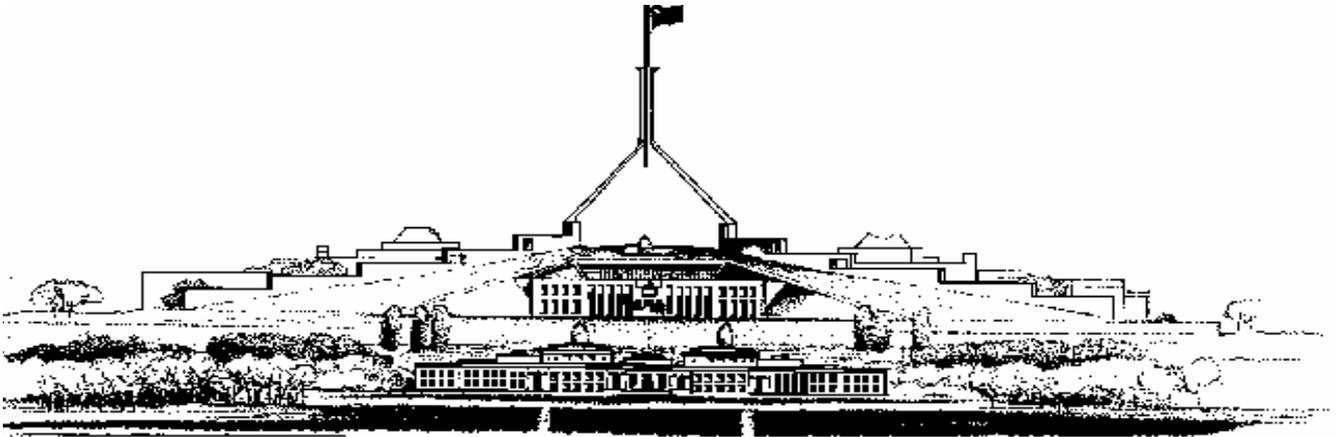




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 1, 2011

Thursday, 10 February 2011

FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SECOND PERIOD

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

INTERNET

The Votes and Proceedings for the House of Representatives are available at
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/info/votes>

Proof and Official Hansards for the House of Representatives,
the Senate and committee hearings are available at
<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>

For searching purposes use
<http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au>

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

RADIO BROADCASTS

Broadcasts of proceedings of the Parliament can be heard on ABC NewsRadio in the capital cities on:

ADELAIDE 972AM
BRISBANE 936AM
CANBERRA 103.9FM
DARWIN 102.5FM
HOBART 747AM
MELBOURNE 1026AM
PERTH 585AM
SYDNEY 630AM

For information regarding frequencies in other locations please visit
<http://www.abc.net.au/newsradio/listen/frequencies.htm>

**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 and Public Sector Superannuation	Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Minister Assisting the Attorney-General on Queensland Floods Recovery	Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP
Minister Assisting the Minister for Tourism	Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency	Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP

SHADOW MINISTRY

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

[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]

SHADOW MINISTRY—*continued*

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

SHADOW MINISTRY—*continued*

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

CONTENTS

THURSDAY, 10 FEBRUARY

Chamber

Tax Laws Amendment (Temporary Flood Reconstruction Levy) Bill 2011—	
First Reading	377
Second Reading.....	377
Income Tax Rates Amendment (Temporary Flood Reconstruction Levy) Bill 2011—	
First Reading	381
Second Reading.....	382
Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011—	
First Reading	382
Second Reading.....	382
Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (MRCA Supplement) Bill 2011—	
First Reading	385
Second Reading.....	385
Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2010-2011—	
First Reading	386
Second Reading.....	386
Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2010-2011—	
First Reading	390
Second Reading.....	390
Private Members' Business—	
Suspension of Standing Orders	392
Main Committee—	
Home Insulation Program—Report from Main Committee.....	393
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (Public Health and Safety) Amendment Bill 2010—	
Second Reading.....	395
Third Reading	396
Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders	397
Recommittal	398
Third Reading	399
Committees—	
Public Works Committee—Reference	399
Committees—	
Public Accounts and Audit Committee—Report	400
Condolences—	
Australian Natural Disasters—Report from Main Committee.....	402
Ministerial Statements—	
Egypt	427
Committees—	
Publications Committee—Report	432
Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2010—	
Report from Main Committee	432
Third Reading	432
Condolences—	
Australian Natural Disasters—Report from Main Committee.....	432
Statements by Members—	
Queensland Floods	436
Building the Education Revolution Program	437

CONTENTS—*continued*

Regional Airlines.....	437
Sudan.....	438
Queensland Floods.....	438
Food for Fines.....	439
Turrumurra Post Office.....	439
Youth Engagement Steering Committee.....	439
Home Insulation Program.....	440
Taxation.....	440
Condolences—	
Atkinson, Corporal Richard Edward—Report from Main Committee.....	440
Ministerial Arrangements.....	441
Questions Without Notice—	
Economy.....	443
Australian Natural Disasters.....	444
Flood Levy.....	445
Employment.....	446
Budget.....	447
National Health and Hospitals Reform.....	448
Murray-Darling Basin.....	449
Flood Levy.....	450
Australian Natural Disasters.....	451
Flood Levy.....	452
Australian Natural Disasters.....	454
Cyclone Yasi.....	455
Queensland Floods.....	455
Flood Levy.....	456
Australian-Indonesia Education Partnership.....	458
Australian Natural Disasters.....	459
Schools.....	460
Queensland Floods.....	461
Climate Change.....	462
Personal Explanations.....	463
Auditor-General's Reports—	
Report No. 27 of 2010-11.....	464
Documents.....	464
Committees—	
Selection Committee—Reports Nos 12 and 13.....	464
Harman, Ms Gillian.....	465
Matters of Public Importance—	
Flood Levy.....	465
Adjournment—	
Calare Electorate.....	477
Australian Capital Territory Australians of the Year.....	478
Australian Natural Disasters.....	480
Schools.....	481
Health.....	482
International Development Assistance.....	484
Notices.....	485

CONTENTS—*continued*

Main Committee

Constituency Statements—

Cowper Electorate: Government Programs.....	486
Greenway Electorate: Sudanese Community.....	486
Solomon Electorate: Queensland Floods.....	487
Solomon Electorate: Mental Health.....	487
McEwen Electorate: Local History.....	488
Dairy Industry.....	489
Franklin Electorate: Centrelink Services.....	489
Bennelong Electorate: Mobile Phone Towers.....	490
Andrew, Mr Cedric.....	491
Flood Levy.....	492
Bass Electorate: Launceston Regional Tennis Centre.....	492
Stirling Electorate: Reid Highway.....	493

Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2010—

Second Reading.....	494
---------------------	-----

Condolences—

Atkinson, Corporal Richard Edward.....	502
Roberts-Smith, Corporal Benjamin, Vc, Mg.....	509

Adjournment—

Pensions and Benefits.....	517
Reid Electorate: Australia Day Awards.....	518
Flinders Electorate: Bass Coast.....	519
Multiculturalism.....	521
Alpine Grazing.....	522
Mental Health.....	523
Main Committee Meeting Times.....	524

Questions In Writing

Practice Incentives Program: Practice Nurse Incentive—(Question No. 118).....	526
Primary Care Providers, General Practitioners and Practice Nurses— (Question No. 124).....	527
Practice Incentive Program: After Hours Incentive—(Question No. 125).....	530

Thursday, 10 February 2011

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

**TAX LAWS AMENDMENT
(TEMPORARY FLOOD
RECONSTRUCTION LEVY) BILL 2011**

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Ms Gillard**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (9.00 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

On Tuesday I expressed the nation's heartbreak. Today I express the nation's resolve: to rebuild, to get back up, to rise from the mud and debris. I therefore introduce the Tax Laws Amendment (Temporary Flood Reconstruction Levy) Bill 2011. And I do so with great pride.

This is not just a routine piece of legislation, not just a package of measures to restore bridges and roads, but an expression of goodwill between Australians.

It is an act of faith in the future, a way of honouring the dignity and resilience that Australians have shown throughout this ordeal.

In committing to rebuild, we accept that this may well prove to be the most expensive season of natural disasters our nation has ever known. Individuals have lost homes and possessions. Businesses and farmers have lost premises, stock, equipment and crops. Communities have lost meeting places, shops and sporting facilities. And our nation has lost vital infrastructure on which countless livelihoods rely. We have seen roads washed away, rail lines twisted and buckled,

and bridges washed away like children's toys. But we will rebuild.

No single level of government or sector of the community can do the job alone. Individuals will contribute, as will family, neighbours, friends, insurers, state and local government, business and unions, generous donors and philanthropists.

More than \$200 million has been contributed to the Queensland Premier's Relief Fund. Every dollar is welcome. Every dollar is an expression of shared concern. All those funds will go to helping Queenslanders who need a hand—like those in the Lockyer Valley who did not even have time to prepare, or those who did not have the insurance cover they thought they did. The Premier's Relief Fund and funds in the other states will be there to help: Australians looking after Australians.

By far the greatest share will come from our national government, and that is as it should be. There will be money to rebuild the roads, ports, rail lines and public facilities that make our society work. The call on Commonwealth funds will be at least \$5.6 billion. That is almost 30 times the amount of money in the Premier's Relief Fund.

That is \$5.6 billion that the Australian government needs to find above and beyond our normal expenditure. Our nation has rarely ever had to outlay such large sums in a peacetime disaster. And remember these figures are restricted to the damage bill associated with the summer floods. They do not include the damage from Cyclone Yasi, to which our contributions will be announced when the situation becomes clearer.

But for today, the Australian government faces flood related outlays estimated to be just over \$5.6 billion. That is not an abstract figure. It is real money for real projects—like repairing the Bruce Highway between Brisbane and Cairns, the Warrego Highway

around Ipswich, the Capricorn Highway around Rockhampton and the Calder and Sturt highways in Victoria.

We will meet our obligations to the last cent, and we will do it by paying as we go. We will not delay the return to surplus for a single day. Nor will we take the soft option of borrowing. Pay as we go: that is the concept that lies at the very heart of this bill.

Sound budget principles say we should pay as we go in an economy that is growing strongly. And sound economic principles say we should not add to capacity pressures.

Even after the damage inflicted by the floods and cyclone, the economy will be back at capacity in 2011-12. We have \$380 billion of mining projects in the pipeline. Skills shortages are looming, and wages are running at healthy levels. Those pressures are likely to be even more pronounced as we enter 2012-13, our target year for a return to surplus.

That target is not arbitrary. It is a vital macro-economic guidepost. We must ensure that the Australian government does not add to aggregate demand at a time of rising cost pressures like the Howard government so recklessly did between 2004 and 2007. The demand for scarce labour and materials for flood reconstruction only heightens the need for fiscal moderation in the years ahead.

The measures I introduce in this bill form a balanced package:

- cutting some spending programs;
- deferring some new infrastructure; and
- applying a one-off, 12-month temporary levy to those earning more than \$50,000 per annum.

The spending cuts and deferrals will raise some \$3.8 billion. The proposed levy will raise \$1.8 billion. In other words, \$2 will be saved or deferred for every dollar raised by the levy.

Of course, the proposed levy is the aspect of our package that has attracted the most community attention. I always expected Australians to ask all the hard questions about why they are being requested to step up and pay more. But at the same time, I always believed our community would understand that additional contributions are required to meet real additional needs.

Australians accepted it when the Howard government imposed a levy to buy back guns in the aftermath of Port Arthur. They accepted it to help dairy farmers and sugar farmers adjust to the pressures of economic change. They accepted it to help pay hard-earned employee entitlements after the collapse of Ansett. They are coming to accept it to rebuild smashed infrastructure that supports thousands of jobs and millions of livelihoods.

I profoundly believe in the fundamental good sense and decency of my fellow Australians. They know what is right and they will do what is right. In proposing the levy, the Australian government has received support from across the community.

I warmly welcome the bi-partisan support shown by the Premier of Western Australia, Colin Barnett, who said:

I believe most Australians, most West Australians, are willing to contribute a little bit more to help Queensland get back on its feet.

A statement of generosity and a sentiment that was reinforced by Premier Anna Bligh:

As a nation we have come together in the past to help out the milk industry, the sugar industry, the workers of Ansett and to buy back guns after the Port Arthur tragedy. I think the people of Queensland are at least as important as all of those other levies in the past.

We have seen welcome endorsements from the NGO sector, including the Australian Council of Social Service, who stated:

Overall we are pleased that the federal government has acted quickly to support the vital reconstruction efforts of the Queensland Government and support the idea that all Australians with the means to contribute to this effort do so through a flood disaster levy.

And from the Salvation Army:

All Australians need to share something of the burden and the horror that's happened to so many in Queensland, and the way that the levy has been established, it takes the burden away from low-income earners.

I also very sincerely appreciated the support expressed by Mr Brent Finlay, the president of AgForce in Queensland, who said:

... given the enormity of what's happened, with this natural disaster, anything that can help to get rural and regional Queensland, back up and running, we would support.

The last word on third-party endorsement should go to the *Australian* newspaper, which stated in its editorial last Saturday:

... the imposition of the levy is reasonable and responsible.

I think that says it all.

As I stated previously, this is a one-off temporary levy. When the clock hits midnight on 30 June, 2012, the levy will end. This bill ensures it. Any further funding required for flood or cyclone recovery will come from additional spending cuts. We will pay as we go.

This levy is also limited in its application. No Australian earning under \$50,000 per annum will pay a cent. By restricting the levy to those earning over \$50,000 per annum, half of our nation's taxpayers will not be liable for the levy at all. Those who do pay will be levied according to their financial capacity. A levy of 0.5 per cent will be applied on taxable income between \$50,001 per annum and \$100,000. And a levy of one per cent will be applied on taxable income above

\$100,000. In other words, the levy is progressive. It is fair.

