also known as PatCH. The emergency and paediatric teams at both hospitals were diligent in their care and took time to explain what was going on to my wife, Gweneth, and me. My son still talks about his ambulance ride and his CAT scan, which he calls 'sitting in the doughnut'. Behind the scenes, there were the laboratory technicians we never met but whose work underpinned the diagnosis that the doctors eventually provided.

Alongside excellent medical care, we are also grateful for the children's play facility provided by the Starlight Foundation. Walking into their playroom, we were greeted by a smiling young woman in a space traveller outfit who insisted on being called Captain Crazy at all times. Having a facility like this was a blessing, because there are only so many times as a parent that you can read *The Gruffalo* before wanting to turn into a small brown mouse.

Being a parent in hospital reminds you of your vulnerability—sleeping in an armchair, eating from a vending machine and drinking endless cups of instant coffee in styrofoam cups.

There is something that feels viscerally wrong about seeing a child hooked up to an intravenous drip, but all you can do is wait and hold his hand while he drifts back to sleep and the drugs steadily do their work.

In a recent issue, the *Economist's* Bagehot column pondered the impact of young children on politicians:

Daily exposure to innocence matters. Parenthood can lead to smugness, but also humility. All parents soon realise how much of child-rearing is improvisation, tempered by exhaustion ... The world looks at once kinder and more fragile with small children in it, and essentially optimistic.

Thank you to those health workers who each day look after young boys and girls like my son. From Captain Crazy to the head of neurosurgery, you make an extraordinary team.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! In accordance with standing order 193 the time for constituency statements has concluded.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed from 25 November 2010, on the proposed address-in-reply to the speech of Her Excellency the Governor-General—

May it please Your Excellency:

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

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

That the address be agreed to.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (11.00 am)—I move:

That further proceedings be conducted in the House.

Question agreed to.

LAW AND JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (IDENTITY CRIMES AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2010 [2011]

Debate resumed from 15 November 2010.

Second Reading

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information) (11.01 am)—I present the explanatory memorandum and I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the Law and Justice Legislation Amendment (Identity Crimes and Other Measures) Bill 2010 [2011]. The bill introduces new identity crime offences, increases penalties for offences relating to the administration of justice, and makes a number of amendments to improve the effective operation of the Australian Federal Police and the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions.

The bill inserts three new identity crime offences recommended in the Model Criminal Law Officers' Committee (MCLOC) final report on identity crime.

A person's identity can be used falsely to obtain citizenship, Centrelink payments, medical services, or to gain professional qualifications. Existing offences in the Criminal Code, such as theft, forgery, fraud and credit card skimming do not adequately cover the varied and evolving types of identity crime such as phishing and use of malicious software.

The proposed offences are framed in general and technology neutral language to ensure that, as new forms of identity crime emerge, the offences will remain applicable.

The offences include:

- dealing in identification information with the intention of committing, or facilitating the commission of, a Commonwealth indictable offence, punishable by up to five years imprisonment;
- possession of identification information with the intention of committing, or facilitating the commission of, conduct that constitutes the dealing offence, punishable by up to three years imprisonment; and
- possession of equipment to create identification documentation with the intention of committing, or facilitating the commission of, conduct that constitutes the dealing offence, punishable by up to three years imprisonment.

The offences can be implemented by the Commonwealth within its constitutional powers by linking them with an intention to commit a Commonwealth indictable offence, and by confining the 'victims' provision to victims of Commonwealth identity crime offences.

Some departures from the MCLOC model have been necessary because of constitutional limits on the Commonwealth's power. The spirit and intention of the MCLOC offences are maintained, however, in this bill.

The identity crime provisions also assist victims of identity crime. Identity crime can cause damage to a person's credit rating, create a criminal record in the person's name and result in tremendous expenditure of time and effort restoring records of transactions or credit history.

Individual victims reportedly spend an average of two or more years attempting to restore their credit ratings.

That is why the amendments will also allow a person, who has been the victim of identity crime, to approach a magistrate for a certificate to show they have had their identity information misused. The certificate is intended to assist victims of identity crime in negotiating with financial institutions to re-establish their credit ratings and other organisations such as Australia Post to clear up residual problems created by identity theft.

The bill also increases the penalties for the offences of perverting the course of justice and conspiracy to pervert the course of justice from five years to 10 years imprisonment, better reflecting the seriousness of these offences and the importance of maintaining the integrity of the justice system.

These penalties are more closely aligned with the penalties for similar offences in other jurisdictions.

In addition, each administration of justice offence has been updated to bring it in line with settled principles about drafting Commonwealth criminal offences.

First, the physical elements of the offences have been separated, bringing them into line with chapter 2 of the Criminal Code.

Second, the amendments apply absolute liability to the jurisdictional elements of these offences. The jurisdictional element of an offence links the offence to the legislative power of the Commonwealth.

This amendment means that, for example, with respect to the section 46 offence of aiding a prisoner to escape, a defendant will not be able to avoid conviction because he or she did not know that the prisoner they assisted was in custody for an offence against Commonwealth or territory law.

The bill also contains amendments to the Australian Federal Police Act 1979 to allow for alcohol screening tests to be used as a preliminary form of testing for random workplace testing and critical incident testing, in addition to the alcohol breath tests presently permitted. The amendments will also expand the range of conduct for which the AFP Commissioner may make awards for bravery.

The amendments to the Director of Public Prosecutions Act 1983 will put beyond doubt that the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions can delegate to DPP staff both functions and powers under the act. This position was previously unclear on the face of the legislation.

Second, the amendments ensure that the director can delegate functions and powers relevant to the conduct of joint trials with his or her state and territory counterparts.

While the DPP Act allows the director to authorise a person to sign indictments on his or her behalf, this authorisation is very limited in its scope. The amendments will ensure that the director is able to authorise his or her state and territory counterparts to institute proceedings for summary offences, committal proceedings or appeals.

Finally, the amendments provide immunity from civil proceedings to individuals (such as the director, or a member of the staff of the office of the CDPP) and to the Australian Government Solicitor, carrying out (or supporting) functions, duties or powers under the act.

The immunity will only apply if the acts or omissions were in good faith and in the performance or exercise of the person's functions, powers or duties under, or in relation to, the act.

As well as providing certainty to the CDPP in carrying out its functions and duties under the DPP Act, the immunity provision will give legislative protection to state and territory prosecutors who conduct Commonwealth matters (for example, under joint trial arrangements).

This amendment will bring the DPP Act into line with most state and territory offices of public prosecution.

AUSTRAC, as Australia's financial intelligence unit, processes and analyses information obtained under suspicious matter or suspect transaction reporting provisions and passes on intelligence information to investigative and law enforcement agencies to assist their operational activities.

AUSTRAC holds information on suspicious matters collected under the Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing Act 2006 (AML/CTF Act) and information on suspect

transactions collected under the Financial Transaction Reports Act 1988 (FTR Act). Information relating to suspect transaction reports is of a similar nature to information relating to suspicious matter reports.

As information held by AUSTRAC relating to suspicious matters and suspect transactions is sensitive, the AML/CTF Act prescribes who can access this information and imposes a number of stringent restrictions as to what they can do with the information once accessed. A person who breaches these requirements commits an offence.

These amendments will extend these restrictions to suspect transaction information collected under the FTR Act. This will ensure that restrictions are placed on the use of all sensitive AUSTRAC information to protect the integrity of the financial reporting regime.

Finally, the bill amends the definition of 'enforcement body' in subsection 6(1) of the Privacy Act 1988 to include the Office of Police Integrity (OPI) in Victoria.

This provides the Office of Police Integrity with the same status as similar law enforcement bodies have under the Privacy Act, such as the Police Integrity Commission of New South Wales and the Crime and Misconduct Commission of Queensland.

The bill also contains several minor amendments to:

- correct a drafting error in the Criminal Code Act 1995, and
- repeal a provision in the Judiciary Act 1903 which is no longer necessary.

This bill introduces important new identity crimes that will provide greater protection to the community. The bill also contains measures designed to improve the administration of justice and the effective operation of the Australian Federal Police and the CDPP.

I commend the bill to the House.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (11.10 am)—I also rise to talk on the Law and Justice Legislation Amendment (Identity Crimes and Other Measures) Bill 2010 [2011]. As the minister has just outlined, clearly identity fraud is a growing threat and the government and this legislature need to respond appropriately and provide the resources for law enforcement agencies to be able to do their jobs to combat this form of crime. This legislation goes some way towards equipping jurisdictions in combating identity fraud.

Identity crimes are very malicious types of crimes and they can affect people on a very personal basis. To have your identity stolen is not a light matter and can have some very serious consequences. Identity fraud is, sadly, Australia's fastest growing crime, with hundreds of thousands of victims and an estimated cost of more than \$1 billion per year. It is evident, with the rapid increase in technology, that the government needs to respond appropriately by giving law enforcement agencies the tools to be able to combat this emerging threat. Identity crimes are increasing due to advances in technology. They particularly affect the banking sector, and the rapid increase of financial transactions via the internet and the use of credit cards have provided criminals with new opportunities to facilitate this form of crime.

An Australian Bureau of Statistics report released late in 2009 found that in 2007 alone more than 800,000 people, or five per cent of the population aged 15 and older, fell victim to at least one instance of fraud. Identity fraud accounted for almost half a million victims, with 77 per cent of those reporting fraudulent transactions on their credit or bank cards. The re-

maining 23 per cent suffered identity theft involving unauthorised use of their personal details.

Anyone can fall victim to identity theft. Indeed, there have been high-profile victims such as the media identity John Laws, who was recently targeted by identity thieves who forged his signature and raided his bank account. That particular group had been responsible for stealing millions of dollars from banks by manipulating people's personal details. They do this through things such as bank statements that have been mailed to private homes. Victims can be not necessarily aware that they have been a victim. Indeed, in the case of Mr Laws, he only managed to identify that he had been a victim of this particular crime when a debt collection agency called him chasing unpaid bills. These examples show that anyone can fall victim to this form of crime. Even well-known identities can fall victim to identity fraud.

The bill implements changes to identity crime offences recommended by the Model Criminal Law Officers Committee's final report on identity crime. It seeks to insert three new identity crime offences into new part 9.5 of the Criminal Code Act 1995. The minister has just outlined what those three would be. It is important to note that, with the exceptions of South Australia and Queensland, currently it is actually not an offence to assume or steal another person's identity. So clearly the need for this type of legislation is very apparent.

Schedule 4 of the bill contains several amendments which will establish a more consistent approach to the restrictions placed upon the disclosure of sensitive AUSTRAC information and strengthen safeguards to protect against the disclosure of sensitive AUSTRAC information. The bill also contains several minor amendments correcting drafting errors for previous bills and it repeals a specific provision within a judiciary act which is deemed no longer necessary. The bill also contains key measures to resolve deficiencies in the current legislative framework that relate to identity crimes. It will help to improve the administration of justice and the effective operation of the AFP and the Commonwealth DPP.

This is the completion of processes that were started under the previous coalition government. Indeed, in April 2005 the government announced the National Identity Security Strategy to combat the misuse of stolen or assumed identities in the provision of government services. To support development of the strategy, the coalition allocated \$5.9 million over two years from the 2005-06 budget including funding for a pilot documentation verification service. Under the former coalition government, the Model Criminal Law Officers Committee released a discussion paper on identity crime, and subsequently our final report was issued in March 2008.

This bill implements the law reform processes largely undertaken by the previous government and now brought to completion under the current government. It will go a long way to ensuring that organised criminals in this country and elsewhere understand that Australia is not a soft target for this type of crime and that Australia will amend and adjust its legislative framework to attack the criminals when they come up with new ways of committing criminal offences, and identity crime is clearly one of those issues. The coalition therefore supports the policy underlying the bill and supports the passage of the bill.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (11.16 am)—I too rise today to support the passage of the Law and Justice Legislation Amendment (Identity Crimes and Other Measures) Bill 2010 [2011]. I believe it is appropriate that the government is using the recommendations of what has been

referred to as the Model Criminal Law Officers Committee to, firstly, identify deficiencies and make corrections to current laws particularly as they relate to identity crime.

At present there is not the uniform coverage across the nation that you would expect in matters such as identity measures. With the exception of Queensland and South Australia, strangely, it is not currently an offence to assume an identity or steal another person's identity except in limited prescribed circumstances. As we move closer to what hopefully might emerge as a model criminal code to be applied across the nation, we should be making sure that there are no windows of opportunity for criminal elements to exploit citizens, as currently happens in respect of identity crime.

As we step into a society which is ever-increasingly dependent on computer based technologies and computer based security systems, the issue of identity crime is certainly ever increasing. Unfortunately, fraud and phishing—and I had to ask my adviser what that meant—are becoming more prevalent. I understand that phishing is a more sophisticated way of scheming, Madam Deputy Speaker Bird, and it is something that is pretty common. It is certainly well known to Australian citizens and, as a matter of fact, the shadow minister made reference to John Laws only recently being a target of identity crime. I probably should not add, but I will: part of an Australian delegation of the Australian Crime Commission visited areas of America, London and parts of Europe looking at identity crime. I do not think there was one member of that committee that did not experience some fraud committed against them, as was obvious once we got back to this country and saw our bank statements. It shows how easy it is, frankly, despite the natural precautions we take. The sophistication of the criminal element and the ever-advancing technology they use means that unless we ensure that our legislation keeps pace we will be exposing citizens to the ever-increasing possibility of identity fraud.

It is not just getting back home and seeing what went out of a bank account: identity fraud can affect Centrelink; it can certainly affect citizenship issues and all those things which are, quite frankly, front and centre for many serious and organised criminals. We need to ensure that what we develop is contemporary and combats the technological advances being made by various elements in the criminal world.

I am just reading here—I forgot about this one: criminal records can be created leading to a very stressful period of how to go about changing that. When the minister spoke, he reported that one of the problems with detecting identity fraud and seeing what has happened to your own records or in the case of a criminal record being created in your name is that it could take an average of two years to rectify. This is not just the effect of the fraud; it is the time, effort and stress that an individual has to go through to restore their good name. These are matters which are being addressed. One way to ensure expunging of a record is by approaching a magistrate and seeking a certificate of proof that you are a person that has been the subject of identity fraud. Nevertheless, while you are going through that process, the burden of proof is effectively on you and that seems to be one of the issues that we are trying to address.

The bill inserts three new identity crime offences into part 9.5 of the Criminal Code Act 1995. The three offences are: (1) dealing in identity information with the intention of committing, facilitating or commissioning a Commonwealth indictable offence punishable by up to five years of imprisonment; (2) possessing of identification information with the intent of committing, facilitating or commissioning conduct which would constitute a dealing offence

punishable by three years; and (3) possessing equipment to create identification documents with the intention of committing, facilitating or commissioning conduct that would constitute a dealing offence punishable up to three years.

By framing the bill in this way and using general and what has been referred to as technological, neutral language, the intention is to ensure that offences will remain applicable, despite emerging developments in new forms of identity crime whether it be technological or otherwise and that, as far as possible, what is being put forward in this legislation stays contemporary in combating the ever-increasing issue of identity theft and crime itself.

I also note the bill contains amendments to the Criminal Code Act 1995, the Crimes Act 1914, the Privacy Act 1988, the Australian Federal Police Act 1979 and the Director of Public Prosecutions Act 1983, the Judiciary Act 1903 and the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006.

The government's position is and always has been that we are going to be tough on crime. The government wants to protect people. One of the basic tasks of any government is to protect its people and ensure that their communities are as safe as possible. Therefore the amendments reflect the government's desire to clarify and improve the operation of the administration of justice to the extent that we can through our sphere of influence in the Commonwealth.

The position in respect of delegations, for instance, which is referred to in the amendments, deals with the delegated authority of the Director of Public Prosecutions, which flows from the Director of Public Prosecutions Act 1983. As I understand it, there has been some conjecture as to the extent of the functions and powers that are delegated. This bill puts that delegation absolutely beyond doubt and to that extent I support what is proposed in the bill.

I also support the significant amendments made to the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism and Financing Act. As was previously referred to, AUSTRAC, Australia's financial intelligence unit, under its reporting provisions, processes and analyses information relating to various suspicious dealings or suspicious transactions and passes that intelligence and information on to the respective law enforcement agencies for their operational activities. Having visited the organisation, I can see that it is very professional and reasonably well resourced, and it certainly does a fantastic job. It effectively tracks transactions—say, over \$10,000—and sees where money passes through and designs patterns of investigations which go off to the various law enforcement and police agencies.

It is quite apparent that the information that goes through places like AUSTRAC is very sensitive. We need to ensure that we protect that information and ensure that it is only used for the purposes described under the act—that is, to address issues of fraud and criminal activity. Schedule 4 of the bill establishes a more consistent approach to the restrictions placed on the disclosure of sensitive information held by AUSTRAC and also strengthens safeguards to protect against the disclosure of any information. Clearly that is information that may flow from AUSTRAC, its staff et cetera. As a parliament, we cannot vest organisations such as AUSTRAC with such authority without ensuring that the information that is being collected is treated with the absolute intention for which we commissioned it to do so and that it goes no further. So these amendments go some distance to doing that.

While I am talking about enhancing our abilities to combat serious and organised crime, on a local note I would like to acknowledge the crime fighting that has taken place in my local area command and particularly identify the commander, Superintendent Ray King. I would like to recognise the bravery of and the outstanding work done by him and those who serve under him. His commitment to policing has delivered to the community of Cabramatta significant advances in public safety. He has a record which has earned him great respect not only in Cabramatta but throughout the New South Wales Police. I only learnt last week, with some regret, that Superintendent King has been transferred to a new post, to the position of Commander of Liverpool Local Area Command. I wish him well in his new position. Fortunately for me, Liverpool Local Area Command is also in my electorate, so I will continue my dealings with him. I do acknowledge the commitment that he has put in over a long period of time and what he has delivered to our community.

I would also like to take the opportunity to congratulate Detective Senior Constable Jason Brooks, who just before Christmas 2010 was named New South Wales Rotary Police Officer of the Year. His leadership and driven personality have seen his team achieve outstanding results, such as doubling the drug arrests within that command. This young person has not only shown leadership but has been committed to task while also staying very personally committed to his oath of office to protect the community that he serves. So, on behalf of a very grateful community, I extend my well wishes to Superintendent Ray King and Detective Senior Constable Jason Brooks and thank them for what they do.

Whilst we create and amend the laws and try to improve the tools that police and other law enforcement agencies use, it is important to realise that at the end of the day it is often left to the professionalism and integrity of those men and women who take that oath of office and take on a role in the community that thankfully most of us will never have to see, and that is putting themselves in danger in order to protect life and persons out there. Whenever I get the opportunity, I will always pay regard to our police. They do a fantastic job. I know they often attract a lot of criticism, but they man that thin blue line which is so vital for our community.

In closing, I indicate that all the provisions of this bill have been agreed to. I support the work in developing a Model Criminal Code. I think we need to do more to ensure that there are not loopholes. If we view organised crime as nothing more than a business—a nefarious business perhaps, but still a business—like any business it will exploit loopholes where profits can be made. I think this is our task. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (11.32 am)—I am pleased to rise to speak on the Law and Justice Legislation Amendment (Identity Crimes and Other Measures) Bill 2010 [2011]. It is an important bill in the community because it goes to one of the fastest-growing crimes that is prevalent in the community today. When I move around my electorate and speak with constituents, when I consider the emails that I receive and the letters that are written in, it is clear that there is a growing level of angst in the community over identity crime. In particular, I highlight that it is spread across different aspects of the community unevenly. There are some demographics in the community that are comfortable with the various scams and tricks involved in stealing someone's identity, and there are those for whom identity crime is a very real threat because of their, for lack of a better term, ignorance with respect to the methods that are employed by those who seek to engage in identity crime.

We know that there are hundreds of thousands of victims, at an estimated cost of more than \$1 billion a year, as a result of identity crime. Methods that are employed include, for example, what is referred to as phishing. In addition to that, there are attempts, especially through the use of technology, to attract people to enter their personal particulars into bogus websites. As a member of parliament, using my parliamentary email address, I receive spam emails from concocted addresses purporting to be, for example, from banks and indeed from the Australian Taxation Office. These are false emails that link to false websites that ask people to input their details or to verify their details with the full intent of the perpetrators of that email using the information that you input for nefarious purposes. So identity crime is a very real cost to the community and it is a very real concern to the community. At \$1 billion a year, some might scratch their heads and ask why it is only in 2011 that we are actually updating the Criminal Code to ensure that it incorporates the elements that make it a specific offence to engage in identity crime and solicit someone's information for the purposes of engaging in identity crime.

The bill itself implements changes to the identity crime offences that were outlined by the Model Criminal Law Officers Committee final report on identity crime and it inserts three new identity crime offences into the new part 9.5 of the Criminal Code Act 1995. In particular, it includes dealing in identification information with the intention of committing or facilitating the commission of a Commonwealth indictable offence. That offence, if you are found guilty, is punishable by up to five years imprisonment. In addition, the dealing offence, possession of identification information with the intention of committing or facilitating the commission of conduct that constitutes the dealing offence, is punishable by up to three years imprisonment; and, finally, possession of equipment to create identification documentation with the intention of committing or facilitating the commission of conduct constitutes the dealing offence and is punishable by up to three years imprisonment.

These are all important new additions to proposed part 9.5 of the Criminal Code Act because they send a clear message from this parliament. As representatives of the will of the Australian people we need to tackle this nefarious crime. We need to deal with this crime and make it clear that we will not tolerate those who seek to take advantage of others in the community who are unfamiliar with the use of technology and with the concerns, especially among the older demographic in the community, about identity crime.

We know that if people do not have confidence in, for example, online retailing, if people do not have confidence in the various technologies that are employed and part of the modern era, they will not use that technology. So not only is there a cost in terms of billions of dollars of actual fraudulent activities undertaken as a result of identity crime; there is also an unmeasurable cost, which is the cost associated as a direct erosion of confidence in the technology itself from those who will choose not to utilise technology and, thereby, potentially cripple to some extent opportunities for information technology-specific new forms of retailing, for example.

So it is very important that we support this bill, and as members of the coalition we support the government's efforts in this respect. I highlight that it was actually the previous coalition government that started the ball rolling on this in April 2005, when the coalition announced the National Identity Security Strategy to combat the misuse of stolen or assumed identities in the provision of government services. There was a specific coalition initiative that allocated

some \$5.9 million over two years in the 2005-06 budget, which included funding for a pilot document verification service. Under the former coalition government, the Model Criminal Law Officers Committee released a discussion paper and, subsequently, a final report in March 2008. This bill is effectively the zenith of all the work undertaken, supported by the Labor Party and the coalition. This is a good initiative that is bipartisan in nature.

What I am mindful of when I speak to this bill is the older people especially in the community and in my seat of Moncrieff, on the Gold Coast, who are concerned about whether they can have confidence in the use of online technologies. These are the same people who, unfortunately, more often than not are the subject of phishing scams through emails and the people who are most vulnerable. So, to the extent that this bill will help to provide some disincentive to those who would engage in this kind of conduct, I commend it. I certainly hope that, as a direct result of actions as a consequence of this bill, we will see a reduction in this kind of activity in the future so that identity crime is not as prevalent as people think it is but, in addition to that, that there is also a reduction in the concern and community angst about identity crime. For those reasons, I support the bill.

Ms SMYTH (La Trobe) (11.38 am)—I am very pleased to speak in favour of the Law and Justice Legislation Amendment (Identity Crimes and Other Measures) Bill 2010 [2011]. I am certainly pleased to have heard the contributions from other members and to recognise that there has been continuity in the regulatory approach taken throughout various parliaments and, it seems, from all sides of the chamber. We certainly know that identity crimes cause not only monetary losses but also very considerable consequential non-monetary damage. Damage to credit ratings, loss of reputation, considerable distress, disruption and inconvenience are all very familiar by-products of these kinds of reprehensible offences. We know that identity crime offenders are often quite difficult to apprehend. We know that they are therefore fairly difficult to prosecute, particularly in cases where they have engaged only in preparatory activities to the ultimate offence, and so it is very timely that the provisions of this bill are implemented in relation to identity crime and the range of other matters that it seeks to address. It is certainly timely that we reflect the deliberations of the Model Criminal Law Officers Committee in its final report on identity crime.

We know that the impacts of identity offences include the erosion of a person's name, with or without direct financial consequences. They include widespread scams against consumers and businesses which have direct financial consequences. They have the capacity for the illegal receipt of welfare and other benefits, the procurement of qualifications in fraudulent circumstances and the evasion of law enforcement and surveillance, amongst a variety of other very significant and detrimental effects on individuals, enterprises and whole communities, both in terms of their practical monetary effects and the erosion of confidence. As we increasingly rely on technologies and as we are increasingly reliant on internet communications and internet transactions, we hope to ensure that members of our community, particularly those who are only becoming familiar with those new technologies, have sufficient confidence in them to be able to utilise them and are not deterred from using them and utilising their convenience by situations where they face identity crime activities.

I am very pleased to see that the bill particularly provides for remedies to some degree for victims of crime. The amendments that are proposed under the bill will allow a person who has been the victim of identity crime to approach a magistrate for a certificate to show that

they have had their identity information misused. This will go a long way to alleviating the frustration and distress faced by people, often in circumstances which might extend for some years, when they are forced to attempt to restore their credit ratings, their damaged reputation and their standing with financial institutions. The certificate which is proposed to be available under this bill may assist victims of identity crime in negotiating with financial institutions in order to re-establish their credit ratings and with other organisations such as Australia Post in order to clear up any remaining problems from identity theft.

In addition to presenting very practical measures by which these sorts of frauds and ills are able to be combated, the bill before us sends a very clear message to our community that identity fraud will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted vigorously. It is certainly a timely message. We see significant effects from identity fraud not only for individuals but also, ultimately, for the Australian taxpayer and the community as a whole, so I am particularly pleased to see those provisions of this bill that deal with preparatory acts to identity fraud in such a timely manner.

Other speakers in this debate have addressed the variety of provisions in the bill which are very significant across a range of law reform measures. I would like to touch on the range of amendments which deal with the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act. These are obviously very significant in the overall fight against terrorism, both in our community and across the globe. The bill contains particular amendments which will establish a much more consistent approach to the restrictions which are placed on the disclosure of sensitive AUSTRAC information and strengthen safeguards to protect against the disclosure of that information. I think that anything that goes to strengthening the role of AUSTRAC in our community and facilitating its more efficient and more rigorous prosecution of its objectives is very laudable indeed, so I am very pleased to be able to speak in favour of those measures in the bill before us.