Under the levy, a taxpayer earning \$60,000 per annum will pay 96c a week. That same taxpayer will have received tax cuts worth \$25.96 per week over the past three years. So they are still \$25 a week ahead. A person earning \$80,000 a year will pay \$2.88 a week: less than a cup of coffee, and 10 times less than the tax cuts they have received over the last three years.

Most importantly, people who were affected by the floods will not pay this levy, including those seriously affected by recent disasters, including Cyclone Yasi. This bill will provide exemptions for taxpayers who:

- received an Australian government disaster recovery payment;
- were affected by a declared disaster and meet at least one of the eligibility criteria for an Australian government disaster recovery payment—even if they have not received a payment; or
- are New Zealand special class visa holders who were technically ineligible for the Australian government disaster recovery payments but who have received an ex-gratia natural disaster payment.

The bill also makes provision for other exemptions to be made by legislative instrument should circumstances require.

I turn to the expenditure measures that form the other significant element of our floods package. As announced, we will defer some infrastructure projects to help manage capacity constraints and redirect funding to immediate rebuilding. This burden has been shared and, indeed, even my own electorate is affected, but it is the right thing to do. Deferring these projects will free up skilled labour and materials for rebuilding and help ease capacity constraints over the next two years, which are crucial years as we manage

the demand pressures which accompany the mining boom.

Six Queensland road projects will be delayed by periods of one to three years. This will save \$325 million in the budget period. We have also identified three projects in New South Wales and Victoria where funding delays and reductions will save approximately \$675 million. These changes have been agreed to or accepted by the respective state governments. I also add this point: the burden of delay has been shared and that should be recognised. It is the right thing to do to share the burden and we have.

As previously announced, the government will also cut some spending programs and cap some others. There are no easy savings, but I am confident Australians will understand the need for these decisions. They are hard decisions by a government that has kept spending lower than in any single year of the Howard government.

We will also cap two programs to limit their cost: the National Rental Affordability Scheme and the LPG Vehicle Scheme. And some lower priority education spending, where the outcome can be achieved through other programs, will be discontinued. These include the Capital Development Pool and the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. In addition, some funding from the Building Better Regional Cities and Priority Regional Infrastructure programs will be redirected to the cause of flood rebuilding.

The government has also determined to abolish, defer and cap access to a number of carbon abatement programs. These include the Green Car Innovation Fund, the Cleaner Car Rebate Scheme and the Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute. Some of these policies are less efficient than a carbon price and will no longer be necessary. Others will be better delayed until the full effects of a carbon price are felt.

The key to these savings is our determination to price carbon. If you want to cut carbon, the best way is to price carbon. Indirect measures have only ever been an imperfect proxy for a carbon price. As we move to a carbon price, those indirect measures can fall away. And so these expenditure measures are a firm down payment and a clear sign of intent:

- 2011 is the year Australia decides on pricing carbon.

I turn now to the issue of accountability, which is so fundamental to the rebuilding process. I understand the desire of the Queensland government to cut through red tape and deliver rebuilding as fast as they can. To start the recovery, the Australian government will make an advance payment to Queensland of \$2 billion so rebuilding can start in more than 60 flood affected communities. This payment will be made in the current financial year, as soon as financial controls and arrangements are finalised.

At the same time, we need to ensure rigorous accountability for what are large sums of public money. That is why both the Australian and Queensland governments are putting in place clear mechanisms to drive efficiency and accountability.

To begin, the Australian government will sign a National Partnership Agreement with Queensland, establishing rigorous conditions for national funding. We have also made available one of the nation's most outstanding military leaders, Major General Michael Slater, to chair the Queensland Reconstruction Authority. And just this week I announced that two distinguished Commonwealth appointees will sit on the board of that authority:

- Mr Brad Orgill, former Chairman and CEO of UBS Australia and head of the BER Implementation Taskforce; and

- Ms Glenys Beauchamp, Secretary of the Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government.

In addition, I have appointed the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator Ludwig, as the Minister Assisting the Attorney-General on Queensland Floods Recovery. Senator Ludwig will sit on the Flood Recovery Cabinet Committee of the Queensland cabinet, and at the same time, report on progress to the federal cabinet.

Further to those measures, this week I announced the establishment of a Reconstruction Inspectorate to increase scrutiny and accountability of flood rebuilding projects. The inspectorate will report directly to the cabinet subcommittee on natural disasters, which is chaired by me with the deputy chair being the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, Mr Crean. The inspectorate will be led by the Hon. John Fahey, former Premier of NSW and former federal Minister for Finance. He will be joined by two leaders in the fields of accounting and construction:

- Mr Martin Albrecht—former Managing Director of Thiess; and
- Mr Matt Sheerin—head of Deloitte’s Queensland Audit Practice and a senior member of the nation’s accounting profession.

The inspectorate will be specifically empowered to:

- scrutinise contracts, especially those that are high value or complex;
- directly inspect projects to ensure they are meeting progress milestones;
- investigate complaints or issues raised by the public;

- help state agencies to develop contractual frameworks, tendering processes and project management systems;
- scrutinise requests for reimbursement by local government once projects are completed.

The reconstruction inspectorate will be supported as necessary by experts in relevant fields such as quantity surveying, construction management and contract law. The inspectorate will also require the states to provide independently audited financial statements to support any claim for funds.

We have got a lot of rebuilding to do. I want to make sure that every dollar we spend on rebuilding is a dollar that gets value for money.

In presenting this bill, I am acutely conscious that we are only at the start of a long journey of reconstruction. It will not just take months. It will take years. But long after the camera crews have moved on, the resources of the Australian government will be there to help rebuild: road by road—bridge by bridge—track by track until the job is done.

As Australians, we stick together. United in mateship. United in our shared desire to help those in need. This bill formalises that desire to help. Beyond the legal and budgetary language, it simply says this:

You won’t be alone. We will get through this together. We won’t let go.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Anthony Smith**) adjourned.

**INCOME TAX RATES AMENDMENT
(TEMPORARY FLOOD
RECONSTRUCTION LEVY) BILL 2011**

First Reading

Bill presented by **Ms Gillard**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (9.23 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Income Tax Rates Amendment (Temporary Flood Reconstruction Levy) Bill 2011 will introduce new tax rates for the 2011-12 financial year, which will give effect to the Tax Laws Amendment (Temporary Flood Reconstruction Levy) Bill.

The existing tax rates will continue to apply for taxpayers who are exempt from paying the temporary flood reconstruction levy.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Anthony Smith**) adjourned.

FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (ELECTION COMMITMENTS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2011

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Ms Macklin**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (9.25 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill delivers on three significant government election commitments to support families and senior Australians.

Work bonus for pensioners

During the 2010 election campaign the government announced an expansion to the seniors work bonus to better support pensioners who choose to work.

The work bonus was introduced as part of the government's secure and sustainable pension reforms in September 2009.

The work bonus allows pensioners over age pension age to keep more of their pension when they work part time. It disregards an amount of employment income from the pension income test.

Many pensioners choose to take on part-time work and occasional work and should be encouraged and rewarded for these valuable contributions to our community.

Under the changes to the work bonus proposed in this bill from 1 July 2011, the first \$250 of employment income earned in a fortnight will be excluded from the income test regardless of the total amount earned by the person in that fortnight. This will be on a dollar-for-dollar basis up to \$250 rather than a 50c-in-the-dollar reduction up to \$500 under current rules. This provides improved rewards for pensioners who work.

Significantly, these reforms allow pensioners to bank their unused work bonus. This effectively 'annualises' the benefit.

If a pensioner earns less than \$250 in a particular fortnight, they will accrue a credit to their new employment income concession bank up to the value of \$250. This income bank can build up to a maximum of \$6½ thousand and can then be used to offset employment income earned in a later period.

The work bonus income bank will offset more earnings when they do work, meaning that a pensioner could then earn up to \$6½ thousand a year extra without it affecting their pension.

It could be regular work each fortnight or, for example, over a six-week period before Christmas.

Pensioners will be able to carry credits in their work bonus income bank forward across financial years.

These changes are expected to benefit up to 30,000 pensioners each year.

The new work bonus comes on top of the government's historic reforms to the pension system and further reflects this government's commitment to providing adequate support for pensioners while supporting those pensioners who want to work.

From September 2009 the government's historic pension reforms have included a new and better system of pension indexation that better reflects the rising cost of living that pensioners face.

The reforms have also delivered a new, consolidated pension supplement to make the pension system simpler. Furthermore, better advanced payment arrangements are helping pensioners with one-off expenses like paying the car rego or fixing the fridge.

Since September 2009 the government's secure and sustainable pension reforms have driven pension increases of \$15 a fortnight for maximum-rate single pensioners and \$97 a fortnight for maximum-rate pensioner couples combined.

This new, expanded seniors work bonus strengthens these important reforms by better supporting pensioners who want to work.

Supporting families with teenagers

This bill also delivers on the government's key election commitment to increase family assistance by up to \$4,200 a year for teenagers in secondary study. This significant increase will help families meet the higher costs of older children and encourage more teenagers to stay at school.

The government recognises that families with older teenage children can face higher costs. The cost of groceries, clothes and family activities can all increase as children grow.

But under the existing system, the maximum rate of family tax benefit part A drops

from \$214 a fortnight to \$53 a fortnight when a child turns 16. Rent assistance also stops when a child turns 16, and families may lose eligibility for family tax benefit part B, the large family supplement and multiple birth allowance.

This sharp drop in family support can encourage teenagers to leave school early if their family is unable to support them in full-time study or training. The drop in family assistance when a child turns 16 is also one of the features of the family assistance scheme most frequently criticised by parents.

This election commitment will increase assistance for families with teenagers aged between 16 and 19 who are in full-time secondary study or a vocational education equivalent.

The maximum rate of family tax benefit part A will increase by around \$160 a fortnight for teenagers aged 16 to 19 who are in secondary school or the vocational equivalent, or who are exempt from this requirement. This will align with the 13- to 15-year-old rate and ensure that government assistance for families does not fall when an older teenage children in full-time secondary study turns 16.

This measure costs \$766 million over five years and starts on 1 January 2012, in time for the new school year.

Over the next five years the families of around 590,000 teenagers will benefit from higher family assistance while their children finish school.

In addition to the increase in family tax benefit part A, families will also be eligible for rent assistance. Rent assistance currently cuts out when a child turns 16. These reforms will provide rent assistance for families with 16- to 19-year-olds who receive more than the base rate of family tax benefit part A.

Single income families may also become eligible for family tax benefit part B as a result of these changes if their child moves from youth allowance onto family tax benefit part A. This will further increase the amount of total additional assistance they may receive.

Families with three or more family tax benefit part A children may also benefit from the large family supplement of \$295 per annum.

This initiative supports the Gillard Labor government's objective to improve year 12 or vocational equivalent completion rates and meet our target of achieving a 90 per cent year 12 attainment rate by 2015. By helping support families while their children finish secondary school, this initiative will mean that more students, particularly from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, can progress into further education or training.

Research shows that children from low-income families have lower levels of school completion. For example, in 2006, year 12 completion rates were at 59 per cent for low-income students compared with 78 per cent for higher income students.

These findings indicate that the costs of educating teenage children are an important barrier for families on low incomes to support their child's education.

The increased family tax benefit part A payment for 16- to 19-year-olds in school or training will be \$781 a year higher than the rate of youth allowance paid for 16- and 17-year-olds. This will encourage more 16-year-old children to stay in school to receive the higher payment.

These reforms also implement the recommendation of the independent Review into Australia's Future Tax System that says: ... family payments should be the main form of assistance for families ... up to the end of second-

dary school, or the school year in which they turn 18 (the earlier of the two).

As a result of these changes, family assistance will be the primary form of government support for children until they finish secondary education. Youth allowance will then provide ongoing support to young people as they finish school and progress into further education and training.

Youth allowance will continue to be available to teenagers aged under 18 who meet independence criteria, who need to live away from home in order to attend full-time secondary study, who are not in full-time secondary study, or who meet other eligibility criteria.

This bill includes changes to the youth allowance parental income test to protect the entitlement of youth allowance recipients with a sibling aged 16 to 19 who remains in or transfers to the family tax benefit system as a result of these new measures.

Baby bonus

This bill also delivers on another government election commitment to assist families with the upfront costs of having a new baby.

From 1 July 2011, parents of new babies who receive the baby bonus on or after that date will receive more of their payment upfront.

The baby bonus is paid in 13 fortnightly instalments. As a result of the changes made by this bill, the first payment of the baby bonus will be \$500 more than the other 12 instalments.

This will help parents meet the upfront costs associated with the birth or adoption, including the purchase of high-cost items such as bassinets or prams. The total amount of the baby bonus will remain the same, and the 12 subsequent payments will help parents meet ongoing costs during the baby's first six months.

Other measures

The bill also introduces two non-budget measures, one relating to the treatment of annuities paid to people affected by the morning sickness drug thalidomide; and the other making some minor administrative amendments to the income management arrangements.

The bill makes changes to the income tax and social security law, to ensure that annuity payments made from the Thalidomide Australia Fixed Trust to or for a beneficiary of the trust, are not taken into account as income. The trust was set up in 2010 and administers annuities to people affected by the morning sickness drug thalidomide, which has been proven to be associated with a range of tragic birth defects. These annuity payments are not compensation payments and the measures in this bill ensure that these annuity payments are excluded from the income test for social security payments, and are exempt from income tax.

Lastly, the bill makes some minor administrative improvements to the income management arrangements. It clarifies when the qualifying period begins for the matched savings scheme payment. It clarifies the role of nominees under income management arrangements. And it improves debt recovery arrangements in circumstances where Centrelink has issued a cheque on an income managed customer's behalf.