As a government we are certainly concerned with protecting those who are most vulnerable in our community. In circumstances where those most vulnerable in our community may be exposed to identity fraud and to the inconvenience, the distress and the frustration that it causes, it is particularly pleasing for me to be able to speak in favour of this bill today. I commend the bill.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (11.44 am)—I rise today to support the Law and Justice Legislation Amendment (Identity Crimes and Other Measures) Bill 2010 [2011]. I am happy to report to the House also in my capacity as Deputy Chair of the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety. In that committee we have been hearing from witnesses about the problem of identity theft and identity fraud across a wide spectrum of businesses, individuals, families and, in particular, children—which is the focus of our inquiry at the moment.

Having heard witness after witness speak about the problem of identity crime in Australia, it does make a very compelling case for legislation of this nature to ensure that we have a modern and relevant framework of laws in place to deal with the emergence of new technologies and crimes using the medium of those new technologies. I do commend the government for good legislation which sets up a legal framework to deal with the challenges of a new era. In this place we should support the use of law, especially criminal law, to set a benchmark for what we regard as right and wrong in our society and to ensure that law enforcement agencies have the tools they need to go after criminals, to prevent crime and to deal with the conse-

quences of online crime. Hearing from different Federal Police authorities and representatives from other agencies about the nature of the problems they face, I think it is the case that the law is not adequate at the moment to meet these challenges, and the improvements that have been well covered by many previous speakers are very much needed.

Identity crime is a serious crime. We have heard many different statistics. I think it is telling that we heard that the AFP reports that \$4 billion a year is lost in identity fraud and identity crime. We have heard from members and senators of their own experiences and anecdotes in relation identity fraud. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that, in 2007 alone, 800,000 people, or five per cent of the population aged 15 and over, fell victim to at least one instance of fraud. Of course, I would assume that is only set to grow.

I do not intend to speak for long today, except to say a few things. In my own electorate I have been approached by constituents, especially parents of younger constituents, who have been victims of identity theft and crime. As I said, children are the particular focus of our inquiry in the joint committee on cybersafety. This is a growing area of concern where we face children having their identity stolen, whether it be by so-called friends or acquaintances or whether it be by people unknown to them, and then the perpetrators either embarrass those children or engage in cyberbullying, cyberstalking or other abusive forms of behaviour online.

I find that all the attempts by government and other agencies to deal with these problems tend to be a little inelegant. Whether it be internet filtering or other proposals which tend to be reactive, they do not tend to address the problem at its cause—and we have heard much evidence that this is a behavioural and educational problem rather than a technological or legal one. What is very important to understand about the nature of this crime is that the law is not in place at the moment to help us to adequately address crimes against children online. So this bill in particular, which improves the ability of our enforcement agencies to deal with identity crime, is very important in making progress on this issue. I have had dealings with all the major social networkers and the big internet providers, both through the committee and also as a representative of my electorate, and they often have very good enforcement regimes in place but they go only to a certain point. While they tend to deal with an immediate problem inside their own network or space, they do not then take the further step of adequately dealing with the perpetrator of a crime—and stealing a person's identity and using it for whatever purpose is a serious offence. We have had laws in the Criminal Code for some time which deal with fraud, and I think it is very important that we keep pace with the technologies that we see today and continue to legislate in this area to ensure that the criminal law is adequate for our agencies.

I do think it is important to record that the varying nature of criminal activity and organised crime is moving very swiftly. They do keep up with technology. We have seen in the past week reports of criminal agencies using BlackBerries with their secure networks to engage in crime in this country. That is why I think it is important to support good legislation in this place, and I think the government ought to be commended for continuing the previous government's push to ensure that our legislation is sufficient. I support the bill.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (11.50 am)—The Law and Justice Legislation Amendment (Identity Crimes and Other Measures) Bill 2010 [2011] is a significant piece of legislation that contains amendments to a raft of measures relating to the administration of justice in Australia. The bill inserts new offences into the Criminal Code on identity crime, it corrects a draft-

ing error in the Criminal Code, it includes the Victorian Office of Police Integrity in the definition of an enforcement body in the Privacy Act, it allows for the delegation of powers and duties to certain persons and provides legal immunity for the director and staff to carry out the functions under the DPP Act, it streamlines the process of alcohol and drug testing under the AFP Act, it expands the range of conduct for which the AFP commissioner may make awards, it improves the operation of the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act, it establishes a more consistent approach to the restrictions placed on the disclosure of sensitive AUSTRAC information and it reframes the administration of justice offences in part III of the Crimes Act to bring them in line with the Criminal Code. It is quite an in-depth bill, as that probably outlines, and it covers a vast array of areas.

Today, I want to focus on the identity theft provisions of this legislation because it seeks to implement the identity crime offences recommended by the Model Criminal Law Officers Committee. This committee identified deficiencies in the current approach to identity crime, and this is what this bill aims to address. It seeks to create three new offences and provide some relief to the victims of identity crime through the creation of victim certificates.

Identity crime and identity theft are not new. The assumption of an identity, real or fictitious, to gain financial or other criminal benefit has been around for centuries, if not thousands of years. In fact, the earliest legislation on identity crime was in England, dates back to 1870 and dealt with the creation of fake stock certificates. I found that information from just a quick search and I am sure there is legislation or some form of governance on this issue dating back hundreds and hundreds of years.

However, with the rise in modern communications and technology and with the expanded use of electronic and online databases, identity crime is a real and growing concern. One of the increasing types of criminal activity is called phishing. Phishing occurs when a criminal sends a fake email purporting to be from a trusted organisation, mostly a bank. These emails entice the receiver to a well-designed fake website and ask them to verify their details, at which point their information is captured and funds are withdrawn.

I was a victim of this some time ago when I was applying for a visa. I was told by my travel agent that I had to get a visa to go to the States. I was surprised that I had to because I thought we had agreements that, for short stays, we did not have to obtain visas. I got on the site, applied for the visa, paid my \$60 and got what looked like an ID code which gave me something I could show to the customs officials. Lo and behold, when I got to the US there was no need for the visa, so it was a completely spurious thing. The US Embassy got in touch with me and the girlfriend I went with and we are in the process of trying to track down the money, but I am not confident.

Last year, my father-in-law was also a victim of phishing. What really made it worse was the fact that it occurred in the wake of the death of my mother-in-law in August. My father-in-law is an intelligent man and very computer savvy for someone who is in his mid-80s. But at that time, just after Mary's death, he was in the midst of reconciling and closing down bank accounts, he was advising government agencies and community organisations of her death and, at the same time, trying to come to terms with the loss of the woman he had loved for more than 50 years. In his grief, he thought the request for bank information was just one of the many administrative processes he had to go through at the time. There was a pile of pa-

perwork and it was just another thing he had to do. He only discovered too late that he had become a victim of identity crime.

Since being elected last year I have had a number of calls and letters from people in my electorate who have been targeted for this sort of crime in addition to the stock market scam and the Nigerian letter scam that seems to have been going on for about 20 years. What has alarmed me most is that most of these people have been over 70 years of age. In an attempt to help them I am using my website as a one-stop shop for information on a range of government and non-government services. As part of that I will be including an issues page where I will cover some of these matters to help people out. It will be like a virtual online office. One of the issues I will cover is scams. I will be linking to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's SCAMwatch website. The site covers everything from phishing and card skimming to lottery and sweepstakes scams to small business directory schemes. It provides a wealth of information as well as stories of the victims of crime and identity crime and how to report a scam in your state or territory. I commend the site to my colleagues here today.

Identity crime also occurs through key-logging devices and the theft of information from computer databases. But probably one of the areas of most concern is social networking sites, as others have mentioned today, which are increasingly being used as a means to steal identities. Seventy per cent of users of these services divulge some sort of personal information. Quite often it can just be your mother's maiden name. That is cross-fertilised, and then all sorts of things can happen, sometimes to an extent that allows the theft of identity. The AFP, in its submission on this issue to the committee, said that 'identity crime is the fastest growing criminal type, possibly running close to 30 percent growth.' One 2003 study estimated the cost to the Australian economy at \$1.1 billion, with \$420 million being directly lost and \$626 million spent on resources that respond to identity crime. That equates to about \$4 billion in 2010.

What we need to remember is that this figure is only an estimate of the cost of fraud-based identity crime. It does not cover the full implications of other types of identity crime. It is equally important to remember that identity crime is committed not just for the purposes of defrauding people of money. It is also used to facilitate people-smuggling, drug trafficking, money laundering, paedophilia, murder and terrorism. A 2005 French Senate report noted that terrorist networks had systematically used false identity documents to obtain employment, fund their activities and avoid detection. The September 11 bombers used false US Social Security numbers to facilitate their crime.

The effects of identity crime and theft on victims can be traumatic. Aside from the direct financial impact, which is often substantial, victims also suffer indirect consequences, including loss of reputation, damage to their credit rating and everyone's worst nightmare—the creation of criminal records. Dealing with the effects of identity crime requires the victim to expend time and effort to correct the records and restore their good name. This is often made more difficult because the victim is not aware for some time of the fact that their identity has been taken. Identity crime strikes at the very core of self. It attacks our individuality, it attacks our reputation, it attacks who we are. Finding out that someone has been masquerading as you or a loved one can have a deep emotional and psychological impact, and there is often no easy

fix. This is especially the case for those families who have had the identities of their dead children stolen, which is just appalling.

Identity crime is something about which the Australian public is becoming increasingly concerned, and I am really grateful for that. I met with some officials from the Attorney-General's Department recently to talk to them about what they are doing on cybersecurity, particularly in the civilian area. I was really heartened by the range of activities they are involved in there. A 2007 Newspoll survey found that 62 per cent of Australians are very or extremely concerned about the unauthorised use of their personal information, which is why they must protect their personal and network computers against viruses and hackers. This is the key message I got from the Attorney-General's Department when I spoke to them, and it is something I would like to reinforce today. People must be aware of the scams out there. It is a case of buyer beware—or person beware—of scammers. It is frightening, and people need to have their computers protected and also be alert to what could actually happen. In another survey, nine per cent of Australians claimed to be victims of identity crime, which is an extraordinary figure.

Given the rapid nature of the crime and the technology used to commit it, the legislative process has not always been quick enough to respond, to keep up. As Microsoft said in its submission to the Model Criminal Law Officers Committee:

Identity theft effectively creates a new class of victim that has not been adequately catered for within Australasian legislative and policing mechanisms to date.

This legislation seeks to address those concerns. It will create three new offences.

First, this bill will make it illegal for a person to make, supply or use identification information with the intention of passing themselves off as someone else for the purposes of committing or facilitating an indictable offence. This offence is important because current elements of the Criminal Code such as fraud, theft and forgery do not adequately cover the rapidly emerging types of identity crimes. This offence will be punishable by up to five years in prison.

Secondly, this bill will make it an offence to possess identification information with the intention of using that information to engage in conduct that would constitute an offence under the conditions I have already mentioned. It is important to note that the prosecution must prove not only that a person held someone's ID information but also that they intended to use it to facilitate crime. This is to protect innocent parties from the many innocuous reasons why someone would have another person's ID, such as holding their wallet while they were having a swim at the beach. This offence will carry a penalty of up to three years.

Finally, this bill will make it an offence to possess equipment needed for the creation of ID documentation where the person intends to use or allows the equipment to be used to engage in illegal conduct. The definition of 'equipment' has been kept deliberately broad to avoid the provision becoming outdated by the advances in new technology which are happening every day, as has also been mentioned today.

This bill also—and this is a really important development—creates a victims' certificate, to provide some remedy to the victims of ID crime. This is an important and welcome initiative, and I congratulate the minister for that. This new provision will allow a person to approach a magistrate for a certificate that will state the matter in which the ID information was used.

The certificate will help the victims of ID crime in negotiating with financial institutions when it comes to re-establishing their credit rating or getting a new credit card—really important and really helpful.

This bill is a timely, relevant and responsible response to the ever-increasing problem of ID crime, and these new provisions have broad support from Australia's law enforcement, banking and IT sectors. I commend the bill to the Committee.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information) (12.02 pm)—I thank the honourable members who contributed to this debate on the Law and Justice Legislation Amendment (Identity Crimes and Other Measures) Bill 2010 [2011]. The member for Canberra, who has just spoken, has outlined that there are, indeed, three new identity crime offences enclosed in this bill. I also thank the members for Stirling, Fowler, Moncrieff, Mitchell and La Trobe for their contributions.

This is an important bill. It is a response by the government in order to improve the way in which law enforcement agencies can deal with these serious crimes. The bill, as I have said earlier, contains three new identity crime offences and other amendments that will improve the operation of a range of Commonwealth agencies. This bill is part of Australia's response in combating identity crime. It will enhance the ability of Commonwealth agencies to perform their functions. For that reason I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that the bill be reported to the House without amendment.

**AVIATION CRIMES AND POLICING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
2010 [2011]**

Debate resumed from 22 November 2010.

Second Reading

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information) (12.04 pm)—I present the explanatory memorandum to this bill and I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Aviation security

The Gillard government is committed to a strong and effective aviation security regime for Australia.

Before turning to the legal reforms contained in this bill, I would like to place them in context.

On 18 December 2009, the government announced major reforms and a new model for the policing of Australia's 11 major airports, to be led by the Australian Federal Police. This will involve a three- to five-year transition period and will strengthen major airport policing in Australia.

The All-In model will result in the AFP taking full control of the community policing role at these 11 airports, replacing the current hybrid model involving AFP and state and territory

police. The AFP will also move to a 'fully sworn' presence so that all AFP personnel deployed at the airport will have the same training and powers. Having sworn AFP members policing these airports will maximise responsiveness and ensure our airports receive the highest quality policing.

There will still be close collaboration and intelligence sharing between Commonwealth agencies and state and territory police through joint aviation investigation teams and joint aviation intelligence groups. We will be consulting the states and territories closely in implementing these reforms.

On 9 February last year, the former Prime Minister announced a series of measures to strengthen international and domestic aviation security totalling \$200 million over four years.

This includes \$17.8 million to increase the number of firearms and explosive detection dogs at major international airports by 50 per cent and \$12.3 million in 2010-11 to maintain the AFP presence at major airports.

Other initiatives being progressed are designed to enhance screening of both passengers and cargo, and to strengthen engagement and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

In addition the government has announced it will provide \$759.4 million for policing at Australian airports over four years. The funding supports the AFP presence at Australia's 11 major airports, intelligence gathering and investigation capability, the AFP's regional rapid deployment capacity and the Air Security Officer program.

The AFP and other agencies continue to meet complex challenges and threats within the aviation environment. To do their work effectively, the AFP need to be supported by appropriate laws that provide deterrence and recognise the gravity of aviation related crimes.

It is against this background that I present the Aviation Crimes and Policing Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 [2011].

The bill has three components. Firstly, it increases penalties for a number of offences in the Crimes (Aviation) Act 1991. Secondly, it creates three new aviation related offences. Thirdly, it proposes amendments to legislation to ensure that existing policing powers are available to the AFP in the airport environment, which will support the move to the 'All-In' policing model.

Aviation Crimes—Increased penalties

The first component of the bill concerns penalties.

Earlier this year the Attorney-General's Department reviewed the Crimes (Aviation) Act, which is now 19 years old. The act contains offences directed against aircraft and airports.

It became clear that there are a number of penalties in the act that do not reflect the seriousness of these offences.

For example, under the Criminal Code, a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment could apply to a person who is found guilty of making threats to contaminate goods. In comparison, under the existing provisions in the Crimes (Aviation) Act, a person who makes a bomb threat could only be imprisoned for a maximum of two years.

This is a very low penalty, given the very serious disruption, and potential danger that such hoaxes can create—for example, if a flight is redirected as a result or if an airport has to be evacuated.

Under the amendments in this bill, the penalties in the act will now fall within four tiers. The severity of the penalty in each tier corresponds with the type of offence falling within each tier.

Life imprisonment (tier 1), the most severe maximum penalty will continue to apply to offences such as hijacking or destroying an aircraft while it is in flight. The attempted terrorist bombing of the American flight NW253 would have fallen within this tier if it had occurred on an Australian interstate or overseas flight.

A maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment (tier 2), will apply to very serious offences that pose danger or cause harm to whole groups of people, such as endangering an aircraft while in flight. The offences in this tier have had their maximum penalties raised from either seven, 14 or 15 years.

For example, assaulting a pilot, thereby impairing the operation of an aircraft will now carry a maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment, rather than the 14 years it currently carries.

Endangering the safety of an aircraft on an interstate flight, for example, by attempting to seize control of the aircraft, would carry a 20 year penalty, not seven years.

A maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment (tier 3) would apply to offences that are generally against aircraft or aviation environments, such as disrupting a major airport or destroying its facilities, which currently carry maximum penalties of seven or 10 years.

For example, damaging the runway or air traffic control facilities at Sydney airport would carry a maximum 14 years imprisonment rather than the current seven or 10 years depending on the circumstances.

Imprisonment for up to 10 years (tier 4) would apply to offences such as hoaxes and taking control of an aircraft, which currently carry maximum penalties of two and 10 years respectively. For example, making a bomb threat to an airport would constitute an offence that would carry a prison sentence of up to 10 years.

Aviation Crimes - New offences

The second component of the bill concerns new offences and definitions.

The bill inserts three new offences into the Crimes (Aviation) Act. These new offences are designed to cover gaps that existed in the coverage of the existing offences.

There will be a new offence of assaulting an aircraft crew member. This offence will carry a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment.

While there is already an offence in the act directed against the assault of a crew member, it can only be applied if the prosecution can prove that the assault has impeded the operation of the aircraft. The new offence provision will not require this.

This offence has been particularly welcomed by the aviation sector during consultations with them.

There will be a new offence directed against the reckless endangerment of the safety of an aircraft which is likely to cause death or serious harm. This offence will carry a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment.

This offence builds on the existing offence contained in the act of endangering an aircraft. The new offence, however, deals with more serious actions, and where the effect of the act in

question is a likelihood of causing death or serious harm. Firing a weapon on board an aircraft would come within this offence, even if no one was hit.

The final new offence concerns possessing dangerous goods onboard an aircraft which are likely to endanger life or cause serious harm. There is currently an offence concerning dangerous goods but not one where the effect is a likely to endanger life or cause serious harm. The penalty for this offence is consistent with other provisions where the risk of serious harm can be shown.

The bill also updates the definition of 'Commonwealth aerodrome' in the Crimes (Aviation) Act to replace a repealed cross-reference and to make clear the airports to which the offences in the act apply.

Consultations have been held with key stakeholders on the amendments to the Crimes (Aviation) Act, including airlines, airports and unions. The responses that have been received have been overwhelmingly supportive and welcoming of these measures that they are seen as an improvement to our existing aviation security regime.

Aviation Policing – COPAL and AFP Act amendments

The decision to accept the 'Federal Audit of Police Capabilities' recommendation to move to an 'All-In' policing model will result in the AFP becoming responsible for airport policing and security at Australia's 11 major airports.

This bill contains amendments that support the move towards an 'All-In' policing and security model. It amends two acts—the Commonwealth Places (Application of Laws) Act 1970 and the Australian Federal Police Act 1979—that impact on the powers of AFP members to investigate offences when committed at certain airports.

The amendments to the Commonwealth Places (Application of Laws) Act overcome a technical anomaly in the act that prevented the AFP from using some of their standard arrest and search powers for state offences that occur at the airports, which are classified as Commonwealth places.

For example, if an assault or theft occurs at Sydney or Melbourne airport, this is a state offence that applies as Commonwealth law because these are Commonwealth places. These amendments will ensure standard AFP powers—such as arrest and search—are available in response. Handling of these cases is also governed by protocols between the AFP and state and territory police.

The amendment to the AFP Act removes doubt as to the legal basis for AFP members to be appointed as members or special constables of state and territory police forces. The bill also makes clear the legal basis for AFP members to be appointed as members of police forces or other law enforcement agencies of foreign countries.

Conferral of special constable status is an important tool for cooperation between police forces, and gives a member of a force the powers of another police force, subject to appropriate controls and accountabilities.

Special arrangements will be required for Cairns Airport, which is not a Commonwealth place, and this has been raised with the Queensland government.

Conclusion

The government has moved to strengthen aviation security in Australia, through changes to the arrangements that are in place, through the funding that is provided, and through cooperation with other countries, states and territories, and the private sector.

This bill represents a further strengthening of Australia's aviation security regime and will ensure that Australia's law enforcement agencies are supported in their work to meet the complex challenges of policing in the airport environment.

I commend the bill to the House.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (12.17 pm)—I rise to speak on the Aviation Crimes and Policing Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 [2011]. The purpose of this bill is to strengthen the existing framework surrounding Australia's international and domestic aviation security regime by ensuring that aviation related crimes carry appropriate severe penalties and by making sure that an appropriate range of offences are applicable.

Large numbers of people pass through our airports every day. For example, Sydney airport is the busiest in Australia and handles approximately 30 million passengers each year. Of course, people in our profession are very well aware of the state of our airports. Such large volumes present potential targets for terrorism and other forms of organised crime, due to the number of people located in a very small area. Likewise, the high concentration of people on large airliners, the potential high death rate with attacks on aircraft and the ability to use a hijacked plane as a lethal weapon have proved an alluring target for terrorism over the years.

It is the role of the government to ensure that aviation security attempts to thwart would-be attackers from bringing weapons or bombs into the airport. Aviation security is designed to safeguard Australia's civil aviation operations against acts of unlawful terrorism. It is designed to protect the airport from attacks and criminal activity, to protect the aircraft from attack and to reassure the travelling public that they are safe.

As mentioned in the *Bills Digest*, since the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, aviation security, including at airports, has been a significant issue in Australia's antiterrorism and law enforcement efforts. To address the new and evolving security threats of the 21st century, the former coalition government invited aviation security expert Sir John Wheeler to undertake a review of aviation security in Australia. The subsequent Wheeler report, released in 2005, made 17 recommendations, including recommendations for regional airports. Following the report's release, the federal government implemented all 17 of those recommendations.

Under the amendments in this bill, the penalties in the act will fall within four tiers. The severity of the penalty in each tier corresponds with the type of offence falling within each tier. Tier 1, which provides for life imprisonment—the most severe maximum penalty—will continue to apply for offences such as hijacking or destroying an aircraft whilst it is in flight. The attempted terrorist bombing of the American airline flight NW253 would have fallen within that tier if it had occurred on an Australian interstate or overseas flight. Under tier 2, a maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment will apply to very serious offences that pose danger or cause harm to whole groups of people, such as endangering an aircraft whilst in flight. The offences in this tier have had their maximum penalties raised from either seven, 10 or 15 years. Under tier 3, a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment will apply to offences that are generally against aircraft or aviation environments, such as disrupting a major airport

or destroying its facilities. These offences currently carry maximum penalties of seven or 10 years. Finally, tier 4 provides for imprisonment for up to 10 years. This tier applies to offences such as hoaxes and taking control of an aircraft, which currently carry maximum penalties of two to 10 years. For example, making a bomb threat to an airport would constitute such an offence.

The amendments also support the move from the current unified policing model, which is the state and territory police and AFP hybrid model, to an 'all-in' policing and security model at airports whereby the AFP will be responsible for policing Australia's 11 major airports. Under these changes, the AFP will take full control of the community policing role at these 11 airports, replacing the hybrid model involving the AFP and state and territory police. The AFP will also move to a 'fully sworn' presence so that all AFP personnel deployed at an airport will have the same training and powers. The transition will be over a three- to five-year period. The 'all-in' model is an outcome recommended by the Federal Audit of Police Capabilities, which was conducted by Mr Roger Beale in 2009.

The coalition fully supports these measures, which are designed to ensure the safety and integrity of our airports and aviation facilities. We regard this legislation as carrying on the work of reform that was conducted during the course of the Howard government and that initially dealt with the increased threat level at our airports and on aeroplanes. Accordingly, we are pleased to support the passage of the bill through the House.

Mr LYONS (Bass) (12.22 pm)—I rise on this occasion to add my comments on the Aviation Crimes and Policing Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 [2011]. May I say from the outset that the government is strongly committed to strengthening aviation security in Australia. This commitment is the driver for these amendments. They come after a comprehensive review by the Attorney-General's Department. The purpose of the bill is to strengthen the existing legislative framework surrounding Australia's international and domestic aviation security regime. The government has enhanced the Australian Federal Police's role at Australia's 11 major airports, provided significant funding for a range of aviation security related initiatives and worked closely with the states and territories, other countries and the aviation sector. The government has also consulted with key stakeholders to make sure we get this right.

In the federal budget, the government provided \$759.4 million over the next four years for policing at Australian airports. The funding supports the AFP presence at Australia's 11 major airports, its intelligence gathering and investigation capability as well as its Regional Rapid Deployment Team capacity and Air Security Officer Program. On 9 February 2010 the Prime Minister announced a series of measures to strengthen international and domestic aviation security totalling \$200 million. These measures include \$17.8 million to increase the number of firearms and explosive detection dogs at major international airports by 50 per cent; \$12.3 million for 2010-11 to maintain the AFP presence at major airports; and \$24.9 million for Customs and Border Protection to undertake a further phase of the Enhanced Passenger Assessment and Clearance Program. This demonstrates the Labor government's commitment to aviation security. These are measures that can give Australians peace of mind.

Looking at the specifics of this legislation, the amendments in this bill include three new offences to be inserted in the act. The first new offence is assaulting a crew member, which will carry a maximum penalty of 10 years. The second, reckless endangerment of the safety of an aircraft, is an action likely to endanger life or cause serious harm. The third offence is di-

rected against having dangerous goods onboard an aircraft that are likely to endanger life or cause serious harm. This will carry a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment to reflect the seriousness of this offence.

The internal review by the Attorney-General's Department indicated that there are a number of penalties in the act as it stands that do not reflect the seriousness of these offences. For example, under the Criminal Code a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment could apply to a person who is found guilty of making threats to contaminate goods. In comparison, under the existing provisions of the Crimes (Aviation) Act, a person who makes a bomb threat could only be imprisoned for a maximum of two years. This is a very low penalty given the very serious disruption and potential danger that such a hoax could create—for example, if a flight is redirected as a result or if an airport has to be evacuated. The revised penalties are a very important factor in this bill and address the inconsistencies we currently face.