This bill delivers on three of the government's important election commitments—improving support for families, improving the delivery of the baby bonus for new parents and better supporting pensioners who work. It also makes minor amendments on income management and recognises the unique plight of thalidomide survivors.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Anthony Smith**) adjourned.

**MILITARY REHABILITATION AND
COMPENSATION AMENDMENT
(MRCA SUPPLEMENT) BILL 2011****First Reading**

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Minister for Indigenous Health) (9.39 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to present legislation that will make a number of minor changes to the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act.

The changes will clarify the eligibility criteria for the MRCA supplement to ensure that members, former members and their dependants continue to receive their correct entitlements.

The MRCA supplement was introduced as part of the secure and sustainable pension reform package on 20 September 2009 as a result of the consolidation of a number of different allowances across portfolios into a new supplement regime.

Prior to the introduction of the MRCA supplement, pharmaceutical allowance was paid under the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act as a separate ongoing entitlement to the wholly dependent partner of a deceased member or former member.

Since 20 September 2009, the provisions relating to the payment of the former pharmaceutical allowance component of the MRCA supplement have not adequately dealt with certain wholly dependent partners.

Amendments in the bill will make it clear that the wholly dependent partner of a deceased member who died before 20 September 2009, is entitled to the former pharma-

ceutical allowance component of the MRCA supplement where the wholly dependent partner has chosen the lump sum payment option.

The other amendments in the bill will ensure that the MRCA supplement multiple entitlement exclusion provisions in the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act operate as intended.

These provisions operate to prevent dual entitlement to payments under the Veterans' Entitlements Act, the Social Security Act and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act that are the equivalent of the MRCA supplement.

Amendments in this bill will ensure that persons eligible for the MRCA supplement under the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act may not receive additional equivalent payments under the Veterans' Entitlements Act or the Social Security Act.

The bill demonstrates the government's commitment to continually review, update and refine our operations to provide the optimum level of services and support to our current and former military personnel and their dependants.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Anthony Smith**) adjourned.

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 3)
2010-2011**

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (9.42 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

There are two additional estimates bills this year: Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2010-2011 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2010-11.

The additional estimates bills seek appropriation authority from parliament for additional expenditure of money from the consolidated revenue fund in order to meet requirements that have arisen since the last budget. The total additional appropriation being sought through additional estimates bills 3 and 4 this year is a little over \$2.3 billion.

I turn to Appropriation Bill (No. 3). The total appropriation being sought this year is \$1.36 billion. This proposed appropriation arises from changes in the estimates of program expenditure due to variations in the timing of payments and forecasted increases in program take-up, reclassifications and from policy decisions taken by the government since the last budget.

I now outline the major appropriations proposed in the bill.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship will receive supplementary funding of \$290 million for operational costs associated with the management of offshore asylum seekers.

The Attorney-General's Department will be provided with \$120.7 million to assist people in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia who have been adversely affected by the floods which began in late November 2010. People who have temporarily lost their income as a direct result of the flooding are eligible to apply for payments which will be provided through Centrelink for up to 13 weeks.

In addition, the Attorney-General's Department will be provided with \$17.6 million to reimburse state and territory legal aid

commissioners for providing legal assistance in national security, people smuggling and drug related matters. This funding will be made available through the Expensive Commonwealth Criminal Cases Fund.

The government will provide the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations with \$14.3 million to support the operation of the Education Services for Overseas Students Assurance Fund which provides compensation to international students in the event of an education provider closure. Students will be given a refund of any course fees that cannot be recovered from education providers if they are unable to be placed in a suitable alternative course. This funding will supplement provider contributions and ensure the Fund is able to meet its obligations, and will only be drawn down if required.

In addition, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations will be provided with \$10.1 million to introduce the Fair Entitlements Guarantee to protect employee entitlements when an employer enters liquidation. The Fair Entitlements Guarantee will replace the General Employee Entitlements and Redundancy Scheme and extend current entitlements to include redundancy pay, up to a maximum of four weeks for each year of service. The new guarantee will apply to all Australian workers other than company directors and their close associates. This funding is in addition to the \$458.6 million currently available to the General Employee Entitlements and Redundancy Scheme over four years.

The government will also provide the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations with an additional \$14.6 million to double the capacity of the Connecting People with Jobs Relocation Assistance Pilot program up to 4,000 places. A primary focus of the program will be to as-

sist eligible unemployed Australians to relocate to Queensland to take up employment opportunities in flood affected areas. This funding will provide incentives for the unemployed to move to areas which offer greater employment opportunities and to stick with their new job.

The government is providing \$22.4 million to assist Tasmanian forestry contractors and employees respond to the challenges facing the Tasmanian native forest industry. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry will receive \$14.6 million in Appropriation Bill (No. 3) to provide exit assistance in the form of grants to eligible contracting businesses as well as assistance to help ensure that employees receive their full entitlements. The balance of the funding is being met from other sources.

The Department of Finance and Deregulation will be provided with \$11 million to support an increase in the number of ministerial, opposition, Australian Greens, Independent and whips staff to allow members and senators to better manage their workload and provide them with greater capacity for consultation.

The government will provide AusAID with the following additional amounts:

- \$20 million for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The global fund is a partnership between governments, non-government organisations, the private sector and affected communities to improve health outcomes in developing countries. Australia has been contributing to the global fund since 2004 and this increase in appropriation is part of the government's commitment to increase Australia's official development assistance.
- \$127.3 million to maintain the grant component of Australia's share in the International Development Association,

the concessional lending arm of the World Bank, which aims to reduce poverty by providing interest-free credits and grants for programs that boost economic growth, reduce inequalities and improve people's living conditions.

- \$71.9 million to finance Australia's share of contributions to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, arrears clearance provided by the World Bank and compensation to the International Development Association for grants foregone.
- The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative is a joint International Monetary Fund-World Bank approach to debt reduction where the international financial community work together to reduce to sustainable levels, the external debt burdens of the most heavily indebted poor countries.
- The Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative enables the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund to provide 100 per cent relief on eligible debt to a group of low-income countries that are pursuing sound adjustment and reform programs, to help them advance toward the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.

The government will reappropriate \$25 million for the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. This reappropriation relates to unspent amounts from last financial year for the Green Car Innovation Fund Program. This funding will be used to meet priority spending measures for other programs.

The government will undertake the first stage of an implementation study into a high speed rail network. This first stage will involve a high-level costing and identification of routes and is expected to be completed by

July 2011. The Department of Infrastructure and Transport will be provided with \$6 million to undertake the study.

The new Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government will be provided with \$5.9 million to strengthen local engagement and improve whole-of-government coordination of policy for regional Australia. This funding is in addition to the resources that have already been transferred to the Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government from the former Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and the Attorney-General's Department.

The government will provide the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism with \$12.5 million to support joint projects with the United States designed to reduce the cost of solar energy technologies. The funding will support new research on advanced solar technology projects, and exchange programs and research scholarships focussed on affordable solar energy solutions. The initiative will build on existing collaboration between researchers in the two countries. The Australian Solar Institute will manage the Australian government's contribution to the initiative.

The Australian Federal Police will be provided with \$24.8 million to increase their own technical and operational capabilities as well as those of regional policing partners. The funding will disrupt people smuggling activities by enhancing support to the Indonesian National Police and Indonesia's High Technology Crime Operations Centre through the acquisition and operation of a patrol boat; the lease and operation of a surveillance aircraft; and strengthening computer forensic and investigative capability.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will receive an additional \$18.2 mil-

lion to reimburse them for the cost of issuing a higher than expected number of passports in 2009-10. This additional funding is being provided in accordance with the passport funding agreement.

The government proposes to provide the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy with the following additional amounts:

- \$17.1 million for additional work to support the finalisation of definitive agreements between Telstra and NBN Co, and to develop and implement arrangements for the establishment of a new agency to manage the universal service obligation.
- \$11.8 million, which is a reappropriation of amounts from 2009-10, for the digital switchover Viewer Access Satellite Television service and the digital switchover communications campaign. Delays with some milestone payments and an advertising campaign resulted in program payments being delayed to 2010-11.

The Australian Sports Commission will be provided with \$21.6 million to continue the Active After-School Communities program until December 2011. The Active After-School Communities program provides funding to 3,270 primary schools and out of school hours care services to deliver quality sport and other structured physical activity programs to around 150,000 children.

The government will provide Centrelink with \$10.7 million to provide families with the additional option of receiving child care rebate payments directly to their bank account on a fortnightly basis from 1 July 2011. This will allow families to choose from a greater range of child care rebate payment options and builds on the child care rebate fortnightly payments measure, originally reported in the Economic Statement 2010.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet will be provided with an additional \$35.9 million to address a shortfall in funding for expenses related to the transfer of the Office for the Arts from the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. The shortfall arose from amounts being incorrectly appropriated to the wrong outcome in the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities during the 2010-11 budget.

The government will provide \$15.1 million in additional resources to the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency to support the energy efficiency functions that were transferred from the former Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, including the National Solar Schools Program and the National Strategy on Energy Efficiency, and to continue delivery of COAG and ministerial council related energy efficiency commitments.

Funding of \$19.5 million will be provided to the Federal Magistrates Court following the government's decision not to restructure the federal courts. The Federal Magistrates Court will continue to exercise general federal law matters and provide a pool of judicial officers for dual commissions to the Military Court of Australia. The funding amount reflects the number of Federal Magistrates who have remained with the Federal Magistrates Court. This funding will be fully offset by savings in the Federal Court and Family Court.

An additional \$19.1 million will be provided for the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to enable the authority to fulfil its statutory obligations and meet community expectations regarding the development and ongoing implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. The increase in funding is matched by a reduction in administered

funding for the Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure program within the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

The Department of Health and Ageing will receive an additional \$24 million for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme premium free dispensing incentive payment. Under this scheme eligible pharmacists receive an indexed incentive payment, currently \$1.56, for each substitutable PBS item dispensed where a premium does not apply. Substitutable PBS items are those that are interchangeable at patient level. The adjustment to the estimates for this program takes account of additional categories of eligible prescriptions and allows for higher levels of growth in the use of substitutable prescriptions.

The appropriations that I have outlined so far are proposed to meet additional funding requirements that have arisen since the last budget. There is a further category of requirement for additional appropriation, referred to as a 'reclassification of appropriation', that are also proposed in Appropriation Bill (No.3).

These amounts need to be reappropriated to align the purpose of the proposed spending with the correct appropriation type. The additional appropriations are fully offset by savings against the original appropriations and thus do not lead to additional expenditure.

I now outline the material reclassifications proposed in Appropriation Bill (No.3):

- The Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency will be provided with \$45.6 million as departmental funding in 2010-11 to provide sufficient funding to meet expected departmental expenditure arising for the closure of the Home Insulation Program and the delivery of the Home Insulation Safety Plan.

- AusAID will be provided with \$85.9 million as departmental funding in 2010-11 and will spend \$85.9 million less in administered funding. This reflects the reclassification of expenditure under AusAID's new expense classification framework.

The remaining amounts that appear in Appropriation Bill (No. 3) relate to estimates variations, minor reclassifications and other minor measures. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Anthony Smith**) adjourned.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 4) 2010-2011

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (9.56 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2010-2011 provides additional funding to agencies for:

- expenses in relation to grants to the states under section 96 of the Constitution, and for payments to the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory and local government authorities; and
- non-operating purposes such as equity injections and the acquisition of administered assets.

The total additional appropriation being sought in Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2010-2011 is a little over \$1 billion, the more significant amounts of which I now outline.

The government proposes to provide AusAID with the following amounts:

- \$202.6 million to maintain the loan component of Australia's share in the International Development Association, the concessional lending arm of the World Bank, which aims to reduce poverty by providing interest-free credits and grants for programs that boost economic growth, reduce inequalities and improve people's living conditions.
- \$10 million for the Global Agricultural and Food Security Program, created by the World Bank in 2009, which provides grants to developing countries and regional organisations that have demonstrated their commitment to a comprehensive approach for increasing agricultural growth and lasting improvements in food security.
- \$10 million for the Palestinian Reform and Development Trust Fund, which was established by the World Bank to provide a secure mechanism for donors to provide financial support to the Palestinian Authority. Australia has been contributing to the trust fund since 2008.
- \$12.2 million for the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, which replaces ageing, inefficient infrastructure and technology in order to accelerate the development of climate change resilient rice varieties to secure food supplies in Asia and elsewhere.

And \$69.8 million will be brought forward from 2011-12 for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to meet contractual commitments of projects relating to the non-government schools component of the Building the Education Revolution program, which have been completed earlier than expected.

In addition, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations will be provided with \$48.3 million, which represents a reappropriation of amounts from last financial year, for the non-government schools component of the trade training centres program. Delays in the pre-construction and construction phases have resulted in delays in program payments to 2010-11. The reappropriation of these funds will ensure contractual obligations are met and sufficient funding is available to meet commitments.

The Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government will receive an additional \$100 million as part of the government's partnership with local government. The funding will contribute to improving community infrastructure in all of the nation's councils and shires, including; libraries, community centres, and sports grounds and facilities. This is the third round of the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program and brings total funding for the program to more than \$1.1 billion since November 2008.

In addition, the Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government will be provided with \$30 million, which is a reappropriation from 2009-10 to meet project commitments under the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. This funding is reappropriated because there was insufficient time after the government endorsement of the projects for recipients to progress their projects prior to 30 June 2010 and claim payments.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship will be provided with \$152.8 million for the commissioning of two new immigration detention facilities to accommodate irregular maritime arrivals at Northam in Western Australia and Inverbrackie in South Australia.

In addition, the government will provide the Department of Immigration and Citizenship with \$31.5 million, which is a reappropriation of amounts of last financial year for capital costs associated with upgrades and enhancements to essential amenities and security at immigration detention facilities for offshore asylum seekers. The funding was first published in the 2010-11 budget in measure 'Immigration detention facilities—expanded accommodation'.