The penalties in the act have four distinct tiers ranging from life imprisonment for serious offences such as hijacking or destroying an aircraft in flight to tier 4, which includes general offences and much shorter imprisonment terms. Attacks and threats put lives at risk, cause great distress and impose unnecessary burdens on our aviation industry. This is why these arrangements are so important. These crimes not only cause great distress and inconvenience but can also compromise public safety. The Australian Federal Police, other agencies and the aviation sector continue to meet the complex challenges and threats, but they need to be supported by up-to-date laws with penalties that provide a deterrent and that recognise the seriousness of aviation related crimes. The AFP also need to be able to use their powers in the airport environment. As Minister Brendan O'Connor said in his second reading speech on these amendments:

The Australian Federal Police and other agencies continue to meet complex challenges and threats within the aviation environment. To do their work effectively, the AFP need to be supported by appropriate laws that provide deterrence and recognise the gravity of aviation-related crimes.

These changes do exactly that. This bill proposes a number of changes to the penalty provisions of the Crimes (Aviation) Act 1991. The proposed increases to the penalty provisions in the Crimes (Aviation) Act will ensure that the maximum penalties that could be applied to aviation related offences are consistent with the current criminal law benchmarks. They also ensure that the penalties that apply reflect the serious nature of the crimes. The new offences are designed to cover gaps in the coverage of the existing offences under the Crimes (Aviation) Act. These offences were widely supported by the aviation sector during the consultation process. These are important changes that should not be delayed.

On 18 December 2009 the Minister for Home Affairs announced the government's decision to accept the federal audit of police capabilities. The Beale review recommended a move to an 'all-in' policing model at Australia's 11 major airports. Under the new arrangements, the AFP will become responsible for policing and security at these airports. This new model will be implemented over a period of three to five years in close consultation with the states and territories. The proposals in this bill relating to AFP powers are designed to support the move to an all-in policing and security model by ensuring that the AFP have access to a full range of their powers when investigating offences committed at certain airports.

To put all of this into perspective, our airports are busy places. In 2009, 33 million passengers moved through Sydney airport and more than 24 million passed through Tullamarine

airport. We need to ensure the safety of workers and the people who pass through these airports. Clear, effective and strong laws are a key element in airport security. This amending legislation is crucial for Australian aviation security. The government's highest priority is the safety and security of Australians. It is vital that we remain vigilant and take the steps that are necessary to protect Australian citizens and Australian interests. I commend the bill to the House and encourage those opposite to do the same.

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (12.30 pm)—The Aviation Crimes and Policing Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 [2011] is a significant piece of legislation, aimed at securing Australia's aviation sector from criminal misbehaviour and providing a clearer and stronger legislative framework for the policing of such crimes. I rise to add my voice to the strong bipartisan support for these measures.

Firstly, the Aviation Crimes and Policing Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 [2011] provides for new and reviewed penalties for criminal acts at Australia's 11 major airports. Clearly, there is an imperative to investigate suspected crimes with efficiency and without undue obstructions to AFP personnel. However, quite obviously there is also a need to find a suitable balance between the need to investigate and the rights of lawful passengers travelling by air to be allowed passage without unnecessary delay and inconvenience. This bill finds the balance.

People are understandably concerned for their safety when travelling by air. I am sure that, for many Australians, the experience of air travel can at times be a stressful and harrowing experience. This is particularly the case for those people unaccustomed to regular flying. That is not to say that Australians ought to be fearful; we have very safe aviation security processes already in place. But the experience of air travel is often very different from the daily life experience of many passengers. When travelling domestically, Australians should rightly be given every reassurance that the government takes their safety seriously.

In order to provide this reassurance it is important that the penalties for aviation crimes reflect community expectations of the seriousness of offences committed. In his second reading speech, the Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information noted, from an internal review by the Attorney-General's Department, 'It is inappropriate that acts creating significant distress such as bomb threats should be punished under an offence providing for merely two years imprisonment.' In saying that, I recognise that oppressively harsh penalties are not desirable, either. Again, this bill's tiered approach to the classification of offences finds the necessary balance. No doubt there is a difference between acts of hijacking and the harm resulting from hoaxes, for example. While this is not to deny the considerable concern and inconvenience which such a hoax may cause, this tiered approach does reflect what I believe to be a gradation of seriousness in such acts.

In addition to the offence provisions I have already spoken about, this bill creates a changed framework for policing operations and security at these airports. While it is important not to embrace changed procedures for the sake of changing procedures, the support for these changes attests the quality of these reforms. These reforms follow the 2009 federal audit of police capabilities, headed by Roger Beale AO. I welcome these changed police arrangements. It involves granting additional functions to Australian Federal Police personnel at these 11 major airports, overhauling the previous unified policing model approach to airport polic-

ing. It reflects the national nature of the risk at hand and the priority which ought to be given to the efficient management of policing duties.

The application of this bill to the major 11 domestic airports has direct relevance to commercial airlines in my electorate of Wannon. In addition to instilling confidence in our aviation security measures Australia wide, Wannon residents can feel assured that security when flying between Wannon and Adelaide has been strengthened by this bill. Air travel is as important to the people of Wannon as it is to people in other regions and the major cities of Australia. Aviation provides opportunities for leisure and business as well as an important way that families across Australia can enjoy regular contact.

Airline security is an issue I take most seriously. This bill finds the necessary balance between the need to ensure confidence in Australia's airport security regime and the need to maintain penalties proportionate to the crimes concerned. I therefore have no hesitation in supporting these measures as appropriate in ensuring Australia's aviation security and ensuring that Wannon residents can fly securely to one of their key destinations.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I thank the minister for coming.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (12.35 pm)—The minister did not need to rush all that much, but it is good that he is backing me up here! I will always take these opportunities to speak on aviation security matters. Ever since I first graduated from the AFP College back in 1986 and then had postings with the AFP, which included at various times Sydney airport and then Perth airport, I have had a bit of an appreciation of some of the security issues in airports and the need for strong aviation security measures. So I will take this opportunity today to make some comments on those matters.

I would like to think, and I am sure, that aviation security has moved forward in leaps and bounds in the last 20 years. There is no doubt that it needed to do so in response to the threats that the world faces and that indeed Australia faces as well. When we had an AFP exercise back at the start of 1987 at Sydney airport, it was a very bizarre thing when people were rostered on for a no-notice security exercise. They turned out basically everyone they could get into uniform, so people were told several days before, 'Make sure you've got a uniform so that we can bus you out to the airport.' Maybe it was not very legitimate so far as the preparation for a no-notice exercise was concerned, but that was the way things happened in those days, in 1987. As I said, things have moved on.

I think things do need to move on, and I am sure that the minister will cover this to a degree today as well. The most concerning report today is from Sky News regarding those Australians or Australian residents who are currently missing, you might say—22 Australian citizens or residents have disappeared in Yemen in the last four months—and are strongly suspected of being in al-Qaeda training camps or in other camps to do with terrorist organisations in the subcontinent area. It is most concerning that we have traitors to this nation who are prepared to take up arms for all the bad things in the world. Of course, this is not the first time that this has occurred. I am sure that ASIO, ASIS, the government, of course, and—rest assured, I hope—all political sides have the right commitment to deal with those people when the time comes.

During my time in aviation security—from the absolute base level, you might say—in our day at Perth and Sydney airports we had patrol vehicles. We even had rostered locations so

that we knew that, no matter which terminal an incident might be in, there was always someone there, whether it was in a secure area or out in a public area. There were always going to be personnel there who could react to incidents. I know that back in 1987 I made two arrests, one in relation to the possession of cannabis at the security control point for the Perth domestic terminal, and the other incident regarded drink-driving in the car park—not exactly the big issues but things that we dealt with at the time. Following those arrests, we went to court to deal with those things. It was an onerous task, with a full brief of evidence required for what was really pretty basic work by community policing standards.

I cannot help but feel that the circle is being completed again following the 2009 review of airport security and that the AFP are once again back in complete control of the airports, with the exception of the joint policing and agency effort concerning intelligence and the serious investigations. The community policing role is back with the AFP in the 11 major airports throughout Australia. Under the provisions of the Aviation Crimes and Policing Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 [2011], in the future there will be joint aviation investigation and intelligence groups.

On the everyday policing responsibility, I have always believed that airport police need to have specific systems in place to facilitate the day-to-day processing of minor infringements, rather than have to go to court and produce that full brief of evidence I spoke about before. State police around the country probably feel that they labour under onerous responsibilities for the presentation of evidence—before magistrates particularly—and there is a need to try to streamline those. Especially in regard to the airports, it is important to have those processes in very good shape, but I am sure that the AFP in the modern age would have these basic considerations well and truly covered.

The other problem that I hope is covered concerns training. Although the AFP are the community police here in the ACT, I thought that sort of experience was lacking in the past in the federal airports. Certainly, when I was there, there were very few people who got transferred out of Canberra into the airport jobs, so a lot of people would spend almost their entire career in the AFP in one of the regions. For instance, in the Sydney eastern region there were some people who moved forward with the drug investigation and fraud squads, whilst others seemed to spend a lot of their time in the airports. In that uniformed role, there was not the frequency of criminal investigations that you would find in community policing in the cities by a state police force. The incidents were a little bit on the infrequent side, so there was a loss of continuity and a loss of experience—because incidents were fairly few and far between.

I would assume that the AFP has those sorts of considerations in place and that the influence and the training of the community-policing element of the AFP that exists here in Canberra would be able to make sure that the 11 major airports are well and truly covered by community-policing efforts. The point is that training is required, and then the maintenance of skills must occur. Therefore, there is a lot to be said for posting into airport positions a number of experienced community-policing sworn officers from the ACT. As I said before, that is something that I believe the AFP would cover in the modern age.

Being at the airport is one thing, but the police and, of course, Customs need the assets in order to be truly effective. They need access to both technology and traditional assets that are tried and true. In the reforms announced in December 2009, there were resources for the En-

hanced Passenger Assessment and Clearance program as well as additional resources for advanced data analysis and risk profiling, and additional cargo screening and screening at certain regional airports.

As I said, the processes for community policing need to be in place, but modern laws also need to be in place to meet the changing threat environment. It is therefore without doubt that enhanced legislation is welcomed in a bipartisan way. I am very much in favour of sending clear messages about offences against aviation. As the minister said in June 2010, making a bomb threat should have a greater penalty these days than just two years in jail. We certainly welcome that change. In fact, this bill introduces tiers of penalties based on the severity of the offence and ranging from 10 years in jail through to life imprisonment.

Given that I have probably exceeded the time that I originally indicated that I would take, I will be brief in summary. What appeals to me in this legislation and a number of reforms that have taken place over the last 10 years and in other legislation that has come before the parliament is that the types of offences and the penalties involved are very important to send a clear message of deterrence. At the same time, the assets, skills and experience of personnel on the ground need to make sure that not only is the deterrence of penalties in place but also the deterrence of the certainty of being caught. So the intelligence aspect and the ability of the uniform and the non-uniform personnel at the airports need to be ready to go and capable of detecting, making arrests and dealing with people whether they are national security traitors, like those who have gone off for training with al-Qaeda or other groups, or whether they are just troublemakers within the airport area. The capacity needs to be there so that these people are caught quickly and dealt with appropriately. I thank the House for this opportunity and I welcome the bill.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information) (12.46 pm)—I would like to thank the member for Cowan for his personal insights into the bill and the history of aviation security, and indeed I thank the member for Stirling for his support and the member for Wannan and the member for Bass for their contributions.

The government's highest priority is the safety and security of all Australians and we are committed to a strong and effective aviation security regime for Australia. The AFP and other law enforcement agencies continue to meet complex challenges and threats within the aviation environment. This bill will modernise the laws relevant to aviation and airports and complements a number of other initiatives that have already been announced and implemented in the broader aviation security field. I thank members once again for their contribution to the debate and for their support of this bill. I commend this bill to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I congratulate the minister on his expeditious delivery of that summing up.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that the bill be reported to the House without amendment.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010 [2011]

Debate resumed from 22 November 2010.

Second Reading

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information) (12.48 pm)—I present the explanatory memorandum to this bill and I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The bill strengthens law enforcement agencies' powers to gather, examine and use evidence to investigate and prevent the commission of criminal offences. It builds on measures in the two serious and organised crime acts passed by parliament last year. Before I outline the specific measures in the bill, let me put these legislative changes in context.

The Gillard government is taking concerted action to detect, disrupt and deter organised crime. Organised crime costs the Australian community an estimated \$15 billion each year. As was recognised in the first National Security Statement, it is also a significant threat to national security.

The government developed the first Organised Crime Strategic Framework to ensure law enforcement and intelligence agencies work better together to combat organised crime. The framework recognised that we must ensure that our law enforcement agencies have the powers they need to tackle the flexible, evolving and resilient organised criminal networks operating across state, territory and national borders.

The bill enhances the powers of the Australian Federal Police. It also provides the Australian Crime Commission Chief Executive Officer with powers, similar to those of the Australian Federal Police Commissioner, to deal appropriately with staff who engage in serious misconduct or corruption.

ACC Act amendments**Dismissal powers**

Given the powers that ACC staff are able to exercise and the information that they have access to, it is important that this agency is able to deal effectively with any ACC staff member who engages in serious misconduct and corruption.

This bill will amend the ACC Act to provide the ACC CEO with similar powers that the AFP Commissioner has to deal with police who engage in serious misconduct or corruption.

The proposed changes will address instances where there has been a serious abuse of power, a serious dereliction of duty, or any other seriously reprehensible act by a staff member of the Australian Crime Commission. The changes are not designed to replace the usual public service processes for dealing with misconduct, but are only to be utilised in exceptional circumstances where the normal processes are not appropriate given the serious nature of the misconduct or corruption.

These amendments will ensure the ACC CEO is able to protect the reputation of the organisation and to properly deal with staff who threaten the ability of the ACC to carry out its key law enforcement functions.

The bill will require the ACC CEO to report to the minister and the ACC Board each time the new power is used. This will ensure that the minister and the board have an appropriate level of oversight of the use of the power by the ACC.

The making of the declaration will be a reviewable decision under the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977, to ensure the correct use of the power.

The bill will also allow the ACC to use already lawfully intercepted telecommunications information to investigate members of staff alleged to have engaged in misconduct or corrupt behaviour, consistent with powers currently available to the AFP.

Telecommunications interception warrants will still only be available for the investigation of a serious offence, which is generally an offence that carries a penalty of at least seven years imprisonment. The amendments will only allow information already lawfully obtained in the course of investigating a serious offence to be used to investigate the misconduct of a member of the staff of the ACC if it is also relevant for that purpose.

The bill requires the government to review the new provisions after two years of operation to ensure they have operated as the government intended, to allow the CEO of the ACC to deal appropriately with the most serious cases of misconduct and corruption.

ACC examiners

The bill will also amend the ACC Act to allow for the appointment of part-time examiners, consistent with the Organised Crime Strategic Framework goal of ensuring law enforcement agencies are appropriately equipped to carry out their tasks.

The ACC currently has four full-time examiners. The need for an examiner, however, can fluctuate depending on the status of a particular investigation or operation.

The appointment of both full-time and part-time examiners will allow for greater flexibility in the appointment and utilisation of examiners. The amendments will also ensure broader geographic cover of examiners as part-time examiners may be appointed in different regions of Australia.

The amendments also include appropriate safeguards to guard against any conflicts that may arise between a person's role as an examiner and other employment they may engage in.

Crimes Act amendments

The bill will also improve the ability of law enforcement officials to gather and examine evidence in light of rapid technological advancements. The bill includes a number of amendments to address operational impediments identified by the Australian Federal Police.

Searches of persons under warrant

The Commonwealth has comprehensive provisions in place to enable effective and efficient searches of electronic equipment found during searches of premises such as a house or office under warrant.

To address the increasing availability and use of portable electronic and data storage devices such as laptop computers, mobile phones and USB drives, the bill includes amendments to help police deal effectively with these items if they are located during a search of a person under warrant.

A key improvement will be the ability to seek an order from a magistrate requiring a person to assist with accessing data from equipment moved or seized under a warrant in relation to a person. For example, if police were investigating online child pornography, they could apply for an order requiring a suspect to provide their password or assist with transforming encrypted data into an intelligible form. Data may only be accessed to determine whether it constitutes evidential material.

Orders

The bill will also ensure that a seized item or document produced under the Crimes Act does not need to be returned if it would be likely to be used in the commission of a terrorist act, a terrorism offence or a serious offence.

The bill will empower magistrates to make orders preventing the return of such items or documents in limited circumstances. Such orders can currently only be made for items seized under terrorism related stop and search powers in the Crimes Act. These amendments will ensure the Crimes Act deals consistently with all items seized and documents produced.

The bill also improves safeguards relating to orders in relation to seized things and documents produced.

Before applying for an order, an officer will be required to take reasonable steps to discover who has an interest in the thing or document and notify them of the proposed application. The magistrate must then allow a person with an interest to appear and be heard in determining the application.

Fingerprint and photograph amendments

The bill will also amend the Crimes Act to provide the AFP with a standing power to take fingerprints and photographs of persons in lawful custody. This will bring the Commonwealth into line with the majority of the states and territories by allowing the AFP to take fingerprints and photographs as part of the process of dealing with an arrested person.

The amendments will provide police with an efficient and reliable way of confirming the identity of suspects to assist in the management of suspects and offenders. It will also improve processes for establishing and maintaining records of arrested persons, which will in turn ensure that these records are admissible in court proceedings.

The amendments will only apply where the person has been arrested in relation to an offence that is punishable by a term of imprisonment of 12 months or more. This will ensure that fingerprints or photographs can only be taken in relation to offences which are generally considered to be serious or indictable and not in relation to minor offences.

Existing protections in the Crimes Act will continue to cover arrested persons, including provisions that ensure that the taking of identification material is properly authorised and that any material taken is destroyed if the person is not charged with an offence.

These amendments will not apply to other forms of identification material such as DNA.

AFP special payments

The bill will also amend the Australian Federal Police Act 1979 to allow the AFP Commissioner to authorise a payment in special circumstances that arise out of, or relate to, a person's engagement as an AFP employee. For example, where an AFP member is injured in the course of work while deployed overseas, the commissioner would be able to authorise the payment

of costs involved in their spouse travelling overseas. The commissioner would also authorise a payment to the family of an AFP member who dies in the course of work.

This amendment will bring the AFP into line with the Commonwealth Public Service, and would avoid the delays presently faced by AFP employees when applying for payments.

Payments under the new AFP provision would be subject to the same conditions and limits as those authorised under the Public Service Act provision. Specifically, the payments would be limited to \$100,000, and would be subject to any conditions attached by the AFP Commissioner.

Conclusion

The reforms in this bill reflect the government's commitment to strengthening our agencies' capabilities to fight serious and organised crime.

This bill builds on a range of measures the government has implemented to prevent, disrupt and investigate organised criminal activity.

I commend this bill to the House.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.58 pm to 4.01 pm

CONDOLENCES

Australian Natural Disasters

Debate resumed.

Ms COLLINS (Franklin—Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services) (4.01 pm)—Over the past month or so we have seen some devastating weather effects wreaking havoc on the Australian summer. We have had the floods in the Carnarvon and Gascoyne region in Western Australia; and the Rockhampton and Emerald floods. And who can forget that dreadful day of the 'inland tsunami', as it is now being called, in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley? We have had the Ipswich and Brisbane floods; floods in New South Wales and in my own home state of Tasmania; floods in Victoria; storms in Victoria, the Northern Territory and New South Wales; some very serious bushfires in Perth; and, of course, Cyclone Yasi.

As the PM so eloquently put it, 'We have had our summer of horror.' It has been an incredibly emotional and difficult time for all those affected. People have lost their homes, their businesses, their employment and, more importantly, their loved ones. We all know how harsh the Australian environment can be. Just two days ago we had the second commemoration of the Victorian bushfires, and they immediately spring to mind when you think about Australia's history of natural disasters. We have had more than our fair share. But these past weeks have seen a convergence of the floods, the cyclones and the bushfires at such an immense level and so close together that each disaster becomes more and more shocking to watch.

I know the people of my home state of Tasmania have been feeling great empathy for their fellow Australians as they deal with the ramifications of these floods. The people of Franklin would want me to extend my sincere sympathies to the families and friends of those who have been lost. Tasmanians have been fortunate in that we have had very few natural disasters, but whenever we have needed a hand from our fellow Australians it was always there. So at this time we want to lend a hand. We want to stand tall with all those affected and assist where we can. I know many Tasmanians have donated money to the disaster appeals. I know our SES

volunteers have been to Queensland and assisted where possible. And, as I speak today, we have our firefighters ready to fly to WA should the exhausted fire crews over there need some support. Tasmanians have been playing a hand.

In my role as Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services last week it was my very great privilege to visit the communities of Toowoomba, Ipswich and Brisbane. I saw firsthand what these communities are experiencing—the incredibly difficult conditions they face as they clean up their homes and their businesses and pick up and move on with their lives. I spent some time with my colleague the member for Blair, talking to people affected. It was very clear that he has been and still is supporting and fighting for his local community.

I was pleased on that day to be able to announce that the Gillard government would provide additional emergency supplementary relief funding of over \$1 million. This funding will be offered to organisations in flood affected areas of Queensland that currently have emergency relief services operating and are able to quickly deliver more help to those in need.

We certainly met a lot of people doing it tough in Queensland, but we also saw some great community service providers across the flood affected areas who are doing an amazing job supporting those who need it—organisations like Lifeline Community Care; Mission Australia; the Salvation Army; Centacare; and Lifeline Darling Downs and South West Queensland, based in Toowoomba. These organisations have been a focal point for the community and they will be pivotal as the recovery efforts in the coming weeks, months and years are undertaken.

We heard some remarkable stories—stories of children who are experiencing trauma; children who, after the floods, started to wet their beds at night; children who were frightened as they heard about Cyclone Yasi. There is much work to do. We have heard about marriage break-ups already and the increase in domestic violence as the stress on individuals increases. The people in these community service organisations, both the paid staff and the volunteers, have done a tremendous job. I want to place on record my thankyou to them all for not just doing their job but doing it even though they themselves sometimes were affected by the floods. There were some workers who had lost their own homes but who continued to volunteer and turn up every day to help others. It really does need to be put on the record.

It is great to hear about the courage and the spirit in which Australians have worked together in these disasters. I believe it is reflective of the mood across the country. Certainly it is reflective of the mood in my own electorate. We have seen Australians have community barbecues, raffles, concerts and sporting matches to support our fellow Australians who are doing it tough. If that does not make you proud to be an Australian, I do not know what will. We know that rebuilding infrastructure is one thing, and we have a plan to do that, but rebuilding lives is quite another. The emotional impacts will take years to resolve and those affected need to know we will all be there with them as they do that. Australians have a proud history of supporting each other during tragedies such as we have just experienced and I have no doubt this will continue to be the case.

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (4.06 pm)—Obviously I do want to talk about my own region and about the agricultural situation around Australia, as part of my portfolio, which is very much agriculture and in this case food security. It has been an extraordinary few months. Without doubt, last year started off as a big year for eastern Australia and south-eastern Australia, with the biggest cropping season ever in my lifetime. Up until middle or late October,

the rain, by and large, was a very welcome event. But my part of the world is I guess where all this really started—rain, flood and eventually cyclone, and flood again in Victoria last weekend. It was about moisture and it was about water. Basically, unless you were in the path of a flood, the rain had pretty much the same effect as flood itself—there was just too much water. We had 10 years of the worst drought in my lifetime, and droughts always finish with a bang when they finish, so I suppose we should not be too surprised that the biggest drought also had the biggest ending, and what an ending it has been.

The Murray-Darling system, by and large, has been replenished, though not quite everywhere. The biggest dam in Australia is still not full. In my area, the Oberon Dam is not full and Wyangala Dam is not yet full. But the system has been replenished and it has been done with one heck of a bang. As I said, this started off as a rain event in my part of the world—the central west of New South Wales. Towards the end of October, it rained and it pretty much rained through November, off and on in December and even through into the new year. The initial effect was to very much downgrade the crops in the central west of New South Wales—Parkes, Forbes and, even earlier, Nyngan. Even before it had started in that part of the world, the crops had pretty much been shot and sprung. The harvest was still a very big harvest. The saving grace has been that it was such a big harvest, even though the price was down. But it was not just the cereal harvest. It went through to Orange and Young, further south of us, and finally to Bathurst et cetera. The cereal crops had so much rain they shot in the head, they sprung and they went down. A lot of barley could not be harvested at all. Southern Queensland was the first to be affected. Most of the crops there got harvested but some, on the heavy, flat country, did not and nor did they in northern New South Wales.

Horticulture also suffered badly and cherries just blew up. At first growers thought they would not be able to harvest the early cherries, and then it was the lot that they could not harvest. The vineyards were very much affected by so much rain. In fact, a few weeks ago, they found that there were no chemicals left in the country to spray for things like downy mildew. That has continued right through, encompassing most of eastern Australia. It was not just the obvious losses in agriculture. This sort of wet brings in disease and brings in insects so that herbicides and various other chemicals have to be used ad nauseam or, in the case of horticulture, cherries and various other fruits soak up so much water that they just blow up. Vegetables become so downgraded that no-one wants to put them on the shelves.

Very early on, with one exception, every single local government area in my electorate of Calare became a natural disaster area. As I said, in the Parkes-Forbes area, crops were lost or very seriously downgraded. As you moved further east, the damage in Cabonne, which was probably the most affected area, included lost roads. There were approaches to bridges where, although the bridges were standing, on each side of them the roads were just cut about. The town and the oval were isolated, basically, for a couple of weeks because it took the council so long to repair the approaches to two bridges. Eugowra, a very small town, was in the news very early on because it got flooded about three times within a couple of weeks. The town was split. Thankfully, with one exception, we did not lose any lives in our region. One week before her 45th wedding anniversary, Denise Brownhill, one of our old assistants at Parkes, drowned when she tried to cross a path of water in the Parkes region. We were devastated by that, but as a region we have been lucky as far as those things go. We all sympathise with her family.

Talking about the incredible events in Brisbane, I want to briefly mention a gentleman called James Perry, who was one of the casualties in the Lockyer Valley. His wife, Jenny, and her family come from Orange. I know that is just one family out of a lot of families, but she is a local from my region who has been through an incredible situation and her husband is not coming home any more. She and her child were very lucky to survive.

My region has had enormous agricultural losses and enormous local government losses, particularly because of damage to roads. As early as months before that, Lithgow had had a landslide because of the rain which was up towards Capertee, which was going to cost a lot of money to deal with. Some local governments, two or three months before, had spent a lot of money on roadworks, which really was wasted because the rain just ripped it all out. Nothing destroys roadworks like consistent rain, which even digs holes in the bitumen. It is something I have not seen before and I do not think many have.

Much of our area was affected—a lot more than most of Australia but obviously not nearly as much as the lower areas, and neither the Lachlan in the south of my electorate nor the Macquarie in the north flooded to the extent that it was dangerous. It caused inconvenience, it caused flooding, but in the grand scheme of things it was quite doable, to put it mildly. But everyone had their issues and certainly there was serious financial loss. Despite all that, when the incredible events started happening around Central Queensland and Bundaberg and then in Toowoomba right through to Brisbane, the businesses, schools and local governments in my electorate raised money not for our own area but for the people of the Lockyer Valley. I am very proud of the people of my electorate. Les and Cheryl Birdsall, two very good friends of mine who own the Telegraph Hotel in Molong, at their own expense brought in a heap of gear for kids and families. One Sunday about three weekends ago, and at their own expense, they put on this day and held auctions and all these things. That money was not to be spent locally; it was for the Queensland flood appeal. The schools, local government and all these people did that, and it was pretty damned good.

Over the last month as part of my responsibility I have visited the flood areas in Queensland and in New South Wales, and earlier Warren Truss and I went to Wagga and Dubbo after the rain events—which actually started in October—in December, when it was apparent how heavy the crop losses were. Late last week I spent quite a few days in Victoria around the Loddon and Campaspe, and on the weekend down the rain came again at Mildura and various other places. I guess we hoped that we were going to have a little bit of respite for a while, and now we have got fires in WA.

The losses to agriculture are just incredible. From talking to the locals and various industry bodies like the banana people, sugar cane growers, the various state bodies and ministers and shadow ministers, in the three main eastern states estimates are that losses are probably around \$2 billion. In New South Wales it is mostly loss of income and in Queensland and Victoria it is probably more fifty-fifty infrastructure and income. When you go to places like Theodore in Queensland—who got belted with floods in March last year and had serious infrastructure losses then—you find blokes like one fellow I talked to who had spent almost half a million dollars since March last year getting ready for this one, because he lost infrastructure last time; everything he had done was wiped out. He had lost his whole crop. It looked like it had been defoliated. Almost all the cotton crop around Central Queensland did. The irrigation did, because it got flooded. Cotton does not have to be underwater for long. This is

very high input cost. On top of the loss of the income and the inputs was the infrastructure. This bloke had spent nearly half a million dollars last year; all that had gone, plus he lost all his pumps—and that was very common in the area—and his off-river storages. The water just came in on the wrong side and then burst out and took the storages. So heaven knows what sort of losses people like that are up for.

But human nature is an incredible thing. Theodore is a town that came out of irrigation; it did not exist once, but it is probably the oldest cotton area in Australia. Within a couple of days, all those cotton farmers who had suffered that incredible loss—not just income but, as I said, infrastructure—had ignored their own problems, got their tractors, their pumps and their tanks, dragged them into Theodore and helped the locals clean out their houses. Half of them were on stilts, but they still went under. They just hosed them out. They just ignored their own troubles and went out and helped the locals deal with their house situation. So human nature is a pretty good thing when you get right down to it.

Actually, that is where I was when Toowoomba copped it, then the Lockyer Valley and subsequently Brisbane. When we were travelling between Theodore and Biloela, late on the Monday, Ken's staffer who was with him knew one of the mayors in that area. We had heard about the rain, and no-one realised the extent of it then. He rang up this bloke, who had just gone across a crossing, just below Toowoomba, which was under a couple of inches of water, and while he was driving over it he got hit by seven feet of water—bang! He was still shaky on the phone.

I do not think we can comprehend it. I certainly cannot. I am a bush boy. I have lived inland my whole life, out in the semi-arid country. You just do not expect something like that to hit that far inland—I think Toowoomba is around 80 miles inland—in our country, certainly not that far south. Knowing country people as I do—and, to me, that is almost rural—I shudder to think how long it will take those communities, which are very close communities, to deal with their issues. I think we will all plug in for them for a long time.

To get back to the overall effect of the losses in Central Queensland—and by that I mean the potential losses—that is where a lot of New South Wales, not to mention South-East Queensland, get their winter vegetables and fruit from. They get them from that part of the world. So, unless the growers can get back on their feet and get settled before then, it is going to be a little different this winter. I hope not. Let us hope that they can deal with it.

The one thing I find, whether I talk to the northern cane growers and banana growers or the dairy farmers way down south in Victoria, is that they keep asking, 'Is the government going to provide the interest rate subsidy?' It might be a drought thing, but the drought basis was a one-in-25-year occurrence before you got Exceptional Circumstances—by inference, the interest rate subsidy. We are talking about a one-in-50- or, more particularly, a one-in-100-years circumstance, so I do not think there should be too much of a moral problem for any government in looking upon this in the same way that you do drought.

As I said, these people, most of whom have serious debt after a decade of drought, need to be able to deal with their banking. The banks, by and large, I think have been pretty good, but people have this debt. They have to be able to separate their minds and be allowed to deal with the debt they already have before they sit down and try to deal with the infrastructure problem they have to get over now to go on with next year's planting, next year's crop and, in the case of fruit and vegetables, one hopes this winter's crop. It is an enormous issue.

How they personally feel about it all is a shock to the system. It is not the kind of shock fire gives; it is different to that, but it takes longer for what you have lost and what you have potentially lost to sink in. The only good thing as a farmer is that at least the ground is going to take a long while to dry out, and we need moisture in the ground to grow anything, whether it is to regrow or whatever we do.

I could go on about this for a long time. I will not. I will just say that the government and the opposition have to realise that, after a decade of the worst drought in my lifetime—and I am 60 years old—people have now had the worst natural disaster in their lifetimes, and it is very much an exceptional circumstance. It will be dealt with, in a productive sense, only by money and, yes, by strong will and hard work. But they have always had that. I do not care whether you are a banana grower or a sugar grower in the north, a dairy man in the south or anybody in between—as I said, horticulture has been hurt; wine cultivation has been hurt; everything has been hurt—this is about water rather than floods, because rain has exactly the same effect. Even without what has happened in WA or Tasmania or anywhere else, I think we are looking at a \$6 million issue for the agriculture industry to deal with.

I am very proud of the people my area. They have their troubles, but they recognise that other people are far worse off at the moment. I am very proud of the agriculture industry because I have not heard anyone say, 'That's it; I'm out.' People sometimes have to go to the wall because, financially, that is it. But I do not think that the spirit of the Australian agriculture industry is broken any more than I think that the people who live in the Lockyer or anywhere else are going to call it quits. They are not. But I do believe that as a parliament, whether in government or in opposition, we have to recognise that there are limits after a decade of drought and now this.

And we should not be surprised. We may have been surprised by what happened in the Lockyer Valley. But the longer the drought goes on the harder it is going to be to get out of it. And people cannot get out of it on their own, for the most part. I would certainly say that as a parliament, not just as a government or as an opposition, in the same way that we work together when lives have been lost, such as when Australian lives are lost overseas while doing their duty, we have to look upon the agricultural industry at the moment as being in that plight. Thank you.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (4.27 pm)—I too would like to support this condolence motion. Madam Deputy Speaker D'Ath, in late December 2010 and into early 2011, significant flooding occurred in your home state of Queensland. Like many others, I watched in horror day in, day out as our television sets showed towns being engulfed by water. As you would appreciate, it dominated the news, both print and electronic media, as people were transfixed, watching in disbelief. To some extent it is a little reminiscent of what occurred two years ago in Victoria: Monday was the anniversary of the bushfires. As one of my sons pointed out to me, watching the flood coverage he felt the same wave of emotion that he experienced when the twin towers went down.

This is something that has had such an impact on all of us. I think the member for Calare is right that floods will occur from time to time. But sometimes they happen when you cannot appreciate them or you are not prepared, and sometimes—as has clearly occurred in this instance—they lead to outright devastation. That is not what we normally talk about when we talk about floods. The Queensland floods are now being seen as this country's worst national

disaster. We saw it unfold in front of our eyes, so it is only right that it has had such an impact on the national psyche, and I would like to talk a little bit about how that is reflected in our communities.

In late December we saw the disaster unfold. We were hoping, at least coming up to New Year's Day, that that was last year and we were looking forward to the sunshine—but that just did not happen. All up, 35 people lost their lives from late November through to the conclusion of the flood situation. What occurred on 10 January with the flash flooding throughout the Lockyer Valley was called—I do not know who coined the phrase; I had never heard it before—an inland tsunami. How accurate! Again, it defied belief. We have heard the horrific stories, such as of the young fellow who rescued his sister by putting her up in the roof, while his mother and father vanished. It became very real to us all of a sudden. Courtesy of modern media, we become and feel part of the situation.

My heart goes out to all those families who lost loved ones and whose loved ones are missing. Many people in Queensland stared at their houses realising that their life's work and a lifetime's worth of memories were gone. It is very hard to contemplate that. Yet the people of Queensland showed enormous courage and strength. They came together as an extended family and lent emotional and physical support to one another, particularly those who lost the most.

Over that period of time, Madam Deputy Speaker D'Ath, I had the opportunity to speak to you on a number of occasions in Queensland and I know the efforts that you were going to personally to help others in your community. It did not matter on what side of politics we were, most of us had the opportunity to talk to people who were involved and we know the work that was being undertaken. Differences have been set aside and people were, and are, united in a common interest to rebuild. Some of that rebuilding will be of infrastructure but a lot of the effort will go to rebuilding lives and communities.

I have great respect and admiration for our Queenslanders, though I may not show it all that much in the rugby league season. The strength that I have witnessed—the resolve, the commitment and the sheer stoic resolution of the people of Queensland not to be beaten—is something to be admired. I would also like to acknowledge the heroic and selfless work undertaken by the men and women of the police and the various emergency services, both the paid and voluntary services, and by the military personnel. Many risked their lives to battle the waters to rescue fellow Australians. The Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, the Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh, my colleagues from, I emphasise, both sides of the parliament that I have had the opportunity to talk to over that period, and the local mayors and councillors showed a commitment and a resolve in the face of what is now seen as Australia's worst natural disaster—a resolve which the rest of us can only stand and be humbled by. When the events came without warning, we saw that the authorities, the police and the SES acted immediately. Where events could be predicted, they worked tirelessly to ensure all that could be done was done to minimise the damage to property and communities and to prepare communities for the onslaught. Right across Australia, and internationally as well, people were asking what they could do to help.

As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I live in what is, according to the ABS, the most multicultural electorate in the country. I would like to take a bit of time to explain how it impacted on them and what they did. The Fowler community were no different to residents of

any other area. They certainly were affected. They were glued to their televisions. They rolled their sleeves up very quickly to get involved and do what was necessary. When Premier Bligh said, 'What we need is help and financial help,' they did that.

I was very touched by a comment by the head organiser for the Golden Heart 2 Heart charity dinner, Dr Vinh Binh Lieu, who advised me that there is a very famous Vietnamese saying that goes something like this: 'When you eat the fruit, have regard for those who planted it.' He told me that, a little over 35 years ago, Australia opened its arms and provided protection and support for the people of Vietnam who were escaping the tyranny of communism, and now, seeing Australia in trouble, it was the responsibility of the Vietnamese community to give something back. The event that he organised one Saturday evening about two or three weeks ago was a great success. It raised \$145,000. I would like to acknowledge all the 10 associations that formed the organising committee. Special thanks must go to Lim Chieu, the owner of Maxims wedding reception and function centre, who not only donated his centre but also provided the staff and all the food free of cost for the event.

I also acknowledge Andrew and Kim Tang and their daughter Katie, who own Danielle Fashion, who donated \$7,000, which was half the profits from the weekend takings of their shop in Cabramatta.

The Vietnamese religious leaders have asked that people be generous, and they have been. Father Paul Van Chi called upon the Vietnamese Catholic community in New South Wales, and they raised \$40,000 from a collection for the Premier's Disaster Relief Appeal. The Phuoc Hue Buddhist temple is also raising money for the Queensland flood appeal and is hosting a massive charity luncheon.

Vietnam Sydney Radio, who I have had the opportunity to speak to, started a phone-in, and in one week they raised \$40,000 for the appeal. The New South Wales VCA committee has organised a fundraising dinner which will be held on 18 February. Special thanks go to the owners of the Crystal Palace Function Centre, who are donating the centre, the staff and the food, with all moneys raised going to Queensland flood relief.

Vietnamese Community in Australia were also actively fundraising over the three-day Tet festival last weekend, which was very hot. They were out fundraising the whole time, notwithstanding the 42-degree heat. Their organiser said to me, 'This is something that we need to do to show the people of Queensland that it is our turn to give.'

Vietnam Vision, a group of doctors that provide medical services to underprivileged people in Vietnam, put on a barbecue last Sunday in Cabramatta. Just on that Sunday afternoon, they raised \$5,000.

The East Timorese Chinese community also had their annual New Year's celebration over the weekend. The event was organised by their president, John Phillip Jong, who decided everything that was raised would go to the Queensland flood appeal. They raised \$10,500 that evening.

The Cambodian community, which I should have mentioned a little earlier, put on a charity function in Cabramatta and raised \$63,500. Special thanks go to Ms Thida Yang from the Salvation and Cambodian Culture Association and Ms Lina Tjoeng from the Khmer Community of New South Wales for organising such a successful function, along with about 15 other Cambodian associations, which I am just not able to mention here at the moment.

During the Cardinal Stepinac Australia Day Appeal, the Croatian community raised \$30,000. Special thanks go to Matt Smolcic, the Cardinal Stepinac Village CEO, for what they have done in that respect.

The youth of the area have also been heavily involved, with the Fairfield-Cabramatta Police Citizens Youth Club raising significant money through a barbecue. I thank the organiser of that, Tony Fornasier, and all the young people who participated.

The New South Wales Indo-China Chinese Association held a New Year's celebration lunch on the weekend, which I attended. I thank the president, Mr To Ha Huynh, and Fairfield councillor Mr Dennis Huynh. Again, they decided to donate everything they raised, which was \$20,000. It has all gone to the Queensland Premier's Disaster Relief Appeal Fund. I thank all those groups for their generosity. It shows that we in Sydney—or New South Wales, or anywhere else in Australia—do not just say, 'That was bad, but that's Queensland's issue.' Everybody, including the newest of our Australians, decided it was their issue. They see themselves as fellow Australians, and when the chips were down it was their responsibility—and, as they put it to me, their obligation—to help.

In closing, my thoughts are with the families of Queensland. It is just so cruel that Mother Nature has rendered this blow to the Queensland community. The suffering that has been occasioned through the flooding and the cyclone is something for which, unless you are there, you do not have the same degree of appreciation. But we can all feel what it does to the community. I know that the Prime Minister is resolved to rebuild Queensland, and I strongly believe that we as a government will do everything we can do to support Queensland in its time of need. The people of Fowler feel the pain of those people in Queensland. In my diverse community we will continue to do what we can to show our support for Queenslanders, because we too are Australian.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (4.41 pm)—Madam Deputy Speaker D'Ath, I understand that as a Queensland member your electorate was not untouched but that you and your residents regard yourselves as fortunate in comparison to the travails felt by others.

Just over two years ago I stood in the centre of what is East Creek, Toowoomba, to begin the coalition's Murray-Darling Basin tour. At that stage East Creek was little more than a storm drain with a few puddles of water in it. East Creek was, as so many Australians now know, the epicentre on the western side of the ranges of the great torrents and inland tsunami which ripped apart the heart of much of Queensland. On the eastern side, of course, Grantham and Murphy's Creek witnessed extraordinary tragedy and untold and unspeakable damage. But to have stood in a place such as East Creek, to have seen a part of Australia which was simply bone dry, to have at the time done a video blog which remains on my site today about it being the headwaters of the Murray-Darling Basin, to acknowledge and recognise the challenges that it faced and then, just over two years later, to recognise that this very selfsame spot was witness to the extraordinary scenes which travelled around the world—of vehicles, of trees and, above all else, of humanity being transported down that wave of raging water—is very humbling.

We know that the people of Toowoomba, the people of Grantham and the people of Murphy's Creek have been the victims of nature's most savage work. It is nobody's fault. It was fast, rapid, dramatic and extraordinary in its consequence. On behalf of the people of my electorate of Flinders—the Mornington Peninsula, Western Port, the Koo-Wee-Rup swamp—

which has had its own, albeit much lesser, travails—and the Bass Coast, I convey our support, our sympathy and our resolve to assist in the pathway forward.

These Queensland floods were, in so many ways, symptomatic of Australian history. They replicated that which has occurred previously. We have had previous tragedies and we will have future tragedies. From each one of these experiences, it is hoped that we learn, make things better and improve. The result of the 1974 Brisbane flood was Wivenhoe Dam both in its primary capacity and in its overflow capacity, designed precisely for events such as this. There can be no doubt that Brisbane, which suffered so grievously, would have suffered far worse had there been no Wivenhoe Dam. The nature of the operation process will be subject to inquiry, but had there been no dam there would undoubtedly have been a far worse outcome. Whether the outcome could have been better still is a matter for others to debate and discuss in coming months.

I want to make a few very brief points. Firstly, there was a terrible tragedy and we all play a part in having to deal with it. But this tragedy, which covered Toowoomba, Granville, Murphys Creek, Ipswich, the suburbs of Brisbane, Rockhampton and inland towns such as Dalby and St George, was accompanied by the very best we could ever hope for from the Australian spirit. My brother John, who lives in Brisbane, was fortunate that he and his family lived a little bit higher than the floods. They avoided the effect of the floods. He said the outpouring of humanity was one of the most positive experiences of his life. He said it was impossible not to be part of it—this volunteer army that took to the streets. He and his family played a very small part, in his words, and he wishes that he could have done more. But I suspect he did a lot more than he acknowledges. That was the common human response which defines who we are as Australians today. It makes me very proud and I know it makes the people on the Mornington Peninsula very proud of who we are—that this volunteer army emerged.

The spirit of Brisbane is something that will be talked about 50 and 100 years from now. People will invoke it. I hope they invoke it to good purpose and never for partisan purposes. I believe that that will be the case because it will be a symbol of recovery, response and, above all else, the common humanity which represents the absolute best of us. The spirit of Brisbane and the spirit of the inland towns—whether it is Theodore, Toowoomba or up the coast to areas affected by Cyclone Yasi, as well as Townsville, Cairns, Tully and Innisfail—is a guiding light for the way in which we have to try to live our lives. It is a sense of the very best generosity and humanity that is within our spirits.

It was also accompanied by the extraordinary work of the formal services: the volunteers of the SES who have spent hundreds of hours working; the volunteers who became attached to units such as that, bringing trucks or mops and brooms; and the police, ambulance and fire brigade workers who faced extraordinary shocks and risks and who carried on as resolute rocks for everybody. Sometimes we as a community can be a little bit cynical about our police force. We should not be. The way in which they conducted themselves puts them right at the forefront of community workers for any society in any place around the world.

We then go forward to the role of the military. The military—hundreds and even thousands of mostly young Australians who put themselves in harm's way and waded through the mud in search of the lost day upon day upon day upon day—have again shown that we have defence forces that are also civil defence forces. In times of need and crisis, their role is profound.

I also acknowledge that all three tiers of government performed wonderfully. I think that we should be generous and recognise that it is not always thus. I have many great friends in America, but I know America—I have lived there—and we saw the chaos and breakdown of society post Hurricane Katrina and the relative failure of the state apparatus to deal with that problem. Neither the society nor the state apparatus failed us in Australia. The Brisbane City Council, the relevant local councils right throughout Queensland, the state government, the state opposition, the federal government, the federal opposition and all of the local members represented their areas with extraordinary alacrity, and they did it with compassion, decency and professionalism. So to everyone involved there has been great loss and great tragedy, but there has also been a sense of our better selves on display both to ourselves and to the rest of the world, and for that we will be better human beings. But, for those who were close to them, those who are no longer with us can never be replaced.

Having said this about Queensland, I say that in my own home state of Victoria we are so very fortunate that the great floods which affected us have not had the same human toll or human impact. They have had a major economic impact, but that is a gross state product issue. At the micro level of farmers and shopkeepers, it can be profound. Many farmers have seen their best crop in a decade gone. I, along with my colleagues Bruce Billson, Dan Tehan, Senator Scott Ryan and Alan Tudge, visited shopkeepers in towns such as Skipton. We spent half a day there and half a day in Beaufort helping the residents to clean up Sir Henry Bolte's home, and then we worked with the residents and the shopkeepers. The shopkeepers had broken hearts because this was the second flood that they had faced and some of them felt that there was no way back. It was about giving people a sense of hope, of opportunity and of possibility and a sense that there was mutual support. I know that Skipton has again faced more issues over the last weekend. It is one town in a state which has suffered significantly, but it has thankfully had nothing like the tragedy which has faced Brisbane, Ipswich, Grantham, Toowoomba, Rockhampton and the great inland outback areas of Queensland.

That same spirit was on show in Swan Hill, in Rochester and right throughout Victoria. Coming closest to home, last Saturday night I received a call from my colleague Russell Broadbent saying that the town of Koo Wee Rup had just been given an evacuation order. Russell grew up in Koo Wee Rup and lived there for many years; he now lives just outside of the electorate in his own electorate. Koo Wee Rup is in my patch, and we were told that the town was to be evacuated and that it was facing inundation. We immediately dealt with the Prime Minister's office, the Attorney-General's office and Tanya Plibersek's office, all of whom were very professional. I acknowledge the speed and skill of their staff and thank them for that.

We survived in our area by just a matter of centimetres. The levee banks which were built over decades and decades survived within a matter of two or three centimetres. So the town for the most part was fine, but the next morning, as we were out in the evacuation centres and then out in the farming communities, we saw farmers who had lost the value of their crop—they had had this season's crop destroyed. Again, it is nothing compared with Queensland, and many of them said to me, 'Yes, we have had losses, but we are very lucky compared with others.' But they will need assistance. I acknowledge the work of our local police and the SES—I note they were military in preparation—as well as the Shire of Cardinia, the Premier and Peter Ryan and my state colleagues Edward O'Donohue and Ken Smith and our council-

lors, particularly Councillor Stuart Halligan. All of them were on the ground the next morning to deal with the problems faced by the farmers.

So from our own little area where we were fortunate compared to others, but where we did suffer loss particularly where there was a breach in the levy because of the failings of the desalination company to repair that work in time—and I have written to the CEO of AquaSure to seek rectification on behalf of the farmers—we acknowledge your courage and endurance. From our own little area in Victoria and the problems we faced there, going out to the great and profound and magisterial task facing Queensland and Queenslanders, they have made us better as Australians for having seen what they have been through. And above all else to those families who have been at the heart of it, I say on behalf of the people of Flinders: you have our sympathy, our support, our belief and our thanks for letting us glimpse and witness a spirit which is extraordinary, which 20 and 30 and 50 and 100 years from now will be a source and point of inspiration and uplift to future generations of Australians.

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (4.56 pm)—I too share with my colleagues in this place the enormity of the devastation of the floods, the more recent cyclone in Queensland and the fires in Western Australia. Despite the tragic losses and the incredible task before us, the marvellous Australian spirit will no doubt be critical in helping rebuild towns and lives affected by these natural disasters.

I am very fortunate in my electorate of Reid in Sydney because it was not at all directly affected by the natural disasters. However, losses for Australians in one part of our country are also felt by all of us in other parts of the country. We also remember particularly those who have lost loved ones and their homes and the many who are still without power and water. We pray and hope for the safety of those still battling the bushfires in Western Australia. We are thinking of you and we are working hard to help you. Everyone has seen the haunting images in the newspapers and on our television screens and heard the reports from distressed victims over the radio and we have all felt their suffering and their anxiety.

I also take this opportunity to wish my parliamentary colleagues who have been directly affected by the floods, cyclones and bushfires all the very best in the recovery effort. I know the member for Oxley lost his entire office with floodwaters completely submerging the building in which it stood. Fortunately, no-one from his office was harmed in the floodwaters and that is of course the most important thing. Who could have imagined that a town like Toowoomba, which is some 700 metres above sea level, could have such a devastating tsunami? It is unthinkable.

For the lives lost, we send our sincerest sympathy to the families at this extremely difficult time. To the businesses and farmers, we offer our resolve to rebuild the vital infrastructure necessary to enable them to recover as soon as possible. To the families struggling to overcome everyday challenges, we offer you our earnest efforts to provide effective and timely services for your needs. To the SES crews, the police and the countless volunteers, we thank you. To the Defence Force personnel who put their lives on the line to save the lives of others, we cannot thank you enough. After many years of drought, floods are a double hit for Queensland. For the flood affected towns and regions in Victoria, the Black Saturday bushfires are still vivid in everyone's memories. These events put our lives in perspective and remind us of what is truly important.

This environment brings out the best of the Australian qualities of mateship and stoicism. They call on all levels of government to make decisions in the best interest of the people. We are talking about a natural disaster that has cost Australia billions of dollars in income and destroyed billions of dollars worth of wealth. This is not just a river bursting its banks or an unfortunate accident affecting a small part of Australia. The floods have affected an area larger than New South Wales, the state from which I come. It is in everyone's interest to finish the clean-up as quickly as possible. It is in all Australians' interest to get those ports and railways open, prepare local economies to function again, provide jobs for those affected and ensure our society functions as it should without undue delay.

Australians from all corners of the country were shocked and saddened by the ferocity and damage of the floods and have been quick to offer assistance where they can, whether it be practical support by opening their homes for emergency accommodation or by putting their hands into their pockets to donate. This, however, is not surprising. Australians are a very compassionate, empathetic and generous people. We do not like to see others suffering. International aid efforts are also a reflection of our generosity.