The government proposes to bring forward \$150 million from 2013-14 for the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities for the Water for the Future package. The funding will be used to purchase water entitlements from willing sellers in the Murray-Darling Basin.

The Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency will receive \$52.9 million, which is a reappropriation of amounts from 2009-10 to meet capital commitments, including accommodation fit-out and capital costs related to new building lease, ICT projects and to purchase a satellite dish for climate change science activities.

The Department of Defence will be provided with \$112.8 million to align its appropriations with its work program, including operations. This additional amount will be partly offset by a reduction in the defence department's departmental appropriation.

The remaining amounts that appear in Appropriation Bill (No. 4) relate to estimates variations, minor reclassification and other minor measures.

I would like now to turn to the general drawing rights limits for nation-building funds, which specify the maximum limit on payments from the funds in the financial year exclusive of GST. The general drawing rights limits for the Building Australia Fund, the Education Investment Fund and the

Health and Hospitals Fund proposed in this bill will replace the limits declared in Appropriations Act (No. 2) 2010-11. The limits for each of the funds have increased to reflect adjustments in timing of payments to better reflect project milestones and recently announced funding from the Health and Hospitals Fund for the Port Macquarie Base and Royal Hobart hospitals.

In addition, the general drawing right limit for general purpose financial assistance specifies the maximum limit for financial assistance payments made to the states in a financial year. The general drawing right limit proposed in this bill replaces the limit the declared in Appropriation Act (No. 2) 2010-11. The increase in the general purpose financial assistance general drawing right limit reflects the estimated increase in the amount of royalty payable to the Commonwealth under the Royalty Act 2010-11. The Commonwealth is required under section 75 of the Offshore Petroleum Greenhouse Storage Act 2006 to pay amounts of royalty collected to Western Australia based on a legislated formula.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Anthony Smith**) adjourned.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Suspension of Standing Orders

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (10.03 am)—by leave—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the following items of private Members' business, being reported from the Main Committee, or called on, and considered immediately in the following order:

Home Insulation Program—Report from Main Committee; and

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (Public Health and Safety) Amendment Bill 2010—Order of the day No. 9.

I advise the House that the motion by the member for Mayo regarding a detention facility at Inverbrackie will not be brought forward for a vote, at the member's request. I spoke earlier today with the member for Mayo. He was preparing with his wife to visit the hospital for the birth of his child. On behalf of the House, I wish him and his wife all the best on what will be a very momentous occasion.

Mr Hunt interjecting—

Mr ALBANESE—I am advised by his colleague, the member for Flinders, that this will be his and his wife's third child.

Mr Hunt—Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to make some concluding remarks in relation to the motion with respect to the Home Insulation Program.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—The motion before the House is to suspend standing orders. I put the question.

Question agreed to.

MAIN COMMITTEE

Home Insulation Program

Report from Main Committee

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I have to report that the order of the day, private members' business, relating to the motion on the Home Insulation Program has been debated in the Main Committee and is returned to the House. I present a certified copy of the motion. The question is that the motion be agreed to.

Mr Hunt—In relation to the motion with respect to home insulation—

Mr Albanese—Mr Deputy Speaker, I would be happy to grant leave to the member for Flinders to make his concluding remarks. This is a motion, not a bill—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Do you wish to take a point of order?

Mr Albanese—Yes, I rise on a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I do not want the precedent to be created that we have summing-ups on private members' motions. We do not have that under the standing orders. The standing orders provide for one contribution in moving a private member's motion and then for debate to occur. I indicate that, if the member seeks leave to make concluding comments, I will allow that to happen on this occasion. But we do not want government business time to be taken up unnecessarily. I indicate to the Manager of Opposition Business that we will grant leave on this occasion, but it should not be regarded as a precedent and we should be informed, with at least a request, as a courtesy, if it is the case that members wish to conclude debate on a particular item in the future.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (10.07 am)—I seek leave to address this matter in brief.

Leave granted.

Mr HUNT—This motion, in brief, is about two fundamental concepts of transparency and public safety. The motion has sought to achieve two things: firstly, the release of the full rate of defects discovered to date under both the Home Insulation Safety Plan and the Foil Insulation Safety Program, and, secondly, it calls on the Australian government to release information on the asbestos problem discovered under the Home Insulation Program. These are continuing matters of urgency.

I know that the government has produced material from CSIRO that is simply statistical fact. It says that the 156,000-odd investigations to date may not represent the entirety of the figure. But that does not hide the fact that there is a risk that is germane and real to those who are conducting the inspections. The response to the government is summed up in the letter from the Secretary of the National Electrical and Communications Asso-

ciation, Mr James Tinslay, to the Independents. He wrote:

We believe there is a public interest issue in releasing the data on both safety inspection programs, not the reverse. The government has said that the figures could scare the public. However, not knowing how big the problem is—whether your ceiling could be electrified or if there is a potential fire hazard in your roof—is more concerning.

I would say with great respect to the Independents who are considering their position that this body, NECA, in addition to the master electricians, right from the outset warned of the dangers of a program which has produced 200-odd house fires, 1,500 electrified roofs, 200,000-plus dangerous or dodgy roofs and \$2½ billion dollars wasted and which has been linked, above all else, with four tragic losses.

The organisations which made the warnings from the outset are making the warnings again and it would be folly to ignore their warnings on public safety. This is real and germane and important. It is also a principle of transparency. We were told that this parliament would be about letting in the sunlight. Right now is the moment to choose whether or not we let in the sunlight to disclose the figures, which are simply being covered up because they are embarrassing to the government. I say this to all of those involved. To the government: release the figures and end the cover-up. To the Independents: consider the principle of transparency and above all else consider the principle of public safety, which has been set out in writing to you by the very people who warned of all of the dangers of this program right throughout the uncovering and unfolding disaster—which they predicted, which they warned of, which they identified and which they are again identifying. That is why this motion must be supported.

Question put:

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

The House divided. [10.15 am]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes.....	68
Noes.....	<u>71</u>
Majority.....	<u>3</u>

AYES

Abbott, A.J.	Alexander, J.
Andrews, K.	Andrews, K.J.
Baldwin, R.C.	Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K.	Bishop, J.I.
Broadbent, R.	Buchholz, S.
Chester, D.	Christensen, G.
Ciobo, S.M.	Cobb, J.K.
Coulton, M. *	Crook, T.
Dutton, P.C.	Entsch, W.
Fletcher, P.	Frydenberg, J.
Gambaro, T.	Gash, J.
Griggs, N.	Haase, B.W.
Hartsuyker, L.	Hawke, A.
Hunt, G.A.	Irons, S.J.
Jensen, D.	Jones, E.
Keenan, M.	Kelly, C.
Laming, A.	Ley, S.P.
Macfarlane, I.E.	Marino, N.B.
Markus, L.E.	Matheson, R.
McCormack, M.	Mirabella, S.
Morrison, S.J.	Moylan, J.E.
Neville, P.C.	O'Dowd, K.
O'Dwyer, K.	Prentice, J.
Pyne, C.	Ramsey, R.
Randall, D.J.	Robb, A.
Robert, S.R.	Roy, Wyatt
Ruddock, P.M.	Scott, B.C.
Secker, P.D. *	Simpkins, L.
Slipper, P.N.	Smith, A.D.H.
Southcott, A.J.	Stone, S.N.
Tehan, D.	Truss, W.E.
Tudge, A.	Turnbull, M.
Van Manen, B.	Vasta, R.
Washer, M.J.	Wyatt, K.

NOES

Adams, D.G.H.	Albanese, A.N.
Bandt, A.	Bradbury, D.J.
Brodthmann, G.	Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S.	Butler, M.C.
Byrne, A.M.	Champion, N.
Cheeseman, D.L.	Clare, J.D.

Collins, J.M.	Combet, G.	The House divided. [10.30 am]	
Crean, S.F.	D'Ath, Y.M.	(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)	
Danby, M.	Dreyfus, M.A.	Ayes.....	71
Elliot, J.	Ellis, K.	Noes.....	<u>71</u>
Emerson, C.A.	Ferguson, L.D.T.	Majority.....	<u>0</u>
Ferguson, M.J.	Fitzgibbon, J.A.		
Garrett, P.	Georganas, S.		
Gibbons, S.W.	Gillard, J.E.		
Gray, G.	Grierson, S.J.		

AYES

Griffin, A.P.	Hall, J.G. *	Abbott, A.J.	Alexander, J.
Hayes, C.P. *	Husic, E.	Andrews, K.	Andrews, K.J.
Jones, S.	Kelly, M.J.	Baldwin, R.C.	Billson, B.F.
King, C.F.	Leigh, A.	Bishop, B.K.	Bishop, J.I.
Livermore, K.F.	Lyons, G.	Broadbent, R.	Buchholz, S.
Macklin, J.L.	Marles, R.D.	Chester, D.	Christensen, G.
McClelland, R.B.	Melham, D.	Ciobo, S.M.	Cobb, J.K.
Mitchell, R.	Murphy, J.	Coulton, M. *	Crook, T.
Neumann, S.K.	O'Connor, B.P.	Dutton, P.C.	Entsch, W.
O'Neill, D.	Oakeshott, R.J.M.	Fletcher, P.	Frydenberg, J.
Owens, J.	Parke, M.	Gambaro, T.	Gash, J.
Perrett, G.D.	Plibersek, T.	Griggs, N.	Haase, B.W.
Ripoll, B.F.	Rishworth, A.L.	Hartsuyker, L.	Hawke, A.
Rowland, M.	Rudd, K.M.	Hunt, G.A.	Irons, S.J.
Saffin, J.A.	Shorten, W.R.	Jensen, D.	Jones, E.
Sidebottom, S.	Smyth, L.	Katter, R.C.	Keenan, M.
Snowdon, W.E.	Swan, W.M.	Kelly, C.	Laming, A.
Symon, M.	Thomson, C.	Ley, S.P.	Macfarlane, I.E.
Thomson, K.J.	Vamvakinou, M.	Marino, N.B.	Markus, L.E.
Wilkie, A.	Windsor, A.H.C.	Matheson, R.	McCormack, M.
Zappia, A.		Mirabella, S.	Morrison, S.J.
		Moylan, J.E.	Neville, P.C.
		O'Dowd, K.	O'Dwyer, K.
		Prentice, J.	Pyne, C.
		Ramsey, R.	Randall, D.J.
		Robb, A.	Robert, S.R.
		Roy, Wyatt	Ruddock, P.M.
		Scott, B.C.	Secker, P.D. *
		Simpkins, L.	Slipper, P.N.
		Smith, A.D.H.	Somlyay, A.M.
		Southcott, A.J.	Stone, S.N.
		Tehan, D.	Truss, W.E.
		Tudge, A.	Turnbull, M.
		Van Manen, B.	Vasta, R.
		Washer, M.J.	Windsor, A.H.C.
		Wyatt, K.	

PAIRS

Briggs, J.E.	Smith, S.F.
Schultz, A.	Roxon, N.L.
Hockey, J.B.	Bowen, C.

* denotes teller

Question negatived.

**ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND
BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION
(PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY)
AMENDMENT BILL 2010**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 22 November 2010,
on motion by **Mr Hartsuyker**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question put.

NOES

Adams, D.G.H.	Albanese, A.N.
Bandt, A.	Bird, S.
Bradbury, D.J.	Brodthmann, G.
Burke, A.E.	Burke, A.S.
Butler, M.C.	Byrne, A.M.

Champion, N.	Cheeseman, D.L.
Clare, J.D.	Collins, J.M.
Combet, G.	Crean, S.F.
D'Ath, Y.M.	Danby, M.
Dreyfus, M.A.	Elliot, J.
Ellis, K.	Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T.	Ferguson, M.J.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.	Garrett, P.
Georganas, S.	Gibbons, S.W.
Gillard, J.E.	Gray, G.
Grierson, S.J.	Griffin, A.P.
Hall, J.G. *	Hayes, C.P. *
Husic, E.	Jones, S.
Kelly, M.J.	King, C.F.
Leigh, A.	Livermore, K.F.
Lyons, G.	Macklin, J.L.
Marles, R.D.	McClelland, R.B.
Melham, D.	Mitchell, R.
Murphy, J.	Neumann, S.K.
O'Connor, B.P.	O'Neill, D.
Oakeshott, R.J.M.	Owens, J.
Parke, M.	Perrett, G.D.
Plibersek, T.	Ripoll, B.F.
Rishworth, A.L.	Rowland, M.
Rudd, K.M.	Saffin, J.A.
Shorten, W.R.	Sidebottom, S.
Smyth, L.	Snowdon, W.E.
Swan, W.M.	Symon, M.
Thomson, C.	Thomson, K.J.
Vamvakinou, M.	Wilkie, A.
Zappia, A.	

PAIRS

Briggs, J.E.	Smith, S.F.
Schultz, A.	Roxon, N.L.
Hockey, J.B.	Bowen, C.

* denotes teller

The numbers for the ayes and the noes being equal, Mr Speaker gave his casting vote with the ayes.

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER—Order! Would members please resume their places quickly and, more importantly, quietly because I think that the House should be aware of the steps it is now going to take.

Is leave granted for the third reading to be moved immediately?

Leave granted.

Third Reading

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (10.38 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (10.38 am)—The government will not be supporting the third reading of this legislation. The government's view is that whilst this is, no doubt, a significant issue for a school on the north coast of New South Wales, this is an issue that affects a range of areas. We have a review of the EPBC Act underway. We believe that a comprehensive approach to these issues is required rather than legislation which removes one suburb from the application of the EPBC Act.

Certainly, the government indicates to all members that the minister is more than prepared to engage in constructive dialogue about solutions to what are, the government acknowledges, very real issues. But the government will not be supporting this amendment bill.