In my own electorate of Reid, I attended a Friday afternoon prayer session at the Gallipoli mosque in Auburn where the local members raised \$12,000 for the Premier's Disaster Relief Fund. The imam presenting the cheque on behalf of his members added that he wanted to make sure that the money would go to the people who really needed it. It goes without saying that the mosque has made a tremendous donation and their generous thoughts for the Queenslanders affected will be very much appreciated. Last Friday, Communities for Communities hosted a charity golf day and dinner at Barnwell Park Golf Course in my electorate. I attended the dinner and fundraiser. I also acknowledge the amazing fundraising efforts of Communities for Communities, established by the inspirational Lance Brooks. At the dinner, I was very pleased to meet many of the participants during the day, who were delighted that the funds raised were going to the Queensland recovery effort. They raised in excess of \$30,000. These were just two outstanding fundraising efforts in my electorate of Reid in Sydney's inner west. I know that there are many more individuals, businesses and organisations who have really put their hearts into raising much-needed funds to help our Queensland neighbours and I thank them for their superb efforts.

We cannot overlook the generosity of the people in Australia and indeed our international neighbours for their support. As the Foreign Minister noted during the immediate clean-up, he received countless calls from our international neighbours, offering their support and resources to help us in our hour of need. We are not without friends, let us not forget. And we are also not without means. We will rebuild. Together, individuals, families, businesses, insurance companies and local, state and federal governments, we will restore these areas. Already, the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment has helped over 100,000 Australians and provided nearly \$136 million to people in need. I am very pleased that the government has also ensured that the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements were provided almost immediately after these events. The assistance is provided to rebuild essential infrastructure such as roads, bridges and schools. It also offers grants of up to \$25,000 for small businesses and primary producers for the clean-up and recovery as well as concessional interest rate loans of up to \$250,000 for small business operators and primary producers, as well as freight subsidies of up to \$5,000. The government was also quick to provide the personal

hardship and distress assistance. These are important measures that were available as soon as possible and will help many victims of the floods.

The response teams should be commended for their timely efforts. As we reflect on the magnitude of the floods in Queensland, we reflect that our great, vast land has indeed wrought a history of climatic battles, as has been referred to by other speakers in this debate, and famously encapsulated in that magnificent poem *My Country* by Dorothea Mackellar. Unfortunately, I do not believe that these will be the last or the worst natural disasters our country will face. Indeed, it is more important than ever to prepare ourselves for any future natural disasters to minimise the loss of human life and destruction to industry and personal property. Today, and over the course of this condolence motion, I have listened to the many heartfelt and personal contributions both from the government and the opposition. I am deeply saddened by the individual stories of those who were caught, helpless in the natural disasters, and the consequent losses.

As I have previously mentioned, it is these extraordinary events that put our lives in perspective and highlight the importance of good governance to help people through such adversity. There will be tough decisions to make and they may be painful in the short term, but I believe that they will be beneficial in the long term. We cannot deny the magnitude of the disaster and expect homes, schools, businesses, ports, railways and roads to rebuild themselves. Indeed, this road to recovery will be very much a group effort.

In concluding, as we pause to remember those who have been lost and grieve with those who have suffered we can look to the future with confidence, knowing that the nation is behind the recovery. As our government continues to provide assistance to affected communities, on behalf of the people I represent in the federal division of Reid, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to everyone affected by the recent natural disasters that have beset our beautiful country.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (5.05 pm)—I join with other members in extending my condolences to the victims of natural disasters across the summer months. Australia has some remarkable and beautiful landscapes, but as we are only too well aware, nature can turn quite savage on us. Across the summer months we saw that all too frequently across our nation. Queensland, tragically, was the epicentre for much of the natural disasters. The focus of our nation turned towards the Sunshine State as it experienced more than its share of rainfall over an extended period of time.

We are not unused to natural disasters in Australia but I think what struck lot of us this time was perhaps the media coverage and the graphic images we were able to see in real time, almost, from towns such as Toowoomba and of the aftermath in the Lockyer Valley. To see the vision and images, shot either through the commercial media or on BlackBerries and mobile phones, which were then put out into the mainstream media, and actually see what was happening in real time—on the web or on the television networks—was something that captivated many people and brought the focus of our nation onto the Queensland community in very graphic terms.

Gippslanders are in the good fortune on this particular occasion to have basically escaped unscathed from the disasters. In previous times we have experienced floods, fires and major storm events, and there is no question that Gippslanders' hearts went out to our fellow Australians as they experienced these disasters over the summer months.

The reaction of our nation as reflected through the members of parliament in this place is something we can be very proud of. I have listened in to many of the members of parliament from both sides of the House as they have given their reports from the front line and given very emotional accounts of how their communities were tested and how their communities have responded magnificently. Naturally our thoughts and our prayers go out to the people whose loved ones have been killed or injured or who themselves have been injured in these disasters. This will be a defining moment in many people's lives. They will define their lives by what they did prior to the floods and what their lives were like after the floods. Many people will need support for many years to come. This is not something that people get over very quickly.

I know from my own personal experience in the Black Saturday bushfires two years ago—which, incidentally, we commemorated this week—and from the Black Saturday bushfire victims that some people seem to be able to get on with their lives quite quickly and seem to cope quite readily with adversity, but for others it seems to fester away in them and the events will re-present many weeks, months and years afterwards. Some people simply do not recover completely. We need to be careful and aware of that in this place. In the support we put in place for those communities we need to be aware that we are going to have to be there for the long haul. Long after we fix the bridges, the roads are back in place, the rail lines are working, small businesses are being cleaned up and the customers are coming back to our tourism resorts, our people are still going to bear the emotional scars of what they have been through.

Anyone who has spoken to people who were directly involved in either the flooding in Queensland or Cyclone Yasi has heard their tales of the trauma they have been through. We need to understand that as a nation we have to stand ready to support those people for many, many years to come. I am one of many MPs, I am sure, who have been touched by the emotional stories from our colleagues. I commend the members on both sides of the House for the way they have conducted themselves in this condolence motion and the way they have brought the stories of their people to life. They have brought the stories of their communities and explained to us who were not there exactly what impact these disasters have had.

In addition to the personal injuries and the deaths there are obviously the economic costs when we are talking about our agricultural sector, and I think that story will get worse as the months go on. There are economic costs to the agricultural sector in terms of lost crops and lost hope. We are talking about some of our farmers who were looking at some of the best crops they had ever seen. Having had them cruelly washed away or blown away will be very difficult for those farming families to cope with. And, of course, I just referred to the tourism industry and our small business sector. These challenges are going to face these communities for a very long period of time. I congratulate the members for giving a very full account of the experience and the challenges that their communities are going to face into the future.

Of course, it was not only Queensland that was touched by tragedy over the summer months and touched by natural disasters. In Victoria we had quite dramatic rainfall events, particularly in the north-west, which inundated towns. The town of Charlton was inundated on three separate occasions, I think, and Rochester on two occasions, and many other towns faced significant damage. While not as traumatic, perhaps, as the inland tsunami which seemed to hit Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley, it was still quite devastating for those people, and the impact of that flood is also going to be felt for a very long period of time. I under-

stand that the people of Tasmania and Western Australia were also affected, and now we have had the bushfires in Western Australia as well.

The challenge for us as we move from this immediate response phase is to be there for the long haul of the recovery—to make sure that in this place we stand shoulder to shoulder with our fellow Australians and let them know that we will be there to support them. As I said previously, the time frame for the recovery from the Black Saturday bushfires has made it very apparent to me that this is not a short-term operation. It is going to take a long period of time for our communities to repair themselves.

I believe that the nation is looking towards this parliament and this place, looking to us in our roles here as elected members and expecting us to demonstrate leadership in our roles and in the way we are prepared to work together to achieve the rebuilding process. I think we are united in many aspects on both sides of the House in our commitment to rebuild these communities. I do not think there is any doubt about that. I know there will be some debate about how we go about that process and how we fund that process, but even when we have differences of opinion I think the people of Australia are expecting us to demonstrate leadership and respect for each other and put aside some of our differences to recognise that the bigger picture here is the people who have been directly affected, their lives and how we repair their communities and let them go on and be prosperous into the future. I think there is a strong expectation in our community as they look at this place for us to not forget the fine words we have said in the condolence motion as we prepare for the future and as we rebuild these communities.

I am not by any means seeking to lecture other members, other than to say that there are many things that unite us in this tragic sequence of natural disasters and we would be well advised to live up to the expectations of those people who have been most directly affected. I think in those people we have seen such great spirit, such incredible willingness, such selflessness, humility, determination, strength and resilience—they have demonstrated such character traits—that we can reflect those in this place as we go about helping them in their rebuilding process.

The local members go back to their communities this week. I guess in some ways our local members have had some respite; they have come to Canberra and they have been able to get their gumboots and their working clothes off for a week. At the same time, back in their communities, people have been slogging it out, out there doing that repair work. In Western Australia they have still been putting out the fires this week. But as the local members go back to their communities I wish them every success in their roles. I urge them to keep the pressure on the banks, to keep the pressure on the insurance companies, to keep the pressure on government departments and to make sure that their people are well looked after.

In closing, I would like to extend my thanks, as many others have, to the countless people who have made a contribution throughout our community. I know the emergency service workers will be tired. They have put in an enormous effort over the last month and they will be required to do even more in the weeks ahead. I also extend my thanks to our military personnel who were incredible in the response phase and for the courage they have shown in saving lives in extraordinary circumstances. I recall hearing members talk about the helicopter pilots indicating they have never seen conditions like it. I acknowledge the bravery of those people and I wish them well as they go back to their lives. I thank the volunteers and the peo-

ple who have travelled for miles just to go and extend a helping hand to their fellow Australians in need. I also thank the people who have been involved in fundraising programs right across Australia. I think it is one of the great things about the Australian spirit that people just want to do something. We found that out with previous disasters like the Black Saturday bushfires where people just wanted to do something to extend a helping hand to their mates or to an Australian in need. We have seen that again here.

We honour the victims of these natural disasters by the lessons we learn from them. We honour the victims by choosing to serve our community here in this place as members of parliament. But we do not need to be members of parliament to honour them. We need to take this message back to our community about the spirit they have shown, the resilience they have shown during these traumatic times and the way the experience has brought our community together and united us: we do not need to wait for a natural disaster to occur to repeat this in the future. There is a real message here for us as Australians that we have a remarkable capacity within our population to work together and achieve great things when we are tested.

The challenge for us now, after these natural disasters, is to go back to our communities and encourage each other to build on that spirit and to continue to make a contribution to our community in whatever way we can, whether it is as a volunteer for our local Red Cross, in a Rotary club or as a surf life-saving volunteer. I encourage my fellow Australians to take inspiration from what they have seen over these months, to take inspiration from the volunteers, the emergency service workers and the military personnel, and to look back at their own community now and decide what they can do to make a contribution to their community on a daily basis. It is something we can take out of this disaster as a positive.

Finally, I simply say from the people of Gippsland, our hearts go out to those who have been affected over these summer months. I am sure I speak on behalf of the entire population of Gippsland when I say our thoughts and prayers are with you as you recover and we wish you every strength in the future.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (5.17 pm)—I join with others in this place, particularly on behalf of the people of the north-west coast of Tasmania, to send our sympathies and express our condolences to those who have lost loved ones and friends, to those who have lost their homes and businesses and to those whose communities have been massively disrupted in so many different ways. The devastating floods in Queensland in particular, and the corresponding flooding throughout New South Wales, Victoria and indeed in my own state of Tasmania, followed by the cyclonic episodes in Queensland most recently and now by those terrible fires in Western Australia, have left several different legacies. They have been commented on by colleagues in this place in the last few hours—tragically in a lot of instances. The first legacy, of course, is in the personal devastation visited on those families who have lost loved ones. Indeed, in Queensland, in those terrible floods that hit Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley and then on into Brisbane itself, 22 people died and, sadly, nine more are still unaccounted for. I cannot imagine the emotional distress associated with these losses and I again extend my personal and my region's condolences to all those families.

There is a second and associated legacy: the personal trauma from and economic cost of the massive physical damage done by the natural disasters. We cannot even begin to assess the psychological damage done to people affected by these natural disasters. And I understand

estimates of the cost to the Commonwealth approximate \$5.6 billion for reconstruction of some of the key infrastructure.

Apart from the huge amount of physical damage experienced by individuals, families, organisations and businesses, there is the massive loss of infrastructure and the cost of that. The government is committed to providing 75 per cent of this public infrastructure, and that is at the heart of funding, in the form of the flood levy announced by the Prime Minister and the \$2 raised through budget savings for every \$1 raised through the levy. I hope that that may be enough to begin this massive reconstruction program. But, if it is not, the Prime Minister has made the commitment, on behalf of the government and, indeed, the parliament, that we will continue to support these communities, families and individuals to the best of our ability.

As many members here have said before, recovery will not just happen tomorrow or the day after—indeed, it is going to be very much long-term. I share with our Victorian colleagues the melancholy of the second anniversary of the bushfires of Victoria. I noticed in some media reports and from listening to some of my colleagues that there are individuals and communities who are still hurting very much in the wake of those fires—and that is two years afterwards. So I expect that this will go on for some time and, as I said, will leave its legacy; its scars will be there for a long time yet.

In terms of personal loss, the federal government is working with state governments—indeed, with all levels of government, and with agencies and communities—to help rebuild businesses and local government infrastructure, and to assist individuals and families who have been directly and severely affected by the floods. This government is committed to continuing that support into the future.

Programs include the natural disaster relief and recovery policy which allows local councils to claim between 50 per cent and 75 per cent of the costs of their infrastructure once the damage bill exceeds a certain portion of the council's revenue. I know that, in a sense, that will not be enough and that those communities, those municipalities, will have to forgo expenditures and programs that they have already got in the pipeline, in order to make their contribution to the massive rebuilding campaign. But I know that that is a fact of life and that is what they are prepared to do. We are prepared to do our part as well.

The third aspect of the legacy of the natural disasters is the wonderful, fantastic example of community support that has accompanied the devastation and suffering. As many members here have commented on, and as some have experienced first-hand—in some cases, tragically—time and again, Australians have supported their neighbours. Indeed, the term 'neighbour' in Australia has now been elasticised and extended right across the nation. In my own region—even apart from the flood damage that has occurred there, which I will refer to in a moment—people, I know, feel a great empathy for and sympathy with those people affected. I remember time and again being affected by what I saw on the television, and by comments made by some of my colleagues whom I had contacted to see if they were okay and how they were coping with it. Judging by the tremendous quality of some of those speeches—very emotional—of some of my colleagues, I know that they have felt it very personally. As an individual Australian citizen, I, too, have felt for my colleagues across the states. So I think that the concept of 'neighbour' in Australia really has been extended across the nation.

I follow on from a point the member for Gippsland made. I often follow him in this House, I must say. It is nice being regional members on either side and following each other. There are the ideas: 'Who is your neighbour?' and helping your neighbour, which, we claim, is an Australian characteristic. Indeed, we share that with a lot of other communities. It is interesting that we have to have some form of tragedy for people to have the reason to come out and provide support. In fact, we often think that our time-poor lives preclude us from being neighbourly until something nasty happens. That is really sad. Australians have a great sense of community. I think it is part and parcel of not just our DNA but, indeed, also our environment, yet our time-poor lives tend to exclude us from that. I hope that some of those communities that have been seriously affected by some of these disasters get some positive ongoing benefits from that tremendous community spirit that has been demonstrated.

There are the incredible fundraising activities—a plethora of them. Some of them are very unique and clever in trying to raise funds for neighbours in other states. It has been fantastic. There has been the help to mop out. The number of people who arrived with their buckets and mops reminds me of a musical clip in *Fantasia*. There they were—hundreds of them with their buckets and mops, wanting a reason to use their buckets and mops. It was just fantastic. I am sure that if I saw that many people coming towards my house if I was in distress, I would be pretty happy too. I thought it was done in a really good neighbourly way. It was just fantastic.

Some people are fantastic at feeding people. They can make a sandwich out of a cardboard box and make it tasty! There was the housing of people and transporting people—all the different ways that people found to transport people. It was really clever. You could not help but have a giggle as well as a cry when you saw that. Comforting people—what a wonderful skill. Some people have a natural way of comforting people. It might be with a joke, an arm around them, a bit of a hug or even a bit of a punch on the arm sometimes. That was fantastic to see. All those different methods of being neighbourly were demonstrated throughout the affected areas. I thank all the people who went out of their way to help their neighbours. It was fantastic.

Of course, as others have alluded to, the work of the emergency services and agencies has been first rate. We are very lucky to have the professional people and our volunteers. I saw the SES in my local area. A lot of them must have been issued with a new uniform, because they stood out. They were ever ready to fill sandbags, get their chainsaws and shovels out, and do whatever else they could do to help out. That was demonstrated throughout Australia. We also saw our armed forces at work, doing what they do best: helping. There are also the people who secured the lives of the many thousands of people who were physically threatened by the natural disasters. When you think of what could have happened in both the floods and the cyclone that hit Queensland, we are blessed that it was not worse. I know that is hard for some people to accept, given the suffering that they have experienced.

I do not suppose a lot of people know that Tasmania was affected by flooding, and severely in some parts. I am sorry that the Leader of the Opposition omitted Tasmania in his address yesterday. Between 11 and 14 January there was excessive rainfall in my state and, while it did not cause absolutely widespread flooding—and nothing on the scale of Queensland, I accept that—it did cause some very severe flooding. People may be surprised to hear that a number of families in my electorate were actually isolated and remained isolated for a week

or more, because we lost a number of our connecting bridges. There is some massive devastation and, if you are interested, I have some of the pictures here. It just shows you the extent of the damage.

Most of the damage was done to infrastructure, particularly in the Central Coast Council area, which is my own municipal area, and in the Burnie municipality. In Central Coast, Purtons Flats Bridge, Bannons Bridge, Central Castra Bridge and the Bellchambers Bridge were lost. It does not sound a lot compared with what occurred in Queensland, but mine is a food-producing area, particularly through the hinterland, along with other natural production, and these areas have been cut off. In central coast something like 22 roads were closed with the flooding.

In Burnie, the neighbouring municipality, the Upper Natone Road and the South Riana Road were severely cut off. In total, there was something like \$12 million worth of infrastructure damage in those two municipalities. The township of Railton in the electorate of Lyons, represented by my colleague Dick Adams, was completely cut off and there was mass flooding of the township itself. Further into the state and on the east coast of Tasmania there was severe flooding as well.

Through the federal government, the state government has activated the relevant assistance and recovery scheme, and indeed the Attorney-General visited my affected area with me on 21 January. With the state government he was able to essentially announce the recovery assistance packages for Tassie. I am glad that we were able to help in our way, and I know our municipalities are now looking forward to working with us and with the state government to get some funding for these important pieces of infrastructure.

I have been on the road recently with my colleagues, including the member for Farrer, who is in the chamber at the moment; we have been on the road together and it is a pleasure, of course. We are part of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia and we have been looking at the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority guide to the plan. The irony there is that we had to cancel some of our visits because of the floods in Victoria. Also, I had to leave that trip to go home to my own town, Forth, and I was sandbagging my house. It is the second time that there has been a major flood in my area in the last three years, and this one actually came further than the 2007 flood. I live next to a beautiful river in the Forth Valley, called the Forth—which makes sense, I suppose. It used to be f-o-u-r-t-h, because there used to be the First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth rivers, but in Tassie we started to get a bit imaginative and gave them other names. It took 10½ hours in 2007 for the river to flood, and this time it took 2½ hours and it came further than the 2007 flood. So we had some mighty rains and a bit of damage. Fortunately, Sid's house had 57 sandbags and about 10 tarpaulins on it—so I know how many to use next time—but it was not affected and I do thank all those people who came to help, particularly the SES.

Down the road at Harvest Moon of Forth Farm Produce, they lost about half a million dollars from their early planting that they had just set out. So my little neck of the woods has been affected—nothing like Queensland and I would not attempt to say that, but my communities have been affected, particularly transport infrastructure, and we look forward to being able to access the assistance packages that the federal and state governments are now triggering.

Before I finish, I would like to try to give a human face to the devastation in my home state and mention a terrific family at Wings Wildlife Park. Colin and Megan Wing have a wildlife park up in the Gunns Plains, which is beautiful. It is as green as green. It has a terrific river and they have fishing contests up there. These people eat, sleep and drink wildlife. Anyway, the floodwaters took out the park. Here is a guy cut off on one side of the river looking over and watching his life's work literally going down the river. But while he was on one side of the river some of his staff were becoming aware of how dangerous the rising waters were and got into the park and saved almost every animal—birds, geese, ducks and everything else; I think two chicks were lost. Loyal staffer Tracey Lane got on the tractor and down she went. They managed to save a lot of the wildlife. Of course there was incredible physical damage. Poor old Colin. He has a great sense of humour in life and everything else but the guy was devastated. Imagine the scene, as the light emerges, 40 volunteers come to assist that family and that business.

Colin hosted the Attorney-General and me. I felt a bit guilty being there whilst he was cleaning up, but he was a genial host. There were all these volunteers helping to build his bridges, rearrange his new driveways, cages and whatever else and here is Colin in his good humour giving us morning tea. The following media record gives you an idea of what he was like:

“We did have a lovely fish display but they all swam off in the creek—I guess it was their lucky day,” the park owner said with a chuckle.

“The aviary floated down 50 metres with the concrete slab still attached to the bottom and all the birds inside doing just fine.”

“The swans and the geese just floated out of the wetlands and were waiting for us the next day. We only lost two chicks all up, so we didn't do too badly at all.”

That is inspiring. His whole business is just wiped out. That is just typical. That is a real human story.

I love the heading in the local *Advocate* of that day where it says ‘People power saves park’. I think that is reflective on a grander scale of what happened throughout Australia. I join with my colleagues—not to make light of it but to say it as a very human thing—in saying that in tragedy you get so much support and neighbourliness, and this was a classic example.

I join with Mayor Jan Bonde of my Central Coast municipality when she said: ‘The great thing about this whole flood emergency has been the cooperation between community; council staff; police; SES; fire brigades; the Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources; government departments; forestry; and the Army.’ She concludes, ‘It has been great.’

Ms LEY (Farrer) (5.38 pm)—I am happy to support the motion of condolence moved by the Prime Minister. While, quite rightly, much of the news and focus from this exceptionally difficult summer has been engaged with the extreme weather events to our north and south—and may I on behalf of the people of Farrer pass on my sympathy to those affected by the floods in Queensland and Victoria and by Cyclone Yasi—I do also wish to raise the attention of the House to the plight of many in my electorate from properties, small businesses and homes lying to the west and south-west of New South Wales.

Can I join with others in the Riverina and pass on my personal sympathy to the family of the northern New South Wales man who perished in the swollen Bullenbung Creek at the weekend. This tragic accident occurred at 3 am on Sunday morning on a property about 10 kilometres north of Lockhart when the man's utility was swept away as he tried to drive through unseen floodwaters. This creek, like so many of our waterways in the last six months since the drought in New South Wales came to an abrupt end, has routinely been turned from a trickle into a torrent.

In October, Lockhart's main street was also under water from the normally docile Brook-ong Creek. Then, again, unprecedented rainfall between last Friday afternoon and Saturday night dropped up to 150 millimetres on the town and across much of the Riverina region. Record rainfall totals were recorded in a little over 24 hours. In some cases, it was four to five times their February average. In as many instances, the falls completely demolished the historically known record February rainfall figures.

Also significantly affected was the area in and around Urana. On the back of being swamped in October, Urana received another massive dumping last weekend. Three homes were flooded out, and the initial damage bill estimated by the local council for repairing road infrastructure has topped a further \$1 million.

Other towns and centres were affected, including but not limited to Hay, Rand, Holbrook, Culcairn, Walbrundrie, Albury and Corowa. In fact, at Corowa, one day's rain smashed the town's entire February monthly total rainfall record, which had dated back 80 years. In Albury, the 100 millimetres we received in 24 hours was the biggest daily tally that the current weather station had received for any month of the year in its entire history. In rural and outlying areas, this was yet another setback for our local farmers, many of whom have now suffered not once or twice but four times since a massive deluge of water swept through local towns and rivers in October last year.

I visited there shortly afterwards, and, while not on the scale of what we have witnessed in Queensland and parts of Victoria, what I saw and heard was confronting, to say the least. Quite apart from the first decent crops for up to 10 years or more being smashed, there were numerous examples of small businesses and homes being caused grief by uncompromising insurance companies. In a number of cases, argument and delays centred on the technicality of whether someone's home or property had been inundated from below or from the heavens above. As you have all heard and seen recently through the extreme experiences of our neighbours in Queensland, a home is your home and water is water, and when it runs through someone's bedroom, kitchen or lounge it leads to vast disruption and trauma, displacement and enormous unforeseen costs. In some local instances brought to my attention, insurers, seemingly intent on minimising their outlay, have paid for the replacement of a home's contents but not the home itself, using an available loophole in the wording which labelled the person's property 'undermaintained'.

I also heard of sheer and utter frustration with the increasing and often overwhelming numbers of hoops that landholders, small businesses and local governments are being asked to jump through in order to access emergency assistance. A classic example of bureaucracy being completely unreflective of reality has occurred in my own local Greater Hume shire, and I suspect that they are not alone. Under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements—known as NDRRA—guidelines, the council can only be reimbursed to carry out

emergency repairs and restoration of vital infrastructure if it uses outside labour and contractors or works its own staff during overtime hours after a destructive event. Any local council staff—or a handyman, for that matter—will tell you that, in reality, some things have to be done right away, even on a weekday, with the local staff who know the region. It is also quite feasible that the work needs to be done during daylight hours, not overnight or maybe on a possible weekend that suits. Quite often in rural areas—and I am sure this would be felt in our cities as well—getting enough available contractors in and on the ground within a reasonable time frame is simply not possible, and that has certainly been the case with the widespread damage and magnitude of events witnessed across our nation in recent months.

In Greater Hume's case, they estimate that a burden of \$3 million from their budget has already been spent cleaning up from these events, even before the most recent deluge over the last weekend. But here is the anomaly. Because the rain fell at the weekend, clean-up costs up until start of business on Monday were covered by the NDRRA, but, once the normal week got underway, council staff, in theory, had to go back to normal duties. In reality, if council's full clean-up costs are not reimbursed under NDRRA, it will have a significant impact on their ability to undertake previously approved works programs, meaning that in the long run the ratepayers will be paying for the flood damage.

I want to also make mention of the current plight of our agricultural industries and the businesses along the Murray, further to the west. Like the previous speaker, the member for Braddon, I am part of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia, which is looking into the socioeconomic effects of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. Many of us visited a great number of locations between Adelaide and Griffith in a nine-day period in January. It was ironic that our visit to the Swan Hill area in Victoria, just south of my electorate, had to be cancelled because of the enormous inland sea that was moving towards Swan Hill and the swollen rivers in that area which made it impossible for those who wanted so much to come and talk to the committee to actually get there and give their evidence. I very much hope that we can return to Swan Hill. The irony escapes no-one that the evidence that they were going to give to our committee concerned the attempts by government and successive policy instruments to remove water from agriculture. Those policy initiatives were certainly developed during a time of drought and, while no-one would ignore the need for a basin plan that operates sensibly in the Murray-Darling Basin, it certainly has highlighted that there was haste and misinformation applied to the existing information that we have received.

On my information, as of Monday, the weekend downpour saw another 140 millimetres fall in a very short period of time, and this has further affected our region, particularly the local wine grape growing industry in the Wentworth shire. Even prior to this most recent rainfall, by last month many vignerons were widely reporting average wine losses of between 20 and 30 per cent. They were not even the growers hit the hardest. Some had already reported that their entire season's vintage for 2011 was gone with the advent of downy mildew. This number has now multiplied, with widespread evidence of powdery mildew and brown rot. It is a very difficult situation for wine growers at the moment because, having had this enormous dump of rain on a crop that is not very many weeks from being harvested, they have to consider whether they will continue to apply really expensive chemicals in order to keep the various mildews and rots at bay in the hope that they will realise a harvest. It might even be a question of throwing good money after bad. It is not just the growers in the Wentworth shire

but also those further upstream through the Balranald and Wakool shires. The town and surrounds of Euston, for example, has roughly 60 to 70 growers in the region, mainly for table grapes. After this most recent event, their second in two months, growers tell me that up to two-thirds of their harvest is underwater or lying in water and probably worthless.

In light of these unexpected rains—and they are exceptional events—I think an exceptional response is needed. I have just today received another plea for governments both federal and state to reconsider the classification of exceptional circumstances to include the event of a flood. The Murray Valley Winegrowers write, and I am forwarding this letter to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for his urgent attention:

We urge the Federal Government to extend the existing Exceptional Circumstances Assistance Funding support for a further 12 months to March 31 2012.

In our view, the effect of the series of unprecedented rainfall events through Spring and Summer clearly warrant classification as exceptional circumstances for the industries in this region.

Without an extension of EC Funding for our growers, the heavy additional costs of fungal disease protection and fuel, together with the heavy crop losses from fungal disease will exacerbate the extreme financial duress under which many growers are currently operating and will force many more growers to exit the industry.

That letter is just about wine grape growers, but it equally applies to those who grow horticulture, including table grapes, to those graziers who have lost paddocks and stock, and to those who have lost wheat crops, because they are harvesting now and only just realising the extensive downgrade from that huge rain in October and November last year.

Every one of these farmers will explain how close to the edge they are—and it is obvious when you see it on the ground, of course. Nobody likes to put their hand out and ask for assistance, but, if the exceptional circumstances interest rate subsidy and the exceptional circumstances relief payment—the two very important arms of that policy—cease on 31 March as they are bound to do, across my electorate there will be some serious repercussions and there will be people in farming families whose businesses cannot survive. It would therefore seem a reasonable request that, at a minimum, the exceptional circumstances relief payment—the fortnightly Centrelink payment that those who are affected by the floods in other circumstances and other parts of the country are receiving under these disaster arrangements—be continued for farming families to get through at least the next six months. That is an absolute minimum, and I will certainly be asking the minister to extend the entire EC regime for another 12 months.

Those who are familiar with the exceptional circumstances policy—and in the last government I was certainly involved in a lot of its iterations—will know that it was a policy designed to address drought in a long-term sense rather than a catastrophe, such as a flood, which occurs in the short term. But the flooding catastrophe which is being addressed by national disaster relief arrangements has a long-term effect no different to a drought. In fact, if your topsoil, seed bank and vegetation are removed, the effect is very much like that of a drought. We have, over time, changed that EC program, and at one stage we persuaded the National Rural Advisory Council—an important body in the assessment process—that it should apply to irrigated agriculture. That has nothing to do with the drought but has to do with a lack of irrigation allocations. So there is scope for this policy to address the very real concerns of the farmers not just in my electorate but across Victoria and New South Wales.

To the far west of New South Wales, nature has arguably been even more volatile. Next week I will be taking an inspection tour of that region's mid-January flooding. During that four-day period, some properties near Broken Hill received close to their entire annual rainfall. One homestead 140 kilometres north-east of Broken Hill reported 240 millimetres in two days, with 160 millimetres of that having fallen in just over two hours. Last week much of that property was still underwater, the only way in or out being by light plane. Even that has been made much more treacherous with the main airstrip underwater. Here—and the story is mirrored by many other property owners—hundreds of kilometres of fencing have been wiped away. Access roads are either still blocked or impassable through normal means. Wild animals remain dead and decaying and entangled in tree branches where the water ran metres above normally red and parched creek beds and channels. I am told the welfare of the stock that remain alive but still at risk is uncertain simply because the landscape is impenetrable and will not allow the owners to check on them. There has not been a postal service into or out of the place for three weeks, with the deadline on applying for government assistance even for that required to be in hard copy and now passed.

Another property owner I spoke to, whose home was inundated with 30 centimetres of water overnight, still cannot get the local insurance assessor in to check and begin the clean-up—that is no simple task when your local agent is five hours away. Early last week the far west region received another 75 millimetres of rain as a precursor to the cyclonic weather coming in over the Top End. Last weekend, on the back of that, we received a further three inches of rain. For this weekend there is still more heavy rainfall forecast. On this, spare a moment's thought for the prospect for the Bornholm family, who live 80 kilometres south of Broken Hill. Margaret and Colin Bornholm run a merino sheep property which was affected by severe dust storms in September last year, before the drought had broken. In January they were hit again, this time by rains which destroyed the same fencing that had just been repaired. Channels and piping to local dams were also destroyed. Then—yet again—this past weekend the Bornholms' property was inundated with a further 100 millimetres of rain. They, like many of us in many corners of this nation, must be wondering just how much more they can take.

I cannot better sum up how my electorate feels than by quoting the last paragraph from a letter sent to me last week. It sums up the spirit of the people of Farrer—that Australian spirit which has been so often detailed in the House during this week by my fellow members. Sue Andrews from the Pastoralists Association writes:

The damage to dams, fencing and flood gates is very extensive across the area. Stock losses will not probably be known until people can get out to muster, which could be months.

The storms over the last week are making it more difficult to move about.

As to the psyche of the people, we had 10 years of severe drought, now flooding rain which in a way we all expected as this is what happens after such a drought.

The hardest hit have had good support from neighbours, SES and national parks (helicopter) and also the rural counselling services.

Having the financial support from the Government will make a great deal of difference.

The people of western New South Wales are practical, commonsense people. They clean up, they pick up, they get up. They do not often ask for help. If you ask them, they will tell you what they need—reluctantly—and of course they will always tell you that somebody is worse affected than they are. They have given extremely generously to the pleas for help from

the Queensland flooding, from Cyclone Yasi and from the Victorian flooding. Many of them have spoilt hay that they have harvested from their own ruined crops; they have offered to send that hay to farmers in Victoria. They have explained that they cannot afford to actually deliver it but that it is there in their shed and they want to donate it.

I, and of course everybody in this House, along with people everywhere across the country and internationally, feel enormous sorrow for the toll that has been extracted from the people of Queensland, the Lockyer Valley and everywhere that has been affected by these disasters. I do want to say today in conclusion that I do hope that my communities, the communities I represent in the electorate of Farrer, are not overlooked as governments restructure and rebuild.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (5.56 pm)—I rise today on behalf of the people of Canberra to offer our condolences to the people affected by natural disasters this summer. I have been deeply moved by the stories that we have heard in this place yesterday and today, as I am sure have the people in my electorate. The thoughts and prayers of the people of Canberra go out to all those who have lost loved ones in deeply tragic and shocking circumstances and to those who have also lost homes, businesses, pets, valuables and treasured items.

In recent months, those who have not been directly affected by the floods have been confronted with images of destruction, tragedy and heartbreak caused by the floods, bushfires and cyclones that have ravaged this country every day. These hundreds and hundreds of images have all told their own tale of the suffering of our fellow Australians, of the human toll of natural disasters unprecedented in our history. But, for me, three images spoke the loudest.

The first was of a mother and her daughter and son running to a helicopter to be evacuated from the floods. They were hot, they were wet, they were crouched and they were propeller blown. They were also visibly frightened, shocked and in a state of disbelief. What underscored the kind of tragedy of the situation was the everyday reality of the family, which so starkly juxtaposed the chaos of the situation. The family was wearing everyday summer clothes and thongs. The daughter was clutching a Barbie backpack—the kind that is standard issue for my nieces and goddaughters and every girl under the age of 10. From memory, the mother was clutching a handbag, which probably contained all the important documents she could collect at short notice. For me, the image evoked some of those iconic images of civilians fleeing the Vietnam War. But the people being evacuated here were not refugees in a foreign land. They were everyday Australians enduring extraordinary circumstances.

The second image was of a son who was watching his mother hosing down the roof to protect it from the bushfires in WA. The boy was visibly stressed. He was worried about his mother, he was worried about his home and he was worried about being caught too late in the bushfire. It was deeply disturbing because he was too young, too innocent, to be experiencing such emotion and fear on such a magnitude, on such a scale. It was disturbing because this image and the earlier one I mentioned are not ones we normally associate with Australian life.

But it was the third image that has deeply haunted me. It was an aerial shot of roofs, where the houses were invisible because they were submerged under metres of water. This image has deeply haunted me because our homes are meant to provide us with physical security from the elements, and here they were engulfed, rendered useless by those elements. This image deeply haunted me because our homes are where we take our newborns to grow and flourish. They are where we celebrate our rites of passage, our birthdays, our weddings and our anniversa-

ries. They are where we collect the souvenirs of our journey through life. They are the keepers of our histories and hallmarks of our identity as people. They are meant to provide us with security for our family and our future. Our homes are meant to provide us with emotional security. They are our haven, our shelter, somewhere we can be ourselves away from the world. They are our sanctuaries. Now tens of thousands of Australians face the prospect of life in the near future without their home or with a damaged home that will take a lot of blood, sweat and tears to repair.

On behalf of the people of Canberra, I want to let the people of Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria know that they will be in our hopes and prayers when the water has subsided, when they are picking up the pieces and when they are without their safe haven. We will be with you in the future; in the really tough times when the reality of your situation comes into sharp focus. Even though nothing we have experienced in recent months touches the scale of these disasters, the people of Canberra have some understanding of what you are going through. In 2003 bushfires ravaged the southern part of Canberra, destroying 500 homes and killing four people. It took years for some families to get back on their feet, having lost everything. Then our community rallied around for their fellow Canberrans, offering money, opening up their homes, giving clothes, shoes and toys and lending cars, and then the rest of Australia sent emergency assistance and support to us. The people of Canberra were grateful for that and they have not forgotten. Now we are running around and digging deep for our fellow Australians in their moment of need. Our cafes, restaurants, clubs, shops, baseball teams and radio stations have held fundraisers. The Raiders have set up a charity auction with items donated by players and staff. Community groups have conducted sausage sizzles. Businesses and families have donated food, toys, clothes and shoes. The business community has given to the Premier's appeal. Canberrans have given in a personal capacity but our public servants are also giving in a professional capacity. Our public servants gladly serve the nation because they want to make a difference, and many of them have been giving above and beyond to help those in need in this moment of crisis.

Emergency service officers have also been lending a helping hand. I received a letter yesterday from a woman in my electorate who had just returned from a deployment in Queensland. She said, 'It was wonderful to have the opportunity to help others in our wonderful country.' I do believe that this reflects the views of so many Canberrans. I want to thank all the SES members, all the emergency people and all the volunteers who have helped the rest of Australia in their moment of need. I particularly want to thank the ADF, who, as always, worked extremely professionally and extremely hard to help those who found themselves in extraordinary and often very difficult circumstances. I thank them all.

I would also like to use this opportunity to pay tribute to the role played by the fourth estate during this unprecedented crisis. I would like to acknowledge the work of the journalists, producers, camera operators and all the others who work behind the scenes in making sure—sometimes at risk to their own personal safety—that the Australian public stays informed. Without them, those in the midst of these disasters would have no idea of what was happening around them. They would not know where safety lies, where they can seek help and whether their loved ones are safe. Without them, there would be no way for government to connect the victims of these tragedies to the vital services they need. Most of them came back from leave

to ensure that these messages got out, and I pay tribute to their dedication, commitment and professionalism and to their strong commitment to the community.

I particularly want to acknowledge the journalists, producers, camera operators and staff in local radio and local television. Nothing better underscores the value of local radio than an emergency or crisis. This was borne out during the crisis of recent months; it was borne out during the floods in Wagga; and it was borne out during the bushfires in Canberra. I know journalists and presenters from Canberra's Triple 6 provided relief to sleep-deprived journalists and presenters on ABC Riverina when they had the floods in Wagga. When the bushfires hit us in 2003, local radio, television and print journalists dropped everything. Everyone was on leave at the time—they were at home or down at the coast or elsewhere—and they dropped everything and returned to work to get the word out to their community.

It is perhaps difficult at this point, while disasters still unfold in Victoria and Western Australia, to understand how the communities that have been affected will rebuild and recover. We have yet to tally the full cost, both economically and, perhaps more importantly, emotionally. But I believe that these communities will recover and I believe that their homes and lives will be rebuilt. I have this firm belief because of the strong, binding ethos of these communities of Australians, the same ethos that has seen scores of volunteers from across the country help with the clean-up and recovery, the same ethos that has seen millions of dollars donated to help those families in need.

While other communities have collapsed into anarchy during crises—and we see it all around the world quite often—we have seen our communities rally through mutual support. We have seen people from across the country ask, 'What can I do?' Often the only link they have to the tragedy is that they are Australian and that a mate is in need. To see this in action, to see what I have always believed—that when there is need an Australian will always lend a hand to a mate, often a mate they do not even know—has made me incredibly proud to be an Australian and also a Canberran.

As a nation we have been tested by these tragedies and we will be tested again in recovery when the cost of these disasters, both human and economic, becomes known. However, we as a nation are prepared for this. The Australian character is a strong one. I believe we are capable of handling the hardships and challenges of our environment because we always have. I am confident that governments—federal, state and local councils—will do all that is necessary to rebuild. I am confident that communities across Australia will continue to unite to help those in need and I am confident that those areas affected will rebuild and, with the strength of their spirit and the help of the nation, will come out the other side even stronger and more united.

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (6.07 pm)—It is very humbling to stand here today to consider the effects of the events of the past six weeks on communities in Queensland, in Victoria, in WA and in northern New South Wales. The electorate of Forde was fortunate enough not to have been severely affected by the Queensland floods. As a result, we were in the privileged position of being able to offer our electorate office as a collection point for flood relief items for distribution to affected areas.

My sincerest thoughts and prayers are with those in the flood affected areas, particularly in the Lockyer Valley, where the loss of life was greatest. Yesterday we were privileged to listen to the heartfelt words of the member for Wright on the effect of those floods on the commu-

nity. For those of us who have not been affected and do not live in those communities it is going to be very difficult to understand what they have been through. But we commend those communities on their unwavering spirit and stoicism and desire to rebuild.

To those in North Queensland who have suffered as a result of Cyclone Yasi and to those in WA, more recently, who have experienced the fires and loss of property—but, fortunately, not lives—our prayers are with you also at this time.

The events of the past six weeks, whilst devastating for so many communities, have also served to demonstrate the generosity of spirit of the Australian people in a time of need. It is heartening to see the many volunteers. In Brisbane many thousands of volunteers got out there in their gumboots or, if they did not have gumboots, because the state sold out of them, in whatever they had to clean up the mud and the mess and to help people start to rebuild their lives. Having been through floods before, I know what a horrible, smelly job that is.

I believe that these events have served to reignite a community spirit that may have been waning under the pressures of everyday life. It is reassuring to see that community spirit. It was no more evidenced than by a comment from my sister-in-law, who is a Canadian and who works for a local radio station in Mount Isa. She said that she was amazed, because in Canada she felt that that would never have happened. So it is a great testament to our country, our community and our people.

The events of the past few weeks I think have also allowed us as a community to reflect on what is important. Whilst material things can mostly be replaced, it is the loss of life that is so tragic, as it leaves a hole in the lives of families and the communities affected. I thank the residents of Forde for their generosity. My staff and I have been overwhelmed by the donations of linen, clothing and personal care items that we have received. We have also had many people offering their time in sorting through the items and aiding in transporting them to a nearby warehouse which was donated for storage, and also to ultimate points of distribution.

My thanks go to community and religious organisations such as Dream Centre, Beenleigh RSL, Dunamis Christian Centre and Currumbin RSL, who donated so many of the items needed. They are simple things that we sometimes overlook. In the early days, the call was for a toothbrush, toothpaste, a hairbrush, ladies' sanitary items, socks and undergarments—simple things that, in the rush to help families, we overlooked because we were looking for clothing and bedding. Some of those organisations made the long drive up from the Gold Coast to deliver those items to our office. Recently we received two pallets of donations from Sydney. Over the first two weeks of receiving donations, my office saw over 20 pallets of clothing, personal care items, bedding and linen sorted. We had over 40 volunteers help us with that.

My thanks go to community organisations such as Mission Possible and Calvary family care, who have been working tirelessly in the affected communities to distribute the necessary items to individual families so that they can get the immediate requirements they need. They also made us aware of areas of need in the community that have been overlooked, that we were not aware of. Again, I thank the community for responding quickly to our requests for specific items to help out. Residents are continuing to bring in donations and we are continuing to look for ways to distribute those and to help the affected communities. The majority of the donations have gone to the electorate of Wright, to help Scott Buchholz's electorate, as that has been one of the worst affected. Again, I would like to thank some of the community organisations in Beaudesert, particularly the Country Women's Association, who were able to

store that stuff for Scott to allow it to then be distributed. I feel extremely fortunate to be part of such a generous and community minded electorate and country.

Other organisations that have done a tremendous amount of work and that have been recognised by many but should not be overlooked include the SES—even in our electorate they had some work to do; the Australian Defence Force, which did an enormous amount of work in very difficult circumstances, both in the Lockyer Valley and also in North Queensland; and the police and the work that they have done to help keep order in those communities and to try to establish some sort of sense of normality, as much as that was possible.

My thanks also go to our media outlets—radio, TV and print—for their coverage to keep the community informed. I hope that the work that they have done is appropriately recognised and that it sets a benchmark for the value they can add to our community in these times of need.

It is important over the coming months that we do not forget these communities and ensure that the flood relief both via donated funds and via government assistance is quickly and efficiently distributed. The quicker that money can be distributed to those families and communities, the sooner they can begin to rebuild their lives. With this also goes the call to insurance companies to assist in being timely in settlement of claims.

We should be proud of ourselves as a community that we have been so ready to help those in need. We should never forget that Australian spirit and that we live in a country where people are prepared to help their neighbours, even if they do not know them, in a time of need. We should never forget that and we should be proud of how we have handled ourselves in these circumstances. I pray that these communities have a speedy recovery and that, as I just noted, we do not forget.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (6.16 pm)—Over the past month and a half, we have watched in shock the devastation caused by natural disasters in all parts of the country. We have watched the people of Queensland, regional New South Wales and regional Victoria wade through waist-high water. We have seen communities in Western Australia ravaged by shattering bushfires which have destroyed 72 homes and damaged countless others. And we have witnessed Far North Queensland face Cyclone Yasi—the worst tropical cyclone to hit Australia in nearly 100 years. As the Prime Minister has said, it has been a summer of extremes, a summer of tragedy, a summer of devastation.

Over the past day, I have been touched by the words of my parliamentary colleagues from both sides of the chamber. I pay tribute to my colleagues who have risen to support their constituents in a way they surely could never have wished for nor imagined. Listening to the experiences of those members whose electorates have been directly affected has been nothing but heart-wrenching. Their personal experiences, and those experiences of others that they have recounted, remind each and every one of us of the human face of these disasters.

I do not have the words to describe the sympathy I feel for those families who have lost so much as a result of these tragedies. In some cases, they have lost everything. I know that nothing I say will bring back what has been lost. Nothing I can say will alleviate the pain currently experienced by those who have lost their loved ones—their sons and daughters, their husbands and wives, their brothers and sisters. Nothing I say will bring back the missing posses-

sions, repair the damaged homes or rebuild the roads, businesses and schools that have been destroyed as a result of the floods, the bushfires and Cyclone Yasi.

But I can say this: Australians will rally together as we always do in times of great difficulty and, driven by our unique spirit of determination, we will rebuild from these disasters. I do know that through our collective efforts we will help get lives back on track and we will rebuild the towns that have been ravaged. The fighting Australian spirit will once again be on display. Indeed, this fighting spirit has been on display over the summer. It is clearly exemplified through the actions of those emergency services personnel who have been working tirelessly to ensure that fundamental services are returned to the people who have been affected by these disasters. Other organisations, such as the Red Cross, have been critical in the recovery process for disaster-stricken suburbs and towns across Australia.

I can only imagine the fear and anxiety felt by those directly affected by these natural disasters. I could only hope and pray that my family and friends in Queensland would be some of the 'lucky ones' who managed to avoid harm. I know that many families were in a similar position as the events unfolded and a nation sat glued to its TV sets, hoping that the waters and storms would ease, and tuning in that fateful morning to see the city of Brisbane submerged.

A parliamentary colleague of mine, not from this place, was in Queensland during the flood crisis and witnessed the loss of a very close lifelong friend who was swept away by the devastating flood waters. There are too many similar stories, and many have been recounted in this debate. Tragically, for so many, what should have been a time of celebration and family became a time of despair, loss and suffering.

Australians always band together and help out someone else in need. This compassion has been evident across my electorate of Greenway where many community groups have rallied together in support of fundraising for the worst affected communities. Our fledgling AFL club, the Greater Western Sydney Giants, offered support to those affected by the Queensland floods. Israel Folau and four other team mates took it upon themselves to seek leave from training and travel to Brisbane to help in whatever way possible with the clean-up. The GWS team is currently in the middle of preseason training and for a marque player of AFL in Western Sydney to put his training on hold to support families doing it tough is a credit to him and the management of GWS. I pay tribute to Kevin Sheedie and his boys.

The Riverstone Girl Guides, who currently do not even have a clubhouse due to a collapsing roof, put aside their personal fundraising endeavours and chose instead to raise funds for families affected by the Queensland disaster. For me, this is a true example of Australian compassion. These young girls not only understand the severity and hardship currently being experienced in Queensland but also displayed the maturity and selflessness to put aside their own needs and help others. This is nothing short of amazing. Two weekends ago I joined the Riverstone Girl Guides selling their famous cookies and holding a fundraising barbecue at the Riverstone Market Town. In the space of three hours we raised over \$300 in sales and donations. I commend the Riverstone Girl Guides for their efforts and I thank the good people of Riverstone for their support.

I also thank the members of the Filipino-Australian Community Association of New South Wales. This association has given tirelessly to ensure that the necessary funds are sent to Queensland. At a fundraising event held last Sunday in Blacktown, the Filipino Australian

community raised well over \$14,000 from just one event. I would like to thank the members of this community for their compassion and generosity—a community which itself has endured much devastation in their homeland in recent years due to a series of typhoons.

There were many other fundraising efforts instigated by the good people of Greenway. These include Simon Holt of Kellyville Ridge, who launched the Great Aussie Wine-athon, and the Blacktown Workers Club, which will be holding a fundraising event on 19 February and a series of auctions.

In the words of the Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh, who has displayed an unending level of resilience and tenacity:

As we weep for what we have lost, and as we grieve for family and friends and we confront the challenge that is before us, I want us to remember who we are.

On behalf of the citizens I represent in my electorate of Greenway, I offer my heartfelt condolences to the families of those who have lost their loved ones. I also offer my deep sympathy to those whose lives have been devastated by the floods, the bushfires and Cyclone Yasi. We in Greenway are a compassionate and caring community. Despite our geographic distance, I say to the victims of these tragedies, ‘We were with you. Our thoughts and prayers go out to each and every one of you.’

Dr STONE (Murray) (6.23 pm)—On behalf of my electorate of Murray in northern Victoria, I acknowledge the tragic deaths and the widespread devastation in all states, it would seem, as a consequence of recent natural disasters—the floods, cyclones and fires. I also acknowledge the two-year anniversary of the Black Saturday fires in Victoria. The legacy of these fires is still very much in the hearts and minds of the families who were burnt out and the families where members were killed. That very tragic event should have taught us a lot about how to deal with suffering. Unfortunately, a lot of those lessons have not yet been learned.

Our land is a place of ‘drought and flooding rains’, of fires and killer winds. We all know Dorothea Mackellar’s poem, or at least those of us who had to recite it many years ago at school know it. This poem mirrors the reality of the Australian landscape and the Australian seasons. Australia is a land of great differences. We are also a land that has a deeply ingrained set of beliefs which value and encourage self-help and which has volunteering at its core. Self-help and volunteering are not just a part of our culture and highly esteemed. Self-help is essential when there is a natural disaster and you are a very long way from anyone or anywhere else; where there are no cameras or nearby Defence Force; when there is not an SES, a fire brigade or, indeed, a police station; and when the flood-warning communication systems fail, or were never in place.

In my electorate we have had seven years of drought—a very, very devastating time for most families; we have lost half of our dairy farms, for example—and we were so pleased to have warm, gentle rains which gave us the best crops on record some seven or eight months ago. We thought that the drought was over—here was a bumper season.

And then of course the rains kept coming—and that was not until the locusts had had their way, of course, with a lot of these bumper crops. But then the rains kept coming so we had the first of our floods back in September in the Goulburn Valley in particular and in the top of the Goulburn Valley. Then we had more rains again in the Goulburn Valley. But in 2011 it was the

Campaspe area, the Loddon Valley, across the Wimmera and parts of the Mallee that had the most devastating rainfall and flood events in the history of European settlement.