The SPEAKER—Order! The question is that this bill be now read a third time. I just indicate that if I give the call to the member for Cowper that will close the debate. No—that is wrong; I am making that up as I go along! The member for Cowper has the call and the debate can continue.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (10.40 am)—This is a very important bill, and I would have hoped that the member for Page would have supported this bill, which is vital to the interests of Maclean High School. We have had a situation in the past where the needs of the school were comprehensively ignored. The students and staff at that school had to tolerate very poor education conditions—conditions that were a threat to their health—and we had a mexican stand-off. We had a situation where the federal department had indicated quite clearly to the state au-

thorities that there was no way they were going to agree to the removal of bats at Maclean High School, and as a result the state authorities refused to submit a licence application on the basis that they knew full well that the federal government would not agree.

But when this bill came to the attention of the public the attitude of the federal government miraculously changed, and we were able to get to a situation where an approval was subsequently granted. But in the future, if we need to modify this approval, again the old processes will come into play. Again, the mexican stand-off will begin and again the students and staff of Maclean high will have to endure intolerable conditions where there are bat faeces right throughout the school, where their health is at risk and we have federal bureaucrats twiddling their thumbs.

So it is absolutely vital that this bill be passed. We had absolutely no assistance from the federal department. A working group was set up: the Maclean bat working group. They sat there and fiddled, month in and month out, basically trying to wear out public interest in this matter. But the problem for the government was that public interest did not wane. People were very passionate about this issue; they were very passionate about the health of the staff and students at the school, and at the nearby TAFE and the health of the surrounding residents. Public opinion did not go away. This bill really was the catalyst for action to be taken; action that, it was made clear, would not be possible due to the intransigence of the federal government.

It is vitally important that we see this legislation passed. This school has a particular need; this is one of the largest high schools in New South Wales. It is immediately adjacent to the TAFE and that is also immediately adjacent to a residential area. There are literally hundreds upon hundreds of people affected by this, over and above the 1,100

students at the school. It is vitally important that we put the interests of the staff and students of the TAFE and Maclean high, and the interests of the surrounding residents, ahead of the interests of bats.

We have had the odd request by people coming into my office to support the bats, I will admit. But the one thing that all of those requesters have in common is that none of them live immediately around the site that is in question. We have a number of people who are concerned about the bats, but they live nowhere near the adverse effects that the bats are causing to the community.

I hope that the member for Page will join me in supporting the staff and students of Maclean high, and that we will see this bill passed through the parliament so that the staff and students can be assured that the educational environment at their school is maintained.

The SPEAKER—Order! First of all, my instincts were right: the third reading debate would have been concluded by the summing up of the mover. But I now give the call to the Leader of the House.

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (10.44 am)—I move:

That in accordance with standing order 132, standing and sessional orders be suspended to enable the House to divide again on the question *viz.*: That the bill be now read a second time.

I move that motion on the basis that when we had this discussion the government put a view that if someone misses a vote or, as the standing orders provide, there is ‘misadventure caused by a member being accidentally absent or some similar incident’ then it should be recommitted to the vote. My view, as indicated, is that that should be automatic, as occurs in the Senate. However, we have to

suspend standing orders in order for that to occur.

In this case, the member for Mallee, John Forrest, is sick, so he did not attend the division and there was no request from the opposition to the government for a pair to be granted. The government is of the view that pairs should be granted in legitimate circumstances, whether they be work issues or sickness. I understand that the opposition were not aware of the member for Mallee's health issues and so no aspersions are cast on the nonasking for a pair. These things happen with real human beings, though I do indicate that the government would expect, under similar circumstances, the same response from the opposition and from all members.

I think that these circumstances are a reminder that common sense should apply when it comes to the granting of pairs. So it is appropriate that the motion be recommitted to the vote rather than the record showing 71 votes each and then you, Mr Speaker, having to make a determination. If the member for Mallee had voted in the division, we accept that the second reading of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Public Health and Safety) Bill 2010 would have been carried by a majority of the House and would be carried again if everyone maintains their vote. So I think this is an appropriate way to move forward with a bit of common sense and a bit of goodwill. The government has always had that approach and I encourage all members to have that approach.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (10.47 am)—I will not delay the House for long. The Leader of the House has outlined the situation perfectly factually with a little bit of gilding the lily at the end, but we will put that to one side. Obviously, the agreement for a better parliament that the government, the opposition and the cross-

benches agreed to required that when a vote is recommitted there be a suspension of standing orders and that could lead to a debate. On this occasion it is perfectly transparent that if the member for Mallee had been here the opposition would have succeeded in the passing of the second reading of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Public Health and Safety) Bill 2010. We will therefore agree to the recommittal of this vote and then proceed directly to a vote in the House.

We hope that the member for Mallee recovers swiftly. We also apologise for not knowing that he may not be able to attend this morning's vote. Having discovered those facts, I thank the Leader of the House and the government for acting in what is an entirely appropriate way. I look forward to proceeding to the vote.

Question put:

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

Question agreed to, with an absolute majority.

Recommittal

Question put:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The House divided. [10.54 am]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes.....	71
Noes.....	<u>70</u>
Majority.....	<u>1</u>

AYES

Abbott, A.J.	Alexander, J.
Andrews, K.	Andrews, K.J.
Baldwin, R.C.	Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K.	Bishop, J.I.
Broadbent, R.	Buchholz, S.
Chester, D.	Christensen, G.
Ciobo, S.M.	Cobb, J.K.
Coulton, M. *	Crook, T.
Dutton, P.C.	Entsch, W.

Fletcher, P.
Gambaro, T.
Griggs, N.
Hartsuyker, L.
Hunt, G.A.
Jensen, D.
Katter, R.C.
Kelly, C.
Ley, S.P.
Marino, N.B.
Matheson, R.
Mirabella, S.
Moylan, J.E.
O'Dowd, K.
Prentice, J.
Ramsey, R.
Robb, A.
Roy, Wyatt
Scott, B.C.
Simpkins, L.
Smith, A.D.H.
Southcott, A.J.
Tehan, D.
Tudge, A.
Van Manen, B.
Washer, M.J.
Wyatt, K.

Frydenberg, J.
Gash, J.
Haase, B.W.
Hawke, A.
Irons, S.J.
Jones, E.
Keenan, M.
Laming, A.
Macfarlane, I.E.
Markus, L.E.
McCormack, M.
Morrison, S.J.
Neville, P.C.
O'Dwyer, K.
Pyne, C.
Randall, D.J.
Robert, S.R.
Ruddock, P.M.
Secker, P.D. *
Slipper, P.N.
Somlyay, A.M.
Stone, S.N.
Truss, W.E.
Turnbull, M.
Vasta, R.
Windsor, A.H.C.

Neumann, S.K.
O'Neill, D.
Owens, J.
Perrett, G.D.
Ripoll, B.F.
Rowland, M.
Saffin, J.A.
Sidebottom, S.
Snowdon, W.E.
Symon, M.
Thomson, K.J.
Wilkie, A.

O'Connor, B.P.
Oakeshott, R.J.M.
Parke, M.
Plibersek, T.
Rishworth, A.L.
Rudd, K.M.
Shorten, W.R.
Smyth, L.
Swan, W.M.
Thomson, C.
Vamvakinou, M.
Zappia, A.

PAIRS

Briggs, J.E. Smith, S.F.
Schultz, A. Roxon, N.L.
Hockey, J.B. Bowen, C.
Forrest, J.A. Murphy, J.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (10.58 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

COMMITTEES

Public Works Committee

Reference

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (10.59 am)—I 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, Northern Territory.

Defence Housing Australia proposes to develop stages 2 to 7 of the Muirhead site, Darwin, Northern Territory for residential construction. DHA will construct 279 houses

NOES

Adams, D.G.H.
Bandt, A.
Bradbury, D.J.
Burke, A.E.
Butler, M.C.
Champion, N.
Clare, J.D.
Combet, G.
D'Ath, Y.M.
Dreyfus, M.A.
Ellis, K.
Ferguson, L.D.T.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Georganas, S.
Gillard, J.E.
Grierson, S.J.
Hall, J.G. *
Husic, E.
Kelly, M.J.
Leigh, A.
Lyons, G.
Marles, R.D.
Melham, D.

Albanese, A.N.
Bird, S.
Brodthmann, G.
Burke, A.S.
Byrne, A.M.
Cheeseman, D.L.
Collins, J.M.
Crean, S.F.
Danby, M.
Elliot, J.
Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, M.J.
Garrett, P.
Gibbons, S.W.
Gray, G.
Griffin, A.P.
Hayes, C.P. *
Jones, S.
King, C.F.
Livermore, K.F.
Macklin, J.L.
McClelland, R.B.
Mitchell, R.

for defence members. Housing will accord with DHA's national design and construction specifications for DHA residences. The total outturn cost of the proposal is estimated at \$410 million, inclusive of GST and land acquisition, with net costs reduced through the sale of surplus lots. Subject to parliamentary approval, DHA will deliver 279 dwellings for Defence Force personnel posted in Darwin. The project will be delivered over an eight-year period, with the first house due for completion in December 2013. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Public Accounts and Audit Committee

Report

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (11.01 am)—On behalf of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, I present the following reports: Report 418: *Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 4 to 38 (2009-10)*; Report 419: *Inquiry into the Auditor-General Act 1997*; and Report 420: *Annual report 2009-10*, with executive minutes received by the committee.

Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

Mr OAKESHOTT—by leave—These reports are tabled on behalf of the committee of the previous parliament, which undertook all of the work for the inquiries, including the conduct of the public hearings and the preparation of the reports.

With regard to report 418, the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, as prescribed by its act, examines all reports of the Auditor-General and reports the results of the committee's deliberations to the parliament. This report details the findings of the committee's examination of nine performance audits tabled in 2009 and 2010. As usual, these reports cover a range of agencies and

highlight a number of areas of concern, in particular grants administration, the implementation of new technology, risk management and data integrity.

The committee reviewed the administration of grants by the National Health and Medical Research Council. The committee acknowledged the benefits to Australian health flowing from research supported by the NHMRC grants system. The committee also noted the upheaval caused by the NHMRC's recent separation from the Department of Health and Ageing and its move to a statutory agency. The committee recognised that the NHMRC is still consolidating its new status but was pleased to see evidence of a tightening in administrative practices, processes and procedures.

The committee examined the implementation of the Change Program by the Australian Taxation Office. While the committee noted the significant productivity gains within the tax office, it expressed concern about the extent of ongoing client dissatisfaction with the system and the undermining of confidence in the integrity of Australia's taxation system. The incoming committee will continue to monitor this situation at the next bi-annual hearing with the Commissioner of Taxation and potentially do more on the back of that.

The committee also expressed concern over the long-term issue of staff churn at AusAID, particularly in light of the growing demands placed on the agency by Australia's expanding aid program. The committee acknowledged that AusAID is taking positive steps to combat this issue and recommended that AusAID report back to the committee on its efforts to alleviate the problem.

The committee reviewed audit reports on a number of controversial topics including the National Broadband Network request for proposal process, the coordination and re-

porting of Australia's climate change measures and the Building the Education Revolution program. The committee identified issues with risk management, data integrity and reporting processes and the effect these issues have had on implementation and delivery. Overall, the committee made four recommendations which, if implemented, will ensure ongoing improvement in public administration of government funds.

Turning to report 419, this report examines the Auditor-General Act 1997, which sets out the functions and powers of the Commonwealth Auditor-General. The committee conducted this inquiry to assess whether the powers of the Auditor-General and the Australian National Audit Office remain adequate in the modern public sector environment. It has been nine years since the last such review by the committee.

The committee acknowledged the gap in accountability of Commonwealth grants to states and territories. In his evidence to the committee the Auditor-General indicated the difficulties his office experiences in 'following the dollar' with regard to Commonwealth funding for programs and projects administered by the states and territories. He told the committee that this has been demonstrated with regard to a number of recent programs including the BER. More recently, this could prove relevant to the implementation of flood reconstruction programs in Queensland. To improve accountability and transparency, therefore, the committee strongly supports changes to the act to enable the Auditor-General to access information and records relating to the use of Commonwealth funds and to audit that information under certain circumstances.

The committee also recognises the increasing use of contractors to implement government programs and services. While acknowledging the benefits of this practice,

the committee is concerned about the potential undermining of ministerial responsibility and parliamentary oversight. The committee wants to see more accountability in this area and accordingly wants the Auditor-General to have the power to audit contractors delivering government programs and services.

The committee considers that the Auditor-General should have the statutory authority to address these issues. Accordingly, the committee has made 13 recommendations which, if enacted, will enhance the power of the Auditor-General, including:

- giving the Auditor-General greater authority to 'follow the dollar' where non-government bodies, including contractors and agencies in other levels of government, are in receipt of Commonwealth funding;
- removing outdated restrictions on the Auditor-General's capacity to initiate audits of Commonwealth-controlled government business enterprises;
- ensuring that the Auditor-General's full information-gathering powers for traditional performance audits also apply to 'assurance' reviews the parliament might wish him or her to carry out; and
- enhancing the Auditor-General's role in reviewing the adequacy of agencies' performance information.

The changes proposed by the committee will help ensure that Commonwealth funding is fully accounted for and that, in the end, the taxpayer is receiving full value for money in all programs delivered by the Commonwealth or by related agencies.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the previous committee, chaired by Sharon Grierson MP, for its work on these inquiries. The incoming committee recognises the important role of the Auditor-General and his office in holding the execu-

tive and its agencies to account and looks forward to continuing to work with the Auditor-General to strengthen accountability and transparency and public administration across the Australian government.

I commend the report to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson)—The member for Lyne may wish to move a motion.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (11.08 am)—by leave—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

Question agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 39(d), the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

CONDOLENCES

Australian Natural Disasters

Report from Main Committee

Order of the day returned from Main Committee for further consideration; certified copy of the motion presented.

Ordered that the order of the day be considered immediately.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson)—The question is that the motion be agreed to.

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (11.09 am)—I rise to support the motion of condolence in relation to the natural disasters that our nation has faced this summer. I particularly want to offer my condolences to those impacted by the floods that swept across Queensland. Also, I want to place on record the impact that the extreme weather events in Queensland has had on the people of Dawson. Firstly I want to assure the victims of these floods that they are in the thoughts and prayers of the people of Dawson. I particularly want to extend my sincere and heartfelt

sorrow and sympathy to those who have lost family and friends in that inland tsunami, as it has been called, that swept through Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley. As the member for Wright said earlier this week, the fact that those people had no warning of what was to come that day made it such a terrible tragedy. I also want to acknowledge the good work that the member for Wright has done in this difficult time and acknowledge the passion and commitment that he has displayed for his people. The electors of Wright could not have picked a better representative.

I happened to be in Brisbane when the flood waters reached Ipswich and Brisbane City. While I was in Brisbane I was able to participate in the clean-up efforts that happened directly after that. What I witnessed when that huge army of volunteers turned up to help clean-up the city is something that will stay with me for a very long time. It was heartening to see, especially after witnessing over the previous couple of days people having their possessions washed away in flood waters down the Brisbane River. I want to pay tribute to Lord Mayor Campbell Newman and his team at the Brisbane City Council who so competently coordinated the flood clean-up effort. It was really an amazing effort. Heaven forbid that a flood event of that nature should happen in the Mackay region or in the Dawson electorate, but I would say that the exemplary mobilisation effort that Brisbane City Council achieved could be used in the regions of other councils.

While much of the destruction in the south-east corner of Queensland was very well publicised through the media, I put on record some of the impacts that the extraordinary La Nina weather events this summer have had on the people in my electorate of Dawson. Some might say that the electorate of Dawson dodged a bullet because we are one of the few regions in Queensland that

were spared from the extraordinary floods that happened, but towns and cities in the electorate of Dawson did receive record rainfall, which has impacted, and there was the impact of the two cyclones in the last fortnight. While we have not had the floods, this has been no normal wet season in the north. In fact, we have already had rainfall in some places that is more than double the annual rainfall.

I have spoken before in this House about the impact the record spring rainfall has had on the sugar industry. It is important to realise the impact the rain that fell before Christmas is having on the sugar industry in Dawson. The Mackay region has had over double its annual rainfall since January 2010. As a result of the spring rainfall, there are over 645,000 tonnes of cane left standing in the paddock that was unable to be harvested in 2010. That is cane that farmers, millers and local businesses in the Mackay region will not receive any payment for.

One of the cruellest effects on the sugar industry is that the rain has not only made it too wet to harvest this year's crop but also has ruined much of the 2011 plant cane. To replace this plant cane will cost local farmers about \$1,800 a hectare. So the economic impact of this unusual wet season is going to be felt for a very long time to come. Some cane growers in the Mackay region reported that they did not suffer any damage from either of the two cyclones, just more rainfall, as if they had not had enough. Other areas, such as Proserpine, have received 4,000 millimetres since January 2010, when the average rainfall is 1,500 millimetres a year. That has left them with \$18 million worth of cane in the paddock. That is one of the regions that was also hit by Cyclone Anthony and received strong gales from Cyclone Yasi.

Farmers of the Burdekin region have probably been the hardest hit economically

by these weather events, with over three million tonnes of cane left in the paddock. That is very damaging to that small town. The Burdekin region was also impacted by Cyclone Yasi, with most of the cane being lodged or blown over by strong gales. I drove through that area and it was an unbelievable sight. It is heartbreaking for some of those farmers. I will continue to call on the government to assist these people where possible.

I also want to make some special mention of the local governments and the professional way in which they prepared their communities when Cyclone Anthony and Cyclone Yasi were bearing down on the coast during the past weeks. As a former councillor from the Mackay Regional Council I know that local government is called upon to prepare the community for every cyclone season. I know the special effort that is put in by local mayors, staff and councillors to prepare for these cyclones. I want to make special mention, today, of Mayor Lyn McLaughlin and her councillors and staff at Burdekin Shire Council. It was very good to be with Councillor McLaughlin at the disaster management meeting when Cyclone Anthony was bearing down on the coast. It was actually heading right for their town at that point in time.

On the night that Cyclone Anthony was to cross the coast at that town, thinking I was doing the sensible thing, I tried to escape down to Bowen only to find that the cyclone had changed its trajectory and was now travelling south so that the eye of the storm would cross directly over Bowen. But Cyclone Anthony was a very mild cyclone. The damage was limited and the next day I made my way around the town. There were trees that were blown over and some damage to property. I spoke with locals but they weath-ered it fairly well.

I have to say that it was nothing compared to the storm that was Cyclone Yasi, which bore down on that town and others in the electorate of Dawson. Again, I stayed in Bowen on the night that that cyclone crossed the coast. It was horrendous. The wind was nothing like I have ever experienced. There were things flying through the air that should not have been flying through the air. The next morning, when I inspected the damage I was surprised that it was not worse, given the extent of that wind. Relatively, we were spared from any major destruction. Certainly the thoughts of people in Dawson were with those who were in the thick of it—in Cardwell, Mission Beach and other communities in that area—when Yasi crossed the coast.

The images of the destruction caused by the cyclone will serve as a warning to anyone living in North Queensland that we are at the mercy of Mother Nature and we must always be prepared. There is a growing concern in my electorate that we may not have been prepared as well as we could have been. Late on the Monday night before Yasi crossed the coast many in Mackay, in the 'brown zones' as they call them, received a text message and automated phone call—the sort that many people receive the night before an election, I suppose, from political parties. But this message said that those in low-lying areas should be prepared to evacuate. I am not sure whether it was a good idea to send a message to people at 10 o'clock at night when the cyclone was 1,700 kilometres off the coast, but that is going to be a matter for debate when the emergency response is reviewed.

What is troubling the people in my community is that although they were told to seek higher ground and evacuate their homes there is no evacuation centre in Mackay. In fact, there is no evacuation centre in the electorate of Dawson, which is one of the hot-spots for cyclones. There is none in Bowen,

the Whitsundays or in the Burdekin. This is something that needs to be addressed. Evacuation centres must be built or identified because it is something that the state government identified in the aftermath of Cyclone Larry. In fact, the issue pre-dates that. The chief executive officer of Burdekin Shire Council told me the other day that he recalled former Premier Peter Beattie telling local government officials gathered at a conference in 1997 that the state government would begin a process of gathering funding for, and rolling out, cyclone shelters in the north. This has not happened.

Another matter that troubled the local community in Mackay and the Whitsundays was that there was no local ABC radio broadcast to keep locals informed of what the local situation was. It was syndicated somewhere else. This meant that locals were hearing reports from south or further north, closer to the cyclone, and not getting the relevant local information. The local ABC radio station in Mackay is only rated for a category 3 cyclone and because Cyclone Yasi was a category 5 it meant that our area received the broadcast from elsewhere, although it was quite obvious that the cyclone was not bearing down on the Mackay region. On top of the category 3 cyclone rating of the radio station building, it is also located in a flood zone. So there is some sense to what the ABC did but there could have been broadcasts from other places within the city. As the Mackay Regional Council Mayor Col Meng said, this really questions the ability of ABC to call itself the state emergency broadcaster. These are issues that will have to be addressed, hopefully by next year's wet season and cyclone season.

Community radio stations such as SweetFM, run by David, Merle and the crew in the Burdekin, did stay on air in the thick of it, supported by other volunteers bringing in food and stuff for them. That was abso-

lutely fantastic. Even our commercial radio stations—Scotty on Sea FM, Cliffo on Hot FM and Hammo on 4MK all did their bit to inform the local communities of what was going on.

I also want to place on record my appreciation for Mayor Col Meng and his team at Mackay Regional Council, Mayor Bruncker and his team at Whitsunday Regional Council, Mayor McLaughlin and her team at Burdekin Shire Council and Mayor Les Tyrell and his team at the Townsville City Council. Their efforts over the last couple of months recovering from the record rainfall and preparing for and leading up to Cyclones Anthony and Yasi are to be commended.

As I mentioned, I spent the night that Yasi hit in Bowen. The next morning I toured Bowen and, as I said, I was very surprised at the low level of destruction, given the level of the winds the night before. I ventured north from there to inspect the towns of Home Hill and Ayr in my electorate and the suburbs of Townsville that are in my electorate. Unfortunately for me I could not get through as the Bruce Highway was cut just before Home Hill. I understand it was cut just above Brandon, as well. Basically, that blocked the whole town in.

What I saw were dozens and dozens of vehicles waiting, stranded. They belonged to people waiting to return home. They had evacuated the cyclone zone and they had to wait an entire day not knowing whether their homes were still there. They may have had loved ones that they needed to contact and could not. It was a tragic thing for me to see and there were people who were quite distressed about not being able to get back to their homes. To me, that shows that there is a definite need for Bruce Highway funding, particularly funding for flood-proofing areas, to be kept in place.

I eventually did get to the Burdekin, to the towns of Home Hill and Ayr, a day and a half later. There was enormous damage, with trees down everywhere, but the community have rallied to clean up the place. There is no extensive damage to homes. In some cases, you could put that down to divine intervention. I saw two big trees which, if they had fallen a particular way, would have basically flattened Home Hill State School or one of its buildings. Another tree, instead of falling on the kids' play equipment, fell on a fence. It is unbelievable to see the near misses there. There were, as I said, a few victims who sustained damage to their homes, and that is tragic.

Up in Townsville, we have had the same situation—a lot of trees have been blown over. It does look like a bit of a war zone, but the council, the community and the ADF based up there have been making a tremendous effort to get Townsville back on track. I understand there are some Townsville residents who are still waiting for electricity to be connected. They have been a week without power, so I suppose things are getting a tad tedious in that regard.

There are calls to look at undergrounding power lines in the north, and that is something that the state government is going to have to focus on. I know that would be a very expensive exercise but, looking at the disruption to people's lives and businesses and the cost to the state of the constant repairs when these things strike towns every year, there could be a cost benefit in undergrounding.

I will close by saying to the people in my electorate, and to those elsewhere in the state and the nation who have suffered loss because of the natural disasters this summer, that I join the House in offering them my sincere condolences.

Mrs D'ATH (Petrie) (11.25 am)—I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in continuation on this condolence motion. I have already spoken in this House about those lost and those left behind grieving. We also need to acknowledge those people who have lost their homes and personal belongings, and the damage that is doing to them and their lives. Such disasters can result in not just physical damage but psychological damage.

I finished yesterday saying that the best way those in this House could try to understand what it was like to be one of the people who lost their belongings was to read the writing of someone whose home and family was in the Lockyer Valley about that fateful day in January in which they convey their experience in their own words. This gentleman, a father and husband, wrote these words for me and I would like to put them on the record:

On the evening of 11th January our home was inundated by the Lockyer Creek flood. All belongings were either washed away or destroyed, the flood leaving little but the shell of our house. After a 2 day wait to access the home we were left with the soul destroying job of emptying the remaining belongings for collection and disposal. We were alone, with no resources and exhausted by stress and a lack of hope. I saw little future for my 2 children, my wife and myself.

At the point where it appeared that it could not be worse a second flood arrived. This time it wore the orange uniforms of the Gold Coast SES. Kristy Heitmann led 3 units from Southport, Carrara and Runaway Bay. Seeing the distress in the eyes of my family they insisted that we stepped back and allowed them to do all the work. Their compassion and understanding went well beyond the call of duty at a time when we were on the edge of breakdown.

Enormous effort went into searching through the wreckage for any items salvageable, items we would never have found in our state. A donation from the Gold Coast residents and Council was made of a simple clothes basket, containing towels, soap, toothbrushes, coffee and many other

simple luxuries that are taken for granted in normal times. There are moments in life when even simple actions can change lives. Their timely arrival, sympathy and understanding as well as their plain hard work allowed us to stand back, reassess our situation and begin the path to recovery.

Leaving our home Kristy and her orange army went on to help many others in our area and I know they are now working in Cairns at Tully and Mission Beach helping more families, tirelessly and selflessly. I cannot imagine how many more people have been helped by them and all the volunteers involved in this disaster recovery, to the Army, State and Federal Authorities, individual volunteers and especially the SES thank you from my family.

Those words come from a man called Brett. Brett is my brother. They lost everything. But they picked themselves up and they are moving on. I cannot imagine what they went through. I have seen some of the footage. When they tried to get back to the house the first time, we saw a massive river flowing extremely fast and a roof sticking out of the middle of the river—and that was their home.

The second lot of footage showed the days after and the destruction in the home. The fridge had been lifted off the floor and was sitting sideways on the kitchen bench, half hanging in mid-air. Belongings were taken from one side of the home to the other. There were toys in my niece's bedroom, but they were not her toys; they were toys from some other home that had been pushed into her bedroom. They were amazing scenes. There were many sentimental items lost that day—items sentimental to our whole family. These included my mother's ashes. But those losses mean nothing, because my brother Brett, his wife Jenny, my niece Shawnee and my nephew Robbie are safe.

We have seen a lot of good come out of this. My brother told me the story of when they turned up at the evacuation centre. They

walked in looking absolutely devastated and a very large gentleman standing at the door put his hand out to my brother and said, 'What happened to you guys?' and my brother told him. This large gentlemen shook my brother's hand and said, 'You are coming home with us.' I want to acknowledge Mick—'Mick the truck driver'—and Shelly who have taken in my brother and his family. They offered them a place to stay for as long as they need. They bought the children new school uniforms. They did not know my family, but they put out a helping hand.