I have to say that that flood legacy is still as bad as it was when it occurred some three weeks ago. It distresses me every time our Prime Minister stands up in this place or in the public media somewhere else and talks about the devastation in Queensland—which I acknowledge was distressing, heartrending and just terrible for the nation and for Queenslanders with all of those deaths, a tragic time—but fails to mention Victoria. As we speak, in Victoria I have thousands of families who have no way of living. Their farms are completely devastated. There is no fodder, no grass. Their houses have also been inundated of course and they have massive losses of livestock. And they have just, as I have said, come through seven years of drought so their financial, emotional and physical resources were already at rock bottom. So when they are forgotten by the Prime Minister it does hurt them. I have just been talking to some members of the government to remind them, please, do not overlook all of those communities that are continuing to suffer.

We had one death in these floods in Victoria in my electorate—tragically, a young boy who fell into the floodwaters of the Goulburn River at a billabong and was lost despite his brothers trying to throw sticks to rescue him. One death of course is one death too many, so I can imagine how those Queensland communities feel with their many, many more deaths. But in my electorate it is a case of livestock deaths, environmental damage, family hopes destroyed and, at the moment, very little sense of the future.

I began a moment ago by referring to the fact that you need to have early warning systems in place and, where they are not in place, it is extremely difficult. How, for example, do you know what is happening if all you get is a phone call from your local federal member? I rang on the Saturday saying to my people on the Loddon River, ‘I know that you have not heard from anyone else but you have a tsunami, metres of water coming down the Loddon River.’ They said: ‘The sky is blue. The sun is shining. The rain occurred two days ago. It was the heaviest rainfall on record and we are wet, but it is okay.’ I was saying to them: ‘No, you have not been warned. There is no system to warn you, but I know because I have been talking to people upstream at Durham Ox, to Chris Harrison, and he is right now putting all of his belongings in his shearing shed’—and in our part of the world these sheds are six feet off the ground so the stock can go underneath—‘and he is hoping to rescue some of his things. But the water is coming down very fast.’

Those farmers along the Loddon River, around Canary Island, Fernihurst, around Durham Ox, and further downstream around Lake Leaghur should have had text messaging. They should have had systems which said, ‘There is a wall of water coming down upon you. You only have hours to get out of there with your lives.’ These people were not able to assess whether they had time to rescue their livestock or their belongings, their lifetime memories, or to put their things into sheds, or whether they should simply try to get out in a four-wheel-drive. Or at this stage maybe some of them could only make it on a four-wheel-drive motorbike, all that was possible to get them up the gravel roads to the nearest bitumen some 19 or 20 kilometres away.

In the east of my electorate, in the Goulburn Valley, we are very lucky as we have text messaging and excellent telemetry. We have all sorts of gauging systems in the Goulburn, the Broken and the Seven Creeks systems and we had excellent information for the September

floods. We were told within centimetres and within hours of when the peaks were to occur, and the information was so accurate. You have to ask why, therefore, in the far west of the electorate communities just as dependent on that information—in fact, are even more critically dependent on information to move livestock because there were further distances to travel—had virtually no information available for them. The Bureau of Meteorology websites had not been updated for 12 hours. There was a breakdown in their phone landlines; they could not ring each other because of the congestion and telephone exchanges going underwater. The only thing they still had working were mobile phones—and no-one was texting them.

I am pleased that the Premier of Victoria, Hon. Ted Baillieu, has announced a very comprehensive review of flood warnings and emergency responses to the severe flooding across Victoria because he has had so many complaints about the failures in the system. We cannot say that the Loddon Valley was overlooked because the streams there are ephemeral. No, they are not; they are irrigation and regulated streams. And at the top of the Loddon River there is both the Cairn Curran and the Laanecoorie reservoirs. Part of the reason we had this tsunami coming down on these farms without warning was that those two reservoirs were spilling at rates never seen before. Why weren't these people downstream told by Goulburn-Murray Water or by Coliban Water or by their local catchment management authority that this was what was happening literally hundreds of kilometres up basin from where they were? That information was not transferred to them.

I was told by the Bureau of Meteorology, which I was ringing desperately to try to get them to start telling people what was going on through their website: 'Look, we don't know ourselves. We actually heard about some of those dreadful flood risings through your local farmers ringing talkback radio. We picked it up on talkback radio. That is where we heard about the floods.' This is our Bureau of Meteorology. Another person ringing the Bureau of Meteorology begging for more information about rainfall events and river levels was told, 'We have other priorities.'

I think this is a time when we have to look very, very seriously at why it is in this modern age of telemetry—where our irrigation systems all through this part of the world are automatically managed through telemetry—when you have an event as severe and catastrophic as this, that people were not being told what was going on unless someone knew of them and made them a personal phone call.

What we are looking at now in northern Victoria on the farmlands is catastrophe; it is environmentally a disaster, with the blackwater now ponded up against every roadway and every channel. We have huge losses of livestock. I will go through some of those losses. This is in my electorate and spilling over into the electorate of Mallee next door. The Department of Primary Industries is now auditing the losses on farms in northern Victoria. So far they have checked 2,800 farms. They have another 900 farms to go. So this data is only for about two-thirds of the numbers who are in fact very seriously affected and for whom this disaster will go on not for weeks or months but for years.

They have lost 4,100 kilometres of farm fencing; 133,150 hectares of grazing pasture was totally destroyed, and that included some of the best dryland lucerne anyone had ever seen and grown; 76,909 hectares of field crops are gone, and that includes most of the state's tomatoes; and a massive loss of 123,200 tonnes of hay and silage. Bear in mind that all of that had been harvested and manufactured up at great expense. Also lost was 5,245 tonnes of stored

grain, and 500 mainly dairy cows. For anyone who knows the value of dairy cows you will be able to do a quick sum and see that that is a very substantial loss. But many more dairy cows are still missing or are injured. Of those dairy cows who have survived, because they could not be milked on time and some of them not milked for days, mastitis is a huge problem. We cannot get hold of all the veterinary supplies needed for that mastitis treatment. It is an animal welfare issue. It is a serious problem for the owners and managers of those dairy cows—

Ms Marino—There is no income.

Dr STONE—There is no income—absolutely not. They are exhausted by trying to treat their surviving dairy cows daily, and, needless to say, the dairy cows are not eating. As you would imagine, they too have been traumatised. There have been 30,000 sheep killed or injured—bear in mind that only two-thirds of the farms' losses have been surveyed—and 330,000 chickens killed. One intensive chicken farm had seven trucks full of drowned birds to take to a local landfill, and thousands of beehives have been washed away. Someone said to me 'that's cute', and I thought to myself, 'They have no idea—beehives are not about honey; they are about honey in some circumstances, but they are in fact the pollinators of the entire crops of the Goulburn-Murray valleys and all of the almonds along the Murray River and around Mildura. The beehives between Laanecoorie and the Murray River have been washed away. That is thousands of beehives, and they cannot be replaced in the short term without very substantial financial support. For a while, we had to argue with Rural Finance in Victoria, who said, 'Bees aren't livestock.' So we have lost the bees as well.

There are the most amazing stories—I am sure you have heard them from many other members and senators too—describing the heroism and the courage of the families and communities who saved one another. Very often they talk about the SES, the CFA, the defence forces and the police, and I acknowledge also those agencies and volunteers who helped in our towns—towns like Rochester. Rochester is on the Campaspe River, and they should have been told virtually to the centimetre and to the hour when the peak of the flood was coming down to their town. Their town also includes one of the biggest dairy manufacturing centres in Victoria, Murray Goulburn Cooperative, which is right on the banks of the Campaspe River. They were told to expect only a moderate flood on the Friday evening, so they made—if you like—moderate preparations. But by about 2 am on Saturday night, they found that they had the highest flood on record ripping through the town and their milk dairy processing factory.

They had had no warning, but the response of the community in that town was nothing short of miraculous and mind-blowing. The local channel constructors, who had all the gear, took charge of looking after sandbagging and levee management. No-one in that town, even the most recent of the newcomers, was alone; their houses were sandbagged, and, when the floods went through, their houses were cleaned and stripped bare of wet carpets and soggy furniture. The shops, which to a large extent were inundated, were cleaned out by gangs of community workers. One woman who has a quilting shop and who had most of her fabrics standing on the floors, as you do, anticipated that when she got into her shop from where she lives out of town she would be looking at a sodden ruin. But other people in the town, knowing that she did not live in the town, had entered her shop and shifted all of her fabrics, and she did not lose a thing. It was that sort of voluntary activity that saved the people of Rochester from the harm that they might otherwise have experienced. The Army helped by taking the

aged residents out of the town in the back of trucks, and some went out with the fire brigade to be evacuated to Echuca and other places.

It was a magnificent community effort, and I commend people in towns such as Rochester, Bridgewater, Serpentine, Boort, Pyramid Hill and Korong Vale. All those little towns put in that magnificent effort, but forgive me for focusing on the farms, because they are the forgotten ones. I have not heard our Prime Minister talk about the farms. What would you do if there was no CFA, no SES, no police, no Army and no warning, and it was just you, your family, your workers—if you had some around—and your neighbours who could still get to you? The amazing thing was how often neighbours got to each other through water over their tractor wheels to bring in equipment and how they managed to put up new or better levies or to breach channel banks so they could save piggeries and dairies. It was a stunning effort.

I have to say that we are still neglecting the farms. It is not enough to say, 'Too bad that your Exceptional Circumstances payments in this area are going to run out on 30 March and it's all over because you've no longer got drought.' Well, we sure as hell have exceptional circumstances right now: it is the worst flood on record. I am begging the federal government to announce, right now, the continuation of Exceptional Circumstances support for these people. Otherwise, how are they to buy food to put on the table? Thirteen weeks of income replacement is 13 weeks. They are going to need much, much longer than 13 weeks. Low-interest loans are fine at \$200,000, but if you have no sense how your \$1 million loan from the drought can be met then that makes it very difficult. These are very highly productive properties, but they are properties that at the moment look like a moonscape. Their fences look like they have been making hay along them—they are completely festooned with dry matter, with the remnants of crops pushed against them. Some fences are still standing; most are gone. In fact we have lost, as I said, 4,000 kilometres of fencing on two-thirds of the properties. There are some volunteers out there, but there are not many cameras, you see. There is not much media out there. They are very tiny districts, and the Prime Minister does not get out to these places, so we do not have the numbers of volunteers from other places that we need for help.

I am trying to put on the national record the fact that floods affect cities, and that is a tragedy; they affect towns, and that is very tragic; but they also affect farms, and farms do not have the numbers of people there to assist, but the impact of floods is just the same. The devastation is just the same; in fact, it can be worse. I had farmers tell me how they watched their sheep stand in water in full wool for two days before they drowned. Sheep can only stand for two days, then they fall over. Some dairy farmers had to walk their cows in full milk for seven hours to be milked. They were doing their best. We have got to do our best to help them.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (6.42 pm)—It has been an extremely challenging summer. These last few months, which are usually a time of celebration and rest, have instead brought a sequence of catastrophic weather events, the most recent of which, Cyclone Yasi, has wrought a colossal amount of damage, though thankfully less than what had been anticipated, especially in terms of the lives and health of Queenslanders in its path. That is a cause for thanks, considering that the cyclone was of a scale and intensity comparable to Hurricane Katrina, which was responsible for 1,800 deaths when it struck the coast of New Orleans in 2005. The fact that Cyclone Yasi was much less harmful in terms of its toll on human life was partly a matter of fortune, which is always involved in such events, but it was also a matter of good planning

and preparations, of good communication, cooperation and leadership. In referring to leadership I would like particularly to pay tribute to Queensland Premier Anna Bligh and Prime Minister Julia Gillard for their competent and compassionate handling of the many disasters over the summer.

I am thankful that, as of yet, there has been no loss of life in the fires that have been burning around Perth this week. On Sunday afternoon my uncle and aunt, David and Jenine Burge, and their children travelled to Fremantle to stay at my place because their house in Kelmscott is one of more than 70 homes that have burnt to the ground. My uncle was heartbroken that he was not able to save his father's—my grandfather's—violin, but he was overwhelmingly relieved that family members, including pets, had gotten out safely. Of course, my uncle was very much aware that his family was only one of many in Perth and around Australia to have suffered loss in recent disasters.

But even with the arrival and consequences of Cyclone Yasi, the fires in WA and the flooding in Victoria, WA, New South Wales and Tasmania, none of these serious events have in any way lessened our sense of the magnitude of devastation and loss that occurred through the floods in southern and Central Queensland. The loss of life, the injuries and the suffering as a result of those floods have been immense. The cost to the community in lives, in trauma and in grief has been acute; and of course there has been and will continue to be a huge cost in terms of the material wreckage of homes and roads and schools and power services, and the less material but no less distressing destruction of stability, of community and of peace of mind.

It has been moving, uplifting and sometimes confronting to hear the contributions made by members of this place. As was the case with the debate on the Victorian bushfires, the worst events not only bring out the best in the Australian character; they also bring out a sense of shared purpose, common cause and camaraderie in this place which is appropriate and welcome. I want to particularly thank the Queensland members for their contributions in recording the detail of what has occurred in their communities and to their constituents. With floods and cyclones there are so many ways to be overwhelmed by the scope and impact of these events. In these times we try to take stock of 200-plus kilometres per hour wind speeds and 200-plus millimetres of rainfall. We take stock of thousands of homes without power, roads closed and towns under water or inaccessible. Of course, these numbers and details are staggering, but in the end it is often the smaller stories, the personal stories of individuals and families confronting these events, that really go to the heart of what has occurred. So I thank the members in this place for sharing some of those important stories with us.

Above all, I join with my fellow parliamentarians in paying tribute to the people who endured the fear and hardship and pain of the recent events. I thank and honour all those who have been part of the emergency response and I thank all those across Australia who are sharing the effort to assist the recovery of people in towns devastated by the storms, floods and fires.

In Western Australia the summer has brought floods in the Gascoyne, fires in the southwest and around Perth and damaging storms to Geraldton and York. While much of the east coast of Australia has gone directly from drought to floods, in much of southern Western Australia the storms and floods, though on a much smaller scale, have occurred against the back-

ground of an ongoing and severe drought. In the wheat belt the soil remains parched; in Perth the dams are at historic lows.

In some ways it seems like a long time ago now, but in December a monsoon trough developed off the north-west coast of Western Australia and, over the days of 16 to 20 December, dumped an unprecedented amount of rain into the Gascoyne River catchment. A number of reading stations recorded between 250 and 315 millimetres of rain across those five days, in a region where the December mean rainfall is five millimetres and the annual rainfall struggles to break the 200-millimetre mark. The rain records for Carnarvon, which date back to 1883, previously recorded the highest 24-hour rainfall at 119 millimetres. In the 24 hours to 9 am on 17 December, Carnarvon Airport recorded 208 millimetres. This part of Western Australia literally went from drought to flood in 24 hours.

The floods in the Gascoyne have destroyed vast areas of agricultural cultivation and taken a massive toll on the properties and livelihood of the people of that region. The early damage estimates are in the order of \$100 million. At least 2,000 cattle were reported drowned. With my other Western Australian colleagues, I fully support the government's decisions to put in place Commonwealth-state government assistance packages, with grants and extra government assistance to those affected by the Gascoyne floods and, I also understand, the Western Australian bushfires. This will assist in the clean-up effort and will enable people to put their lives back together more quickly and with more dignity.

Life on the land can be subject to a meteorological cycle that swings savagely from one extreme to the next, with barely a season to catch one's breath in between. We have seen that this summer. We are continuing to see it. So it is that, on the east coast, farmers who struggled to raise crops or maintain livestock in a series of dry years now confront crops that are washed out and animals that are drowned. In the Gascoyne, farmers whose crops were demolished by floods and whose animals have been drowned may well in the next 12 months face crops that will fail for lack of rain and animals who will suffer and die of thirst. I grew up in the country and I have never had anything but the greatest respect for the particular challenges that come with life on the land. This summer those challenges have been made clear again for all to see.

I would also like to recognise that, along with the terrible human cost of the Queensland floods and other natural disasters that have occurred around Australia, there has been an enormous amount of suffering visited upon animals. The floods in Queensland, Victoria and the Gascoyne have resulted in the deaths of a large number of livestock, pets and native animals. In addition to those losses, the Australian Veterinary Association has noted that the destruction of habitat and food sources will continue to have an impact on native species for some time to come. I take this opportunity to applaud the work being done by organisations like the AVA and the RSPCA and by local vets, wildlife associations, farmers and ordinary animal lovers across the affected areas.

One of the key frames through which we consider the world in the 21st century is climate change. It is a matter of commonsense that we should consider how to respond to that change and its consequences. In Australia that imperative is made stronger by the fact that we are in many ways particularly susceptible to the negative effects of climate change. The evidence and the expert analysis do suggest that climate change will produce extreme weather events of greater intensity. While no-one can say that the clearing and burning of a particular forest in

South America in the year 1987 has directly contributed to Cyclone Yasi or the floods in Queensland or the fires last year in Victoria, it is absolutely correct to say that all of the human contributions to climate change are, taken together, a factor in bringing about an altered climate system that will result in higher temperatures, higher sea levels and more intense extreme weather events.

Perhaps what would otherwise have been a one-in-100-year flood event may now occur two, three or more times in that period. Perhaps the average intensity of the cyclones that occur in our region will increase. These are the kinds of things that fit a realistic prognosis. For that reason, the rebuilding and construction in Queensland needs to happen in a way that anticipates the next flood of the kind we have just seen—and possibly one that is worse. At the same time, right around Australia we need to re-examine our approach to urban planning, development approvals and the task of disaster planning and preparation. Storms and sea rises place our predominantly coastal society at great risk, and we will have no-one but ourselves to blame if we do not require planning to occur that takes account of the risks that are ahead.

I know that the new maps produced late last year by the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency made sobering reading for the people in my electorate. At the outer end of projections, there would be significant areas of the coast that would be subject to extensive inundation, including the area of the Cockburn coast that is currently being intensively developed—in some cases with apartment and marina developments that sit right on the ocean's edge—and also including the west end of the city of Fremantle, which is regarded as one of the world's best-preserved 19th century cityscapes. There needs to be a comprehensive review of our planning and preparation for the effects of flooding, storm surges and sea rises in order to ensure we do not create circumstances for unnecessary loss in the future and that we act to prevent damage, wherever possible, to development that already exists.

The last thing I would like to say is on another topic that, sadly, tends to arise whenever we face a crisis in Australia. When this country responds to natural disasters, and specifically to the cost of repair and reconstruction, there are always calls from a very small number of people to immediately cease our foreign aid contributions in order to allocate those same funds to our own backyard. On numerous occasions last year the coalition supported this government's commitment to raise our level of foreign aid to 0.5 per cent of GNI by 2015-16. This is a level of aid that will make a significant difference to alleviating poverty, disease and malnutrition and to reducing the instability and violence that flow from these deprivations. I note reports of the present debate taking place within the coalition about whether to abandon bipartisan support for foreign aid. I find this very disturbing and I hope it does not continue.

If we were to do as the Leader of the Opposition suggests and renege on our commitment to help build schools in Indonesia, what would it achieve? It would mean that tens of thousands of underprivileged children would miss an education that stands to hugely improve their economic and health prospects. As a result, more would die and more would endure lives of poverty and deprivation. Apart from being a terrible loss for those kids and their families, it would do nothing for regional stability or economic development. And, as the Minister for Foreign Affairs said today in question time, it would do nothing to address the root causes of terrorism. It would not be well received by the government of Indonesia. It would be a promise that we have broken and, in that sense, it would be a mark against our own character and honour.

The phrase ‘charity begins at home’ was coined by English writer Thomas Browne in the 17th century, and its meaning is that in some cases the urge to help others can lead us to neglect ourselves. This is not the issue here. In any case, being a good international citizen and a good neighbour is absolutely in our national interest, contributing to global and regional peace and security and fostering economic development and self-sufficiency, which in turn expands our own export and economic opportunities.

Even as we lift our level of aid, it must be recognised that it is still at a level below that provided by a number of other developed countries. In fact, Australia ranks 16th out of 23 OECD nations in terms of the level of aid we provide and our contribution is well below the level of 0.7 per cent that the United Nations believes is necessary if we are to meet all the Millennium Development Goals.

There are always debates about how to allocate government funds, but the debates are not always as brave or as forensic as they should be. It is unfortunate that the focus is often on taking funds away from those who already have very little. Sometimes, domestically, the focus can be on cutting welfare or cutting funds to Indigenous programs. You would think it makes little sense, when trying to help people in trouble, to remove assistance to those already at the bottom. It is even easier but no less unreasonable to suggest that the response to our own troubles should include slashing foreign aid. As UNICEF has noted:

The recent natural disasters in Australia have given us a front-row seat to the devastation and suffering that too often we see on our television screens beamed from across the world. As a rich nation, and one that avoided the worst of the global financial meltdown, Australia has the capacity and the resources to help those in need both at home and beyond our borders.

As Queensland was being ravaged by floods, so too was Brazil, with more than 600 people dying there. These events and others, like the devastating earthquake in Haiti last year, show that disaster can strike anywhere; but of course it affects the poor disproportionately. As former Labor Prime Minister Ben Chifley famously said:

We have a great objective—the light on the hill—which we aim to reach by working for the betterment of mankind not only here but anywhere we may give a helping hand.

I like to think of this as not just a Labor tradition but an Australian one.

We are dealing with tough times here in Australia, and we are going to confront that challenge together. But we are not going to confront those difficulties by playing politics with our aid commitments, because we know that those commitments go to men, women and children whose lives are on the line, and whose health and futures we help to change from being extremely bleak to being relatively safe and secure through the assistance we provide. We will rebuild Queensland and the other affected parts of Australia, and we will achieve that together, at the same time as we continue to do our part in reducing global and regional poverty and disadvantage and in promoting peace, security and economic development.

As I stated at the outset, it has been an extremely challenging summer in terms of the extent and ferocity of the natural disasters that have occurred. We have been lashed east and west by cyclones, floods and fires; yet, through all these months of danger and devastation, we have seen not just loss but also courage, not just destruction but also generosity, not just fear but also irrepressible Australian humour. In that sense, in the unstinting and big-hearted response of Australians to adversity, it has also been an uplifting summer.

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (6.57 pm)—The majority of what I am going to say this evening will relate to the floods in Victoria that occurred in such a devastating fashion. But, before I address what happened in Victoria, I would like to offer my condolences and pay respect to the victims of the floods in Queensland. In particular, I would like to draw attention to the speeches given by the member for Wright and the member for Herbert about what has occurred in Queensland. They are both colleagues who started with me in this place in August, and what they have witnessed in that short time as members will have had a huge and lasting impact on them and their communities. The way they spoke about that in the House can leave us all with nothing but great admiration for the job they have done as new members. I think they articulated superbly what happened in Queensland and what the lasting impact will be with regard to both the floods and the cyclones. I extend my sympathy and pay my respects to them and their communities, and all the other Queensland members who are still going through such a difficult time.

In Victoria we also had devastating floods. Two weeks ago I was in Glenorchy, which is a small country town west of Stawell, and I was shown around by a local councillor who had seen their house flooded for the second time in four months. The first flood had had a huge impact on their weatherboard house. It had started to bend the walls and do irreparable damage to the ceiling, because the house in many ways soaked up the initial flood. When the second flood came through, the house literally started to collapse around this local councillor and it is now a complete write-off.

The township of Glenorchy cannot afford to lose any more of its population but, sadly, for this local councillor the option of rebuilding in that small community is now not viable. The tears with which she expressed her disappointment at having to move away from that community—she is renting a caravan on a property and looking at where else she might head—will remain with me for the rest of my life. It showed me how much these floods, as others have articulated so well, have a human cost and a human impact, which we should never forget. As the months and years roll on we must always remember the human cost and the human impact of these floods and make sure that as members of this parliament we are there for these communities that have been impacted.

The second thing I will mention is when I was in Skipton on Sunday. Skipton has been flooded twice in the last four months, and on Sunday I was there again as that community waited for floodwaters to rise for the third time. The emergency services crews were there. The police were there. Local government was there. The Red Cross was there waiting to see what was going to happen. The resilience in that community facing flood for the third time was as admirable a thing as you could ever see. The first flood did a lot of damage; the second flood, in many cases, irreparable damage. For that community to be sitting there and waiting a third time for an event which in many ways would make the task of rebuilding so much harder. For them to be sandbagging, washing, waiting and in the end, fortunately, watching as the floodwaters rose but did not rise enough to inundate the town and the spirit with which they did that is the second thing which will remain with me forever.

I will take a moment to thank the State Emergency Services, the Country Fire Authority, Victoria Police, local government authorities, Red Cross and volunteers for the outstanding leadership they have shown in dealing with the floods and in guiding our community through it. The work they have done can only be described as inspirational.

I also praise the excellent coverage of our local emergency broadcasters, the ACE Radio Network and ABC Radio. Our emergency broadcasters at all times kept the local community informed of every development and as I travelled around Halls Gap, Pomonal, Stawell, Beaufort, Skipton, Wickliffe, Warrnambool, Allansford, Panmure and Mackinnons Bridge, our emergency broadcasters were keeping the local community informed of every development by crossing regularly to the emergency services and other relevant agencies. Even though the information was not at all times at hand, they did their utmost to keep communities informed. I know there were broadcasters who worked upwards of 15 hours to make sure that local communities knew as much as the emergency services did.

I would also like to commend our local newspapers for their coverage of the floods. Not only did they do an excellent job in providing as much information as possible but some of the weekly papers also brought us the human element, which is so important to our understanding of what is occurring on the ground. Even in some of the smaller communities which do not have newspapers but only community newsletters, those newsletters were vital in providing stories so that communities knew that what they were going through was shared and also in providing information after the events of what help was available for our local communities to access.

As I spent time with our affected communities in Wannon, and after helping with the clean-up, I heard many flood stories. The way the water came, the speed and the devastating impact on lives were all very much part of those stories. There was one comment I heard repeatedly, and I think it is very Australian: 'There were people who were worse off than me, so I went to help them.' People selflessly gave to help out others. I know of an example in Beaufort of a local businessman whose warehouse was flooding and yet he was working with the CFA to try to help save homes. To me, that was just so indicative of the way Australians deal with these disasters. The selflessness was there for all to see and was the constantly repeated theme that I heard as I went around.