That is just one story, but there are so many stories out there. We have heard so many people, in speaking to this motion today, talk about the complete strangers who just came out to help. It was absolutely incredible. It is a sight that we have never seen in this country before. We know that in times of disaster Australians stand up and help each other. We have seen that time and time again. But I have never seen it to the extent that we saw it in January. I know that those in Central Queensland and Rockhampton, who went through those floods in December and early January, also saw that incredible spirit. We heard from the member from Capricornia that they all got together and they filled those sandbags and they protected their town and each other. It was just incredible to see.

My electorate of Petrie is one of the very fortunate electorates in Queensland that has remained relatively untouched as far as floodwaters. There was minor flash flooding here and there and a bit of damage—not in any way take away from the damage that was received in some community sporting organisations and so forth that are still trying to recover—but we did not lose lives or homes. But I do not know of too many people who do not know someone who has been affected. My community have come out with absolute strength and have fundraised,

baked, sewn, knitted and collected. They have not stopped from day 1. They have jumped on buses to help. Businesses have put backhoes on trucks and have gone into industrial areas and have helped dig mud out to help other businesses and homes. It has been incredible. As I said, I think my diary is full of fundraising events coming up. I do not know when it is going to stop.

I spoke to a lovely lady recently. She is a pensioner in one of our local retirement villages. She rang after the government mentioned the flood levy. She wanted to know how long the Premier's flood relief fund was going to go for because, as a pensioner, she will not be paying the levy and she wanted to know how she could donate \$20 a month for the next 12 months so that she could do her share. She was very worried that the Premier's fund might not continue for 12 months and wanted to know how she could get this money to us because she could not pay it all at once and needed to pay it monthly. I am sure that there are many, many people out there like that who are helping.

One area that has been talked about a bit—certainly by the member for Blair and some of the other members whose electorates have been significantly affected—is our schools and how many schools have been affected. I thought that this was one area where I could help in my electorate by gathering our schools together and helping them—and they were eager to help—to make sure that what they were fundraising was getting to the right schools and that we were getting the right stuff to the right schools. We have heard from some members that sometimes our hearts lead our generosity. We race out and donate clothes, fridges and everything else but we need to stop and say, 'Is this what they need?' They may already have five fridges, but they might need some clothes, a bed or something else. We

need to make sure that our generosity is matching the needs in the community.

I started with a list of 120 schools that were impacted by the floods and we now have it down to about 50 schools that still need assistance. We are matching up schools; they are adopting each other. They are doing fundraising and the kids are becoming pen pals and building those personal connections. I will talk in much more detail at another time in this chamber about the schools and how they are progressing in that program, but I would like to acknowledge some schools now. Aspley East State School has adopted Ipswich East State School. Ipswich East State School has 580 students. One-third of those students have lost their homes. In addition, the Ipswich East State School was significantly damaged. Water went through their science room, their special education room and their music room. The whole of the outside-school-hours care, which is run by the P&C, has lost absolutely everything.

Aspley East State School, which has adopted Ipswich East State School, did a 'free dress, gold coin' donation the other day, where a teacher did a chalk mural on the ground that showed the Brisbane River and the mountains all the way through to the city and then out to Moreton Bay and coins were laid on the lines of the mural. They raised \$1,329 that day. I know Ipswich East State School is very grateful for that. A local individual from my electorate, Terry Skinner, rang me up after hearing Ipswich East State School's story and he is donating an electric piano, which we are dropping down there next week. The music teacher is very grateful for that wonderful donation by Terry.

St Paul's School, after seeing the list of schools, said they could not just adopt one. They adopted Arcadia Valley State School, two hours north of Roma. It is a little school

that probably no-one has ever heard of—it has only five students. The principal only moved to the school this year. His home has been flooded out. He is living in a shed with his wife while it gets repaired. The principal is also the groundsman, as would be the case in most very small schools. His wife is the cleaner for the school. The water went through the one and only classroom. They have lost their early learning childhood books and toys for the kids—the box of Lego is gone—and those sorts of things. St Paul's School of Bald Hills has adopted this school. They have donated \$1,000. It is a permanent adoption and they will be doing a lot more for them. They have also given a financial donation to Brassall State School, which we heard about yesterday. This school was significantly damaged. They have one phone line now and the internet connection is very poor, so they are hard to get through to. They will get \$2,500. St Paul's has also adopted Milpera State High School, which predominantly takes new refugee migrants. They have given them \$6½ thousand to begin with and will be doing a lot more work for them.

These are just some of the stories. Bounty Boulevard State School, Deception Bay North State School, Grace Lutheran Primary School, the Lakes College and Taigum State School have all put their hands up and said 'Yes, we want to adopt and help these other schools.'

Unfortunately, just as I was finalising the list of the schools that still need help from the floods, I got the new list of schools that have been affected by Cyclone Yasi. That is a long list, including Tully school which needs to be bulldozed and rebuilt. So there are many schools that are damaged because of the cyclone as well and we will endeavour to help them.

Our hearts go out to all the people who have been affected by these floods and the

cyclone. I know the members for Blair, Oxley and Wright have worked extremely hard. It has been devastating for them to see the effect on their communities and the lives lost, but these members are working day in and day out to help rebuild them. I am sure their communities would not mind if I spoke on their behalf to say thank you to those federal members for what they are doing for their communities. I echo the sentiments expressed by the Prime Minister in the debate on this condolence motion. It has been a difficult time for Queensland, it will continue to be a difficult time in the reconstruction, but the Australian people are strong and resilient. They are kind and compassionate. They will rebuild their lives and they will do it with our help.

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (11.41 am)—At the outset of my contribution to the debate on this condolence motion on the natural disasters, I acknowledge the very moving speech by the member for Petrie and also the speech before her by the member for Dawson. We in this House cannot be anything but moved when we hear the personal stories that have been so eloquently told to us in this place.

I join with my colleagues on both sides of the House and the crossbenches to add my condolences, along with those of the people of Higgins, to the people whose lives will be forever scarred by these disasters.

The past two months have been a most extraordinary period for Australia, one which we will never forget and hope never to relive.

While the floods, cyclones and fires have directly affected communities in the states of Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia, all Australians, regardless of where they live, mourn their loss, understand their pain, pay tribute to their courage and celebrate the uniqueness and generosity of the Australian

spirit—a fighting spirit that will not be broken, no matter how hard Mother Nature may try.

We have been in awe of the events that have hit both our cities and our regions and, like all disasters, they have been totally arbitrary in where and who they strike.

This motion was originally intended as a condolence motion for those affected by the floods and Cyclone Yasi in Queensland and Victoria; yet, even while the clean-up continues in those states and the reconstruction commences, only this week we hear of more homes lost to bushfires in Western Australia. We also offer our sympathy and support to them, and I am sure the member for Pearce will speak of this later.

I particularly acknowledge the tragedy of 35 lives lost. So many of us were moved to tears listening to Scotty Buchholz, the member for Wright, as he spoke of the people in his community who did not make it. Words do not do justice to the unimaginable grief that their families, friends and colleagues must be experiencing. What these tragedies have proved is that we are a united people and our sense of who we are is not determined by state boundaries. We have pulled together for a common cause: to help rebuild communities in disparate regions of our continent, even those regions separated by great distance.

It was the pre-eminent historian Geoffrey Blainey who referred to the 'tyranny of distance' as a defining feature of Australia's history and a constant obstacle to our development. With Federation, we made our first concerted attempt to overcome this obstacle. Since that time our identity has only become stronger. While we may live great distances from one another, our generosity is not confined to such geographical limitations, nor is our sense of nationhood diminished. This is most evident during tragedies such as these.

The charity we have observed from our fellow Australians, and the mindfulness they have shown towards those who are suffering and destitute, has been inspiring. If there is any comfort to be found in these horrible events it is that Australians have confirmed their commitment to one another in the most spectacular way. The images we have seen on our televisions, and the stories we have read in newspapers and heard in this House, tell of large-scale suffering and loss but also of courage and kindness. It is a testament to the will and endurance of Australians that those affected have dealt with this situation with such grace.

The fallout from these disasters is immense. It is not just the lives lost, but the permanent setbacks so many now face as they struggle to rebuild their lives. Businesses have suffered, workers have suffered, and basic goods and services are in scarce supply, forcing up the cost of living. Economic recovery will be a slow process, and for many it will be years before they can rebuild their lives.

On 7 February Victoria commemorated the second anniversary of the Black Saturday bushfires of 2009, during which a horrific 173 people were killed. While much of the infrastructure building has been completed, the task of rebuilding lives is ongoing. This will be true of the floods as well.

I want to offer my sympathy and condolences to those in my home state of Victoria who have been affected by the floods that struck the western and central areas of our state. It is incredibly lucky, and due in no small measure to the work of emergency services and volunteers, that there were no fatalities in Victoria. Yet recovery is no less difficult for those whose livelihoods have been wiped away. The damage caused to property, as well as to vital infrastructure and amenities, has been significant. In particular

we offer our sympathy to the people of Kerang, Horsham, Pyramid Hill, Quambatook, Allansford, Wycheproof, Panmure and Culgoa, who were the hardest hit by the flooding. We are inspired by their courage and fortitude in the face of such widespread destruction.

Although the events in Queensland meant that the floods in Victoria were not given as much airtime, it is important for the nation to reflect upon the many personal stories in the south as well as in the north.

We are grateful to our state emergency service volunteers, police and emergency workers for the remarkable job they have done and we thank them. Their dedication and year-round training ensure that our state is prepared for these terrible events. The losses incurred would undoubtedly have been much higher were it not for their efforts.

We thank the many Australians, including so many from my own electorate of Higgins, for their generosity in donating money and goods to their fellow Australians and for their willingness to help. It will be a long road to recovery. To all those people who are being touched by these disasters our prayers are with you, as is our support. You must know that you are not alone.

Mr MARLES (Corio—Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs) (11.48 am)—I rise to speak in support of the Prime Minister's condolence motion on the natural disasters which have occurred over the summer. On 16 January this year I spoke at an ecumenical service that was pulled together by Father Kevin Dillon in Geelong. I thank Father Kevin Dillon for pulling together that service, which I think was an important occasion for the people of Geelong to express their grief and their solidarity with the people of Queensland and, of course, a growing number of people in Victoria.

During the ecumenical service, I spoke of a story which had been reported in the *Courier Mail* and referred to in the Prime Minister's contribution on this motion earlier this week. It was the story of a young pregnant woman who was swept from her home by the wall of water in Grantham. As she was swept away she was able to grab hold of a downpipe while holding onto her young baby, but from there she lost her grip and was swept to a nearby railway line where her foot was caught by a sleeper. And from there she was literally in a struggle against the force of nature, a struggle which she could not win. Her baby was torn from her arms, and it is thought that her baby is the youngest victim of these terrible floods. She herself would have been a victim but for the fact that a few minutes later she was saved by a helicopter pilot whose story also featured in the Prime Minister's contribution on this motion.

You can look at all these statistics, as terrible as they are, around this tragedy. Almost all of Queensland was affected, more than 10,000 people were evacuated and more than 30,000 homes were affected. There were record flood levels in Victoria. I echo the comment by the member for Higgins that some of the events and stories that have occurred in Victoria have not received the same airplay given to the events that occurred in Queensland. But there are enormous difficulties being experienced by people in parts of Victoria associated with these floods. Indeed, within my own region, in the Barwon area there were 500 calls made to the SES associated with local flooding. Of course, in our region it was nothing like it was in other parts of Australia.

You can look at all of that, and you can look at the 35 people who have lost their lives. But to truly understand the significance of these floods, you have to think of that young woman who a month ago held her baby safely in her arms but is now faced with

an unimaginable pain for the rest of her life. Whilst this was a moment of incredible tragedy, it was also a story of tremendous courage. That helicopter pilot I mentioned, Mark Kempton, and his crew plucked 28 people from the raging waters. I am sure that many of their lives were saved by the actions of Mark Kempton and his crew.

You can look at the selfless actions of Pauline Magner, who perished in these floods in Grantham but, it is thought, in the process was able to put her grandson Jacob in a position of relative safety within their house such that Jacob was able to survive the floods and is alive today. You can look at the courage of Rob and Jim Wilkin, again from Grantham, who saw this unprecedented wall of water coming towards them. They had the opportunity there and then to get to higher ground themselves but in that moment decided instead to take the time to warn their neighbours about what was coming and to get them out so that they could reach higher ground as well. When the wall of water came through they then got in their boat and managed to pluck a number of other people from the torrent. It is thought that their actions, in the space of just a few moments, were the difference between life and death for another 16 people. And, of course, you can look at the amazing story of Jordan Rice, which has been spoken of by many people in this debate. He asked rescuers to save his younger brother first but, unfortunately, they were unable to save Jordan.

This is also an extraordinary story of Australians pulling together in a really tough time. The number of volunteers who put their hands up to help in the clean-up and rebuilding of Queensland in the immediate aftermath of the floods was truly amazing. Tens of thousands of people registered to provide their assistance in the clean-up. In the days immediately after the floods went through Brisbane, we were all struck by the visions

on the television of queues in excess of one kilometre long of people registering to volunteer to help clean up. Of course, across the nation, in a very short period of time indeed, \$180 million has been raised by ordinary Australians to help their fellow Australians in a really difficult time of need.

In all of this, one group, from my electorate, have not had their story told and I would like to spend a moment describing their contribution in the last few months. Centrelink's emergency call centre in Geelong is our country's only 24 hours a day, seven days a week emergency call centre operated by the Commonwealth. I was glad to see that the Minister for Human Services in her contribution to this debate specifically mentioned this call centre. As it happens, the call centre is located just around the corner from my electorate office in the centre of Geelong and it is designed to be the first to go into action when natural disasters such as bushfires and floods occur. It gives the Australian government an immediate response capacity, not to replace 000 calls but to offer information on evacuation options and recovery plans, to deal with requests for financial assistance and to cope with the overflow of calls being made to state and local emergency services.