It is very moving to hear the stories and see damaged homes and farms. I would like to particularly note what the member for Murray said in here two speeches ago on the impact these floods have had on our rural communities and especially our farms in western and north-western Victoria. There is talk of upwards of \$2 billion to \$3 billion in lost income for our farmers. Recuperating from that after many years of drought is going to be extremely difficult and is going to make the recovery of communities which have been flooded difficult as well, because it is the farms that ultimately provide the income that sustains a lot of the businesses in those communities. Hearing those stories—and they have been articulated here in this place—is dreadful. But, at the same time, I must say that it has been inspiring to witness the true resolve of people who have lost so much and their ability to give when you would think that the natural inclination would be to help oneself.

The flooding in many parts had to be seen to be believed. I have seen bridges with holes just ripped out of the centre of them; fences dragged for kilometres; and silage bales, which can weigh three-quarters of a tonne, delivered five kilometres from one farm down to another farm by the force of the water. It is going to take a long time for these communities to rebuild because the damage has been so destructive. Yet I am sure that in our communities in Wannon people will pull together and that that true community spirit will lead us to rebuild our communities and to move on. We have already seen that in Panmure, where the local football oval

and netball courts were destroyed by the floods. Within two weeks there was a community working bee and already the repair job has started to make sure that, for the opening of the football and netball season, the recreational reserve will be in a fit state so that the community can gather again and move on.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my parliamentary colleagues Greg Hunt, Bruce Billson, Scott Ryan and Alan Tudge for assisting with the flood clean-up in Skipton, Wickliffe and Beaufort. Special thanks go to Alan Tudge for bringing members of the Salvation Army and Crossway Baptist Church to assist and also to John Kavanagh, Chairman of the Skipton Progress Society, for organising the local business owners meeting when my colleagues came to visit. Our community meeting in Skipton with all the businesses that had been impacted by the floods was an incredibly moving hour and a half. We heard firsthand from those businesspeople how they will seek to rebuild after the damage of the second flood. We heard the raw emotion, the uncertainty and the difficulties that they are facing in dealing with just the financial burden that the floods are causing them. They were concerned not so much for themselves but for the people that they employ and also whether they will have the money to keep employing those people, knowing that if a job is lost to that local community it is that little bit harder to make sure the community flourishes and thrives.

One of the things which struck me from talking to the people at these meetings is that they expect that one of the roles of government will be to support and invest in the long-term infrastructure of their communities. Right now, especially in western Victoria, I think that that, more than anything else, is what people want to hear from our government. With that in mind, I wrote to the Prime Minister. I will place on the record now how much I appreciated the phone call I received from the Prime Minister after the floods, asking me whether there was anything she could do and telling me that there was a contact in her office who I could call at any time with regard to the flood. Because of that phone call I have taken the opportunity to write to the Prime Minister and suggest that our communities in western Victoria need a one-off Roads to Recovery and bridges payment.

Having travelled around the local government areas, such as the Northern Grampians shire, Ararat Rural City, Pyrenees shire, Corangamite shire and Moyne shire, I saw that the devastation to the road and bridge infrastructure in all these local government areas will be a lasting legacy of these floods unless swift government action is taken. I know from talking to John Forrest that local government authorities in his electorate of Mallee are in a similar situation. I also know from talking to Sharman Stone that there are similar problems in her electorate of Murray. The devastation to the road and bridge networks has a major impact on these local communities. It prevents people from directly accessing their workplaces. It hampers the access of school buses, fire and emergency services and farm and freight transport. Many of the bridges are on secondary freight routes and, apart from the movement of freight, they are key economic assets in connecting local communities to the broader road networks that they travel on to get to work and school.

Prior to the floods some councils were already struggling to afford the maintenance and upgrades necessary to keep these roads and bridges open—these are not large local government authorities. Local residents, having been impacted by the floods—in some cases for the second time in four months—are not in a position to face further rate hikes.

So, to assist local government areas across Australia, including Wannon, that are already facing pressures in maintaining this road and bridge infrastructure, a one-off federal government roads and bridges to recovery payment directly to local government is, I believe, an absolute priority that must be addressed. I understand that mayors right across western Victoria will be supporting the letter that I have written to the Prime Minister by writing their own letters requesting such a payment. The Roads to Recovery program, which the former coalition government implemented and the Labor government has continued to support, would seem to be the ideal program to provide this support to local communities. I hope that the federal government will look very closely at this proposal as part of the package that it puts forward for Victoria.

On that, I would like to say that, while the plan and response that the federal government has put forward for rebuilding Queensland has been incredibly admirable, we are looking for such a plan now for Victoria. We need the Commonwealth to come out and articulate how it is going to help and assist in Victoria, what money it will dedicate to Victoria and how it will do this. I hope that we hear this sooner rather than later, because in many of the communities I am starting to get questioned about where the Commonwealth assistance to Victoria is.

In addition to infrastructure funding, the recent floods across the country have showcased the dire need for additional funding for the Bureau of Meteorology to ensure that it is well-equipped to adequately monitor and predict fast-moving, intense weather events such as these. Currently, the flood-monitoring infrastructure in the Wannon region is extremely inadequate and in many areas nonexistent. Indeed, there are no automated formal flood warning systems in the Glenelg-Hopkins region and there are only manual flood warning systems at Dergholm and Fulham Bridge. Townships such as Beaufort and Skipton and many waterways, including Mount Emu Creek and the Glenelg, Wannon, Hopkins, Merri and Moyne rivers, do not currently have adequate flood-monitoring systems, resulting in poor information for these communities regarding expected flood levels and flood time estimates. Similarly, Fiery Creek, north-west of Beaufort, and Wattle Hill Creek, Portland, lack flood warning equipment. I also understand my region has very few online Bureau of Meteorology rainfall stations.

People in Beaufort, Skipton, Wickliffe and surrounding localities could have saved more of their possessions had they received an indication of the flood level and estimated time of arrival. As it was, these communities were caught off guard yet again and for the second time—and for some even the third time—in six months some of these people have lost everything. I will give you an idea of what I experienced in Skipton on Sunday. Warnings were issued for flood in Skipton for the third time in five months. I went to Skipton in the afternoon and already they had been warned that the flood would occur at 10 o'clock; then it was to occur at two o'clock and then it was to occur at four o'clock.

I joined up with the SES in Skipton and went with them to do the latest round of flood measuring. What that entailed for the SES officer who was in charge at that time was to get down on his hands and knees and look through shrubs left over from the floods from the previous time to try and get an indication of how far the river had risen in the last two hours. In the 21st century I think we should be able to provide better information, better technology for our emergency services to do their job. The Bureau of Meteorology needs increased resources to enable it to provide early warnings about floods. Recent flood events have highlighted that my electorate is deserving of increased investment in flood-monitoring stations and funding

for flood modelling. I urge the government to consider providing assistance for improved flood management and to invest more resources in the Bureau of Meteorology and its flood-warning system in Wannon and across the nation.

I wish to urge the federal government to allocate a tourism payment of the like received by Queensland to try to assist places such as Halls Gap and Pomonal in my electorate and those towns along the Murray that also rely on tourism. The devastation in the Grampians National Park has to be seen to be believed. The damage to walkways and bridges means that two-thirds of the park is closed and will probably remain so for three to six months. Right now, towns in the region such as Halls Gap and Pomonal need help in getting the word out that, although a large part of the national park is closed, they still need people to visit.

The jazz festival is on in Halls Gap this weekend. If we could get a record crowd there, that would be the best thing that people across Victoria and Australia could do for the town and the region at this time. As events occur throughout the year, if people could just keep in the back of their minds the idea of a trip to Halls Gap, that would have great benefits. It would help businesses which have been devastated by the floods and, the year before that, by the code red alert warning which emptied the town. That could be an ongoing contribution to helping western Victoria recover from the floods.

The federal government can also play a role here. I commend them for what they have done in offering money for tourism in Queensland, but I ask them to think about making a similar payment to either the regional tourism operators or jointly with Tourism Victoria to make sure that people are aware that all the tourist towns in western Victoria are open for business as well. The roads, although ripped apart in many places, are still open. As long as you are prepared in some places to take alternative routes, you can get to those towns. By visiting and putting money into those local economies you can make a huge difference.

I would like to end where I began: by pointing out that we should never forget the human impact that the floods, the cyclone and, in Western Australia, the fires have had. We should remember that people will be left with that impact not for months but for years. The government and all members of this House should remember that there is going to be an ongoing need to make sure that all these communities have the help that they need to recover.

We also must remember that we can make a difference, when we get rains, cyclones or fires like we did, by making sure that we can always improve on the way we prepare for those types of events. In the case of floods, it means by making sure that the technology is there for our catchment management authorities so that they can predict as best they can levels of rainfall and what impact that rainfall will have on communities which are prone to flooding. If we can remember those two key things going forward, as members of this parliament, we will be able to make a difference when these events occur in the future, as they will.

Ms O'NEILL (Robertson) (7.26 pm)—I would like to associate myself with the comments of the Prime Minister and other members of the House over the past day. The stories they have told are many and they are deeply moving. I hope by putting the grief, the sorrow and the loss into words we can reassure the broader Australian community of our commitment to one another as Australians. Queensland Premier Anna Bligh, when the true horror of the inland tsunami that struck Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley became clear, said, 'I want us to remember who we are.' These disasters have certainly made us remember who we are. They have revealed our core beliefs, held broadly across the nation, beliefs made apparent in

the actions of care, of determination to hold firm in the face of adversity, to give service, to get in, one and all, and to get on with the clean-up. Across the entire nation, we have shared with another generation, generation Y, a formal and practical induction into the Australian way of enacting the deep understanding that we are an island nation and that we are all in it together.

Today I speak formally to honour the losses of lives and property, in cities, in regional areas and in rural settings. I speak to recognise the heroes and helpers who stood tall and have given such amazing service in extraordinary circumstances. As a citizen of this great country, Australia, I want to say on behalf of the people of Robertson that we care for you, our fellow Australians. Unlike the experiences of those in Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, northern New South Wales, Tasmania and, more recently, the suburbs around Perth, our homes on the Central Coast were untouched by natural disaster. Yet the response to the flood crisis, in particular, has been nothing short of phenomenal. The people of the Central Coast have opened their hearts and their wallets and in many cases have put their bodies on the line to help those in need. They have approached me asking me to convey to the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Premier of Queensland a recognition of their outstanding leadership and compassion at this time of great trial.

The people of Robertson, the people of the Central Coast, have reassured me that they want to be part of the rebuilding of the nation. We are more than willing to bear and share some part of the burden to ensure a fair go for those who have lost so much. Within days of the floods, every shop you walked into in Gosford had a donation bucket next to the cash register, for the Premier's flood appeal. I have been to many local fundraisers. Our local Cumberland community newspaper, the *Central Coast Express Advocate*, ran a barefoot bowls afternoon out at the famous ABC, the Avoca Beach Bowling Club. There was money raised and there was also solidarity and reassurance that in our distant grief we were not alone, nor were we powerless to help from a distance.

A week later I was able to support another event, brought together by two Fire Brigade officers from Umina Fire Station, Billy McLean and Gary King. They are men with big hearts and great friends in the community and the emergency services. So, appropriately, they put on a triple-0 party at Woy Woy Leagues Club. I spoke that evening to many emergency services workers, who so deeply understand crises and disaster, but I also spoke to three young women who work for an insurance company up in the Hunter. They took calls from flood victims by day and then drove for an hour and a half from Newcastle by night to chip in and support the fundraiser, to do their bit.

One of our local Rotary clubs, the West Gosford Rotary group, asked me to speak at a fundraising dinner. Anthony and James and chef Jess put on a great Lebanese feast for more than 100 people at Byblos Restaurant just around the corner from my office in Gosford. Local businesses donated so generously and, by the end of the evening, Andrew Dickson, the president, and his trusty team had raised over \$4½ thousand in one evening. I seek leave to table the list of local businesses who made donations to the event to ensure it would be a success. Their efforts deserve recognition in this place.

Leave granted.

Ms O'NEILL—Quietly, and with determination to do his bit for his country again, Australian cricket legend Arthur Morris, a member of Don Bradman's invincible side, stepped up to

do what he could from Tarragal Glen Retirement Village in Erina, where he now lives. Mr Morris donated one of his bats to the auction for a flood fundraiser. Last Friday, organised by our local radio station Star 104.5 FM, a convoy of care—six trucks from the Central Coast—headed up across the border with essentials and toys to bring a little comfort to those with so little. There were so many more local fundraising events that I will not have time to mention them here today, but I must take this opportunity to pay special tribute to two Central Coast mums who simply could not stand by while their fellow Australians were suffering.

Vanessa Betland and Sam Schuetze put together a mission of mercy to the flood ravaged area around Ipswich. They call their group the Central Coast Caravan of Angels. With an unbeatable attitude and fierce determination Vanessa and Sam marshalled financial and in-kind support from companies as large as Caltex, alongside local accounting practice Robson Partners, Chittaway Bay pharmacy and tavern, Donut King, Domino's Pizza, Coastal Liner, Signarama, Axiom Psychological and Coaching Services, Star 104.5 and Sanitarium. These two women then went about rounding up their friends, supporters, local tradies and friends of local tradies—more than 60 volunteers in all. They got a bus, a few utes and they got to Ipswich. Volunteers paid their own way to get on a bus so they could get up there to help.

The practical side of their visit is that from Thursday, the 20th to Monday, 24 January they gutted houses, helped the ADF bag up rubbish, cleaned more than 20 houses and gave invaluable humanitarian assistance. The even more lasting gift they left behind was a delivery of hope for people who were wondering if others might forget their suffering. In her day job, Vanessa works for Robson Partners, while Sam tests children's toys for safety. I want to give my special thanks to Vanessa and Sam, to their Caravan of Angels and their many supporters. Thank you for your amazing generosity of spirit. You are an inspiration. And it does not end there. The angels are going back to Ipswich on 24 February. Angels, you have done your region proud.

This summer has been one we will never forget, and it is one that we do not yet understand. Even as our amazing teams of emergency workers respond and some semblance of order is restored, there is the lingering question that hangs in the air: why? There are times we need to search out words to help us make sense of the great challenges that come to us in our lifetime. This is such a time. It is such a time because the floods, the rain, the wind and the fire tore away so much that our spoken words are a powerful way—sadly, sometimes the only way—in which we can record and acknowledge what was lost.

We as a nation have lost much. Every life is precious. What mother, what feeling human being would not be moved to tears by the account of 13-year-old Jordan Rice, who told his rescuers, 'Take my brother first'? My own son, Noah, is just 14. Jordan's courage certainly moved me.

The members for Oxley, Blair, Groom and Wright all gave moving testaments to both the pain and the resilience of the wonderful communities they represent. I am proud to be in this parliament with them. People across this great country who have survived nature's worst are speaking of their amazing escapes and terrifying experiences in stories shared between neighbours and in words spoken in conversations down the phone. When the world around us has shifted, words offer us the chance to renew and restate our commitment to one another as human beings, to try to restore some order to the chaos and to reflect on what we have lost. To those who have lived in a disaster zone: we know that you have lost. So many treasured per-

sonal memories of places and lifetimes recorded in photographs and letters are lost and gone; so many years of tender caring for gardens, so many special pets, teddies, toys, music, iPods with favourite songs and special memories, computers with half-written books and letters—all gone. We know that, in the middle of that physical and emotional loss, the ordinariness of life was lost too. I want to reassure you that we all want to restore the ordinariness of life for you.

When we look back on this summer of 2010-11, it will be as a marker of time—a key moment in the life of our nation when nature once again revealed our vulnerability in the wake of her forces. Yet in our vulnerability we will find strength in one another's commitment to our country and to our shared future. We will rebuild, we will not leave those most affected behind and we will be ever mindful of those we lost in the summer of 2010-11.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Murphy)—I understand it is the wish of honourable members to signify at this stage their respect and sympathy by rising in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I thank the Committee.

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (7.36 pm)—I move:

That further proceedings be conducted in the House.

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (7.36 pm)—I move:

That further proceedings on orders of the day Nos 4 and 7, private members' business, be conducted in the House.

Question agreed to.

Main Committee adjourned at 7.38 pm

QUESTIONS IN WRITING**Asylum Seekers
(Question No. 30)**

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 30 September 2010:

In respect of the Government's announcement that the disused mining camp site at Leonora, Western Australia, will be used for the temporary accommodation of asylum seekers:

- (1) What will be the overall cost to the Government for the use of this facility.
- (2) What are the extent and costs of refurbishment works associated with the use of this facility.
- (3) What is the duration of any lease negotiated with the owner of this facility, including renewal options.
- (4) From where will the operator of this facility be sourcing goods, including but not limited to food and toiletries, for the consumption of asylum seekers.
- (5) What security measures will need to be implemented at this facility, and at what cost.

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

- (1) The department is leasing the facility at Leonora. Between 27 April 2010 and 7 November 2010, the department has paid \$3.1m in leasing fees to the property's owner for the use of the facility. The overall cost will depend on the size and composition of the client and staff population and the duration for which the facility is used.
- (2) Refurbishment works were undertaken by the owner and are only minor in nature.
- (3) The duration of the lease is six months. There is an option to renew this twice on a six month leasing arrangement. The first option has now been exercised.
- (4) The operator of the facility will primarily source goods from local and regional suppliers.
- (5) The facility utilises static guarding in conjunction with the interactive management model utilised throughout the detention network as the primary security measure.

A new fence will be constructed around the site by the owner. The department has agreed to share the cost of construction, which has been estimated at a total of \$93,000.

**Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital
(Question No. 34)**

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 18 October 2010:

- (1) During her time as Minister, has she visited Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital; if so, on what dates.
- (2) Can she indicate whether submissions were made by the NSW Government (and other entities) for funding for Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital under the various rounds of the Health and Hospitals Fund; if so, (a) for what purpose was funding sought in these submissions, (b) what submissions were (i) selected, and (ii) not selected, for funding, and (c) on what grounds were submissions not selected for funding.
- (3) Does her department or any agency within her responsibility undertake or receive assessments on the standard, state and needs of Australia's public hospitals; if so, what is the nature and substance of such assessments in respect of Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital.

- (4) Does her department or any agency within her responsibility undertake or receive rankings of Australia's public hospitals on their respective standards, states and needs; if so, how is Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital ranked, and why.

Ms Roxon—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) While I have visited many of Australia's 756 public hospitals, I have not had the opportunity to visit Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital.
- (2) The Department of Health and Ageing (the Department) did not receive a submission from the NSW Government, or any other entity, for funding for the Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital under the Health and Hospitals Fund.
- (3) The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare regularly receives information on public hospitals, some of which is now published on the *MyHospitals* website.

Under the *Private Health Insurance Act 2007*, all hospitals (both public and private), as part of the Commonwealth declaration process for private health insurance benefits, the Medicare Benefits Scheme and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, where applicable, must have and maintain accreditation from an appropriate accreditation agency. The responsibility of the Department is to ensure that hospitals maintain their level of accreditation.

Under the National Health and Hospitals Network Agreement, a new National Performance Authority is being established to report on individual hospitals, both public and private, Local Hospital Networks, and Medicare Locals. The Authority will publish Hospital Performance Reports that will provide clear and nationally comparable performance data covering every Local Hospital Network, the hospitals within it and on the performance of private hospitals.

- (4) No. See answer to (3) above.

Visas

(Question No. 49)

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 26 October 2010:

In respect of decisions made by the Minister in the 2008, 2009 and 2010 (to 26 October) calendar years pursuant to Section 501 of the *Migration Act 1958*, how many cases to cancel or revoke a visa were considered by the Minister, and of these, how many were (a) approved, and (b) denied.

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

- During the 2008 calendar year the Minister considered two cases pursuant to Section 501 of the *Migration Act 1958*. The cases were both refusal considerations and the Minister's decision in both cases was to refuse.
- During the 2009 calendar year the Minister did not consider any cases Section 501 of the *Migration Act 1958*.
- During the 2010 calendar year (to 26 October) the Minister considered one case pursuant to Section 501 of the *Migration Act 1958*. The case was a cancellation consideration and the Minister's decision was to cancel.

Australian Defence Force: Cosmetic Surgery

(Question No. 68)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 28 October 2010:

In respect of cosmetic surgery on Australian Defence Force members (including but not limited to breast implants and augmentation and gender change) paid for by his department since 1 December 2007:

- (a) how many operations and procedures have been undertaken;
- (b) what specific operations and procedures have been undertaken; and
- (c) what sum of funding was provided for each operation and procedure?

Mr Stephen Smith—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

Cosmetic surgery is defined as any medical or dental procedure undertaken solely for the purpose of attempting to preserve or improve a person’s subjective appearance. It is one type of plastic surgery. Procedures conducted for the sole purpose of improving or preserving the subjective appearance of a member (i.e. cosmetic surgery) are not provided at public expense.

- (a) No cosmetic procedures have been undertaken since 1 December 2007. There have been 60 surgical procedures provided to ADF members since 1 December 2007 that would be considered as ‘plastic surgery’.
- (b) Specific plastic surgery procedures provided include breast and other post-cancer-related reconstructions, breast reduction and a small number of breast augmentation procedures. All have had an identified, justifiable and well documented clinical need and have been managed in accordance with extant Defence policy, and therefore are not regarded as cosmetic. No gender change surgery has been provided at public expense.
- (c) No funding has been provided for cosmetic procedures since 1 December 2007. The total cost of all plastic surgery procedures provided since 1 December 2007 is estimated at \$633,000.

Visas

(Question No. 90)

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 19 November 2010:

To ask the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship—In respect of his department’s refugee and Special Humanitarian Program (SHP):

- (1) How many applications for (a) a refugee visa, and (b) sub category visas within the SHP, have been received since August 2008.
- (2) What number of applicants were (a) granted, and (b) denied, permanent residency visas in each of the following years: 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 (to 22 November).
- (3) What is the maximum period that applications will remain active before they are refused or denied.
- (4) What is the average waiting period between his department receiving an application for a humanitarian visa, to his department (a) granting, or (b) denying to grant, that visa.
- (5) Of the current applications, how many involve women with and without young children.
- (6) What is the country of origin and current residence of each current applicant.

Mr Bowen—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

- (1) The following table outlines applications (persons) received for Refugee and offshore Special Humanitarian Program visas between 1 August 2008 and 31 October 2010.

Visa category	Visa subclasses included in category	Number of applications August 2008–October 2010
Refugee	200, 201, 203 and 204	32 292
Special Humanitarian Program	202	65 054

- (2) The following table outlines applications (persons) for permanent visas under the offshore Humanitarian Program that were finalised in 2008–09, 2009–10 and 2010–11 (to 31 October), showing application outcomes.

	Approved	Refused	Withdrawn	Total
2008–09	11 010	22 341	512	33 863
2009–10	9236	33 886	445	43 567
2010–11 (to 31 October)	2249	13 433	169	15 851
TOTAL	22 495	69 660	1126	93 281

- (3) There is no maximum period for an offshore Humanitarian Program application to remain active before it is finalised. DIAC service standards require that 75 per cent of applications are finalised within 52 weeks. In 2009–10, 75 per cent of applications were finalised within 47 weeks.
- (4) In 2009–10 the average processing time for offshore Humanitarian Program applications that were granted was 52.6 weeks. The average processing time for offshore Humanitarian Program applications that were refused was 27 weeks.
- (5) Across the entire offshore Humanitarian Program, data is not kept in a way that can be interrogated to answer the question asked.
- (6) Data is not kept in a way that can be interrogated to provide the current country of residence for all applicants currently under consideration. The table over the page shows the number of people with offshore Humanitarian Program applications under consideration by the primary applicant's country of birth (as at 31 October 2010).

Country Of Birth	Persons	Country Of Birth	Persons	Country Of Birth	Persons
Afghanistan	7301	Germany, Federal Rep. Of	2	Senegal	1
Angola	5	Ghana	13	Sierra Leone	1175
Azerbaijan	4	Guinea	48	Singapore	1
Bangladesh	3	India	20	Somalia	4529
Belarus	1	Indonesia	6	South Africa, Republic Of	7
Benin	3	Iran	504	Sri Lanka	621
Bhutan	777	Iraq	5215	Stateless	9
Bosnia-Herzegovina	8	Jamaica	1	Sudan	3625
Bulgaria	1	Japan	1	Syria	13
Burkina Faso	1	Jordan	5	Tanzania	23
Burma (Myanmar)	2099	Kazakhstan	1	Thailand	42
Burundi	253	Kenya	25	Tibet (So Stated)	29
Cameroon	24	Kuwait	112	Togo	121
Canada	2	Kyrgyzstan	5	Turkey	14
Central African Republic	15	Lao Peoples Democratic Rep.	139	U.S.S.R.	4
Central America (So Stated)	1	Lebanon	23	Uganda	22
Chad	28	Liberia	1697	Ukraine	1
China, Peoples Republic Of	120	Libya	6	United Arab Emirates	4
Colombia	1	Malawi	7	United Kingdom	5
Congo	292	Malaysia	1	United States Of America	1
Cote D'ivoire	97	Mauritania	1	Unknown	5
Croatia	1	Mauritius	2	Uzbekistan	20
Cuba	8	Mongolia	3	Vietnam	30
Congo, Democratic Republic Of The	1024	Nepal	3	Yemen	1

Country Of Birth	Persons	Country Of Birth	Persons	Country Of Birth	Persons
Djibouti	3	Nigeria	81	Zimbabwe	91
Egypt, Arab Republic Of	38	Pakistan	279	Total	35 540
England	1	Palestinian Authority	28		
Equatorial Guinea	5	Papua	1		
Eritrea	1560	Papua New Guinea	1		
Ethiopia	3031	Poland	1		
Fiji	22	Romania	3		
Macedonia, Former Yugoslav Republic Of	3	Russian Federation	5		
Former Yugoslavia	3	Rwanda	161		
Georgia	4	Saudi Arabia	7		

Visas

(Question No. 99)

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 22 November 2010:

In respect of the assessment of visa applications made under the General Skilled Migration program of his department, are any targets, quotas or priority processing arrangements used for the determination of applications based upon the nationality of applicants; if so what is the nature of those targets, quotas or priority processing arrangements, and for each region, what targets/quotas are being enforced by his department.

Mr Bowen—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

No. Australia runs a global non-discriminatory migration program where any person may apply for a visa if they believe they meet the relevant legislative requirements regardless of their nationality or ethnicity.