One can imagine that these are very difficult calls to deal with. In my time I have had a bit to do with call centre workers and I think it is hard to imagine more difficult calls to have to deal with than those coming into Centrelink's Geelong emergency call centre in recent times. These calls would be emotionally taxing and would have to be handled with the utmost sensitivity and professionalism.

During the floods, more than 100,000 calls were made to Centrelink's Geelong emergency call centre. They included calls from people who had lost their homes or businesses and people who were unable to

locate their families and friends. Four teams of 10 people worked rotating 12-hour shifts in the call centre and it was in constant operation during this crisis. So I would like to place on the record the appreciation of the Australian people for the work of the staff of this call centre. They did great work for their country and they certainly made their community very proud. Today it is my honour to acknowledge them as being part of the local Geelong contribution to the events of the last month or so.

Many emotions are felt in the context of natural disasters. We feel an enormous sense of grief for those who have perished, and today during this debate we think of their families and friends. We stand in solidarity with all of those Australians who have been affected by these natural disasters. We let them know, as the member for Higgins stated in her contribution, that they are most definitely not alone. I think it is also appropriate that, as a result of this crisis, Australians feel a quiet sense of pride in the amazing coming together of the community and the nation. People really pulled together as one, in the most Australian way, in the most difficult of times.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (11.58 am)—With the advent of the 2011 new year came floods, fires, cyclones and storms across the country. The ferocity of these events and the damage they wrought over several states shocked and distressed many. I think there was hardly a dry eye in this House when the member for Wright shared with us the grief of his community, which perhaps sustained the greatest loss of life. We understand their pain, as my colleague the member for Higgins said, and we pay tribute to their courage. We have been touched by other accounts in the media and in this place of the acts of heroism and the generosity of spirit of the Australia community. From beyond our

shores have come messages of support and comfort.

In dozens of evacuation, recovery or disaster control centres, from Grantham and Murphys Creek to Emerald, to Rochester, to Echuca, to Grafton or the Brisbane showgrounds, thousands of people, mostly volunteers, have been striving around the clock to help Australians who have suffered terrible loss. In places such as Toowoomba, Bundaberg, Dalby, Horsham and Dadswells Bridge, people devastated by the loss of homes and businesses have been buoyed by the support they have had from good Samaritans who turned up when they were needed most. Battalions of people, including my friend and former colleague the former member for Riverina, the Hon. Kay Hull, were cleaning out homes and shops as soon as the floodwaters had sufficiently receded. Most had no special connection but they had come in their dozens with broom, mop, shovel and sometimes gurneys and even bobcats and trucks to lend a hand and to make a difference. It was a time, as someone observed, that we experienced the 'worst from Mother Nature but the best from human nature'.

The devastating floods are a sobering reminder of our vulnerability to unforeseen events. We have become accustomed, regrettably and unfortunately, to natural disasters that occur every year, whether they be bushfires or cyclones, floods or drought. In my home state of Western Australia, following on from the disastrous fires that burned so many homes in Toodyay on the eve of the new year in 2009, we again experienced, this year—just over a week ago—a freak storm in the Avon and terrible bushfires, while recovery efforts continued following floods in Carnarvon and the Gascoyne River in the electorate of Durack.

Emergency services across Australia have been stretched, and I would like to comment,

as others have done, on the extraordinary effort made by these extraordinary people who conducted the search, rescue and recovery effort across Australia. Our emergency crews performed magnificently. This fact was brought sharply into focus again when cyclonic winds devastated part of my own electorate of Pearce. The towns of York, Northam, Toodyay and Beverley were all hit on 29 January by winds that ripped the roofs off houses, felled powerlines and trees and left much of the Avon region without power for several days, and were responsible for the death of a local identity.

I am very grateful to the President of the Shire of York, Mr Pat Hooper, and the President of the Shire of Northam, Mr Steve Pollard, for the briefing on recovery efforts they gave me, and in particular to York shire chief executive officer Ray Hooper and to President Pollard for making time to assist me with a visit to many of the damaged properties and town infrastructure, including the Avondale Primary School in Northam. My thoughts are with those families and businesses and with the many elderly people who were particularly affected, and those who have sustained severe damage. For one family I visited, almost the entire roof had been ripped off their house and the beams of the roof snapped like matchsticks. The children were terrified and traumatised to the extent that they did not want to go back inside the house. So it will take time—many months indeed—to restore their homes and the business premises, and I wish them a speedy recovery. But, above all, for all of those who are victims of these catastrophic events, it is usually once the initial requirements have been attended to that much later on reaction sets in—and I know that with the Toodyay fires it was some months afterwards that the depression and sadness set in. This is the time when people need our continuing support, assistance and grief counselling.

I want to record my admiration and thanks for the tremendous work done in my electorate by FESA, especially incident controller Paul Leiper, to Julie and her team from DCP, the local police, the York Health Services and Centrelink, who once again performed speedily and magnificently. There was also the York Country Women's Association, the Salvation Army, the Red Cross and the many individuals who responded to that particular crisis. The speedy declaration of the national disaster and the support offered by Premier Barnett and the Western Australian government was very much appreciated. I was grateful also for the timely advice and assistance from the federal Attorney-General, the member for Barton, who provided information for the affected area.

Just weeks after these storms, Pearce and the neighbouring electorate of Canning were hit by severe bushfires, the horrific images of which I am sure many of you have seen. In Pearce, approximately 1,170 hectares has been burnt throughout the areas of Brigadoon, Baskerville, Millendon, Red Hill and Herne Hill, and some parts of the Shire of Chittering. But I am very pleased that on this occasion no houses were lost. Nevertheless, many people were required to evacuate their homes and to endure a very anxious wait.

The risk of bushfires is a constant concern to people living in many parts of the Pearce electorate and almost every summer there is a serious incident. The people of Pearce understand the threat and they can sympathise with the people of Roleystone and Kelmscott as they face the terrible loss of property from the recent fire. I am sure that residents of Pearce would join me in wishing the people of Canning a speedy recovery from their heartbreaking losses.

From speaking to my parliamentary colleagues in Queensland in the days following the floods, I know that they have also seen

the emergency services putting in similarly extraordinary efforts to those I have witnessed in my own electorate. There is little doubt that a highly professional response to the initial emergency saved many lives and provided effective support to many thousands of victims. The challenge will be maintaining that 'can-do' attitude after most of the volunteers have gone home, when residences are still uninhabitable, the railway lines are still out and the legalism is beginning to trump common sense.

However, the emergency services personnel who put their lives at risk, the residents who faced disaster without panic and their loss with brave spirits, the volunteers who pitched in without being asked or told to help are representative of Australians at their best. It is important not just for us as a country but for those people in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, and particularly in the Durack, Pearce and Canning electorates, whose lives have been irrevocably changed by catastrophic events well beyond their control.

My staff and I extend our best wishes for the recovery effort and we stand ready to assist our colleagues in any way that we can.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (12.07 pm)—We have begun yet another parliamentary year with the spectre of tragedy and a pall of grief hanging over our deliberations. Only two years ago we stood in this place reflecting on the devastation of the Black Saturday fires. With those tragic stories still in our minds, we now confront the destruction wreaked by floods and fires across this nation. The natural disasters of the summer, particularly in Queensland, northern New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, have underlined both the harsh brutality of the Australian landscape and the inherent compassion and generosity

of the Australian people. Even for those communities who were far removed from the events in Queensland and the other regions that were most badly affected by flood and fire, these were disasters that struck a blow at all of us as a nation.

Like most Australians I watched as great swathes of Queensland and Victoria were submerged by floodwaters, and we have seen homes burn in Western Australia. I heard the stories of those who did not survive or those whose loved ones were swept away or lost to fire. It has been a summer of extraordinary catastrophes that seemed to cascade one on top of the other, and with each expression of natural force came more homes, more property, more businesses destroyed, more lives lost. The tragedies of this summer will linger in our collective memories for many decades to come. For those who lived and survived these tragedies I can barely begin to imagine the horror that they have faced or the dark days that are still to come.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the many fine contributions to this condolence motion. In particular I wish to acknowledge those members who have spoken with such force about their own personal circumstances, who have spoken with force about the impact of these natural disasters on their communities. It is in moments such as these that we see the great power of representative democracy, where individuals can come forward and not just advocate for the interests or the demands of the communities that they represent but reflect and amplify the feeling, the loss, the suffering, but also the hope, of their communities.

I can stand here today with the great fortune of not having been personally affected by these tragedies but, as I said earlier, I think as Australians we have all been greatly affected by what we have seen. But I do stand here today to ensure that it is recorded

in the *Hansard* that the people of my community, in the Lindsay electorate, wish to acknowledge that they too grieve and wish to show their compassion and empathy towards those who have been affected by these events. My community is divided by the mighty Nepean River, part of the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment. With the Nepean River running through the heart of our electorate, ours is a community that is no stranger to flooding; indeed, much of the electorate of Lindsay is located on the flood plain. I have no doubt that that is in the minds of those locals who remember the flood events our community has experienced in the past and that is why so many members of my community have mobilised to contribute, to raise funds and to show their expressions of support for those who have been affected by these natural events.

I wish to take a few moments now to record just a few examples of some of the individuals and groups in my community that have made a contribution to the collective national fundraising effort and to the collective national effort of extending sympathy and assistance to those in need. I wish to acknowledge the 10 Penrith Panthers players who travelled to Ipswich to help out with the recovery. Captain Petero Civoniceva has a special connection with Ipswich, having played as a junior in the district. He told our local paper, the *Penrith Press*:

I just don't think the vision of the floods we saw on television gave it justice. It was just utter devastation and for two days we helped people in any way we could. We just moved from house to house offering our help, and ended up with shovels and wheelbarrows on the first day and knocking out gyprock walls and ceilings on the other.

It just really made me think if this had happened to me what I would do.

I think that for Australians, as we spent summer, the time that so many of us enjoy spending with our families, as we looked on,

that was a question we all asked ourselves: 'What would I do if this happened to me?'

I also wish to acknowledge local entertainers who teamed up with the many clubs, pubs and restaurants in my local community that hosted and held fundraising events, some of which included the Penrith Paceway, the Penrith RSL and the Log Cabin. I also acknowledge the Red Cross volunteers in my local community who have worked tirelessly to raise funds for the relief effort. In particular, I acknowledge those women who were involved on Australia Day, battling what was oppressive heat in Penrith, out at the Penrith Lakes walking around with their tins, raising money for this cause. I acknowledge our local Bunnings stores who, through their barbecue stalls and donations from customers, raised more than \$8,000 for the Premier's flood appeal.

I acknowledge a local small-business person, Rob Gibson. I know that there are many others, but I record his contribution to also recognise the efforts of those who have equally made such a contribution. Rob Gibson, who runs a business, CleanOff High Pressure Service, spent a week helping to clean homes in Queensland that had been affected by the floods. Now, having done that, he is donating 10 per cent of the proceeds from all of the jobs that he completes until the end of March to the flood appeal.

I acknowledge the Penrith City Council, which has offered technical assistance to a number of the Queensland local government authorities. Those authorities are under enormous strain at the moment and are trying to continue to deliver the very basic services that communities affected require. I know that nine of our local SES volunteers have also travelled to flood and cyclone affected areas in Queensland to lend their expertise.

Last Sunday I attended a fundraising relief concert held at the Blacktown Bowman Hall

organised by the New South Wales Philippine Community Council. I know many local residents were in attendance at that event and I understand that, in total, approximately \$20,000 was raised at that event. It struck me that many people who were involved in that concert from the local community that were of Filipino background showed a particular empathy having come from a country that faces many of these natural disasters and has done so on a great scale in recent times as well. I acknowledge their contribution as Australians of Filipino background towards the relief effort.

These are just a few examples, and I know that there are so many more in my community, but I wanted to record them to ensure that it is known that our community stands side by side with those other communities who are now seeking to rebuild themselves out of the debris that these natural disasters have left behind.

I thank all of these people and acknowledge the efforts they have contributed in their time, their strength and their money. I know there are also many people in our community who have prayed for those who have been affected by these natural disasters.

Many communities have been wiped out physically by these natural disasters, but the spirit that binds those communities remains. I believe it is out of this spirit that we as a nation, determined to demonstrate our resilience, our compassion and our mateship, will begin the process of helping those in these affected communities to rebuild the infrastructure that they need and to rebuild their communities.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (12.18 pm)—I commend the contribution by the member for Lindsay to this debate on the condolence motion on the natural disasters. From time to time, we experience significant events that become etched into our national

memory. The flash flood that ripped through Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley on 10 January 2011 was such an event. The torrent was so unexpected in its arrival, so brutal in its power and so terrible in its destruction that we will remember it forever.

In the days that followed that terrible event, Australians watched the crisis unfold as floodwaters spread from the mountains down towards Brisbane. We watched as homes and businesses were flooded. We watched as businesses were literally washed down the river and smashed against bridges. We watched as a tug boat operator carefully guided huge chunks of debris past bridges and wharves to the relative safety of Moreton Bay. We will never forget those images.

Every Australian will remember the floods in a different way, but we all share deep and heartfelt sympathy for those who have lost loved ones, homes and businesses. And our sympathy extends to those Australians who have suffered through Cyclone Yasi and the Brisbane floods as well as the flooding in Central Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, and the bushfires in Western Australia.

In the face of these extraordinary natural disasters, Australians have demonstrated extraordinary resilience, courage and generosity. While the floodwaters roared through Toowoomba, brave emergency crews and bystanders plucked stranded motorists from their cars and saved people desperately clinging to trees and debris. Sadly, one hero, teenager Jordan Rice, made the ultimate sacrifice—losing his own life after insisting that his younger brother be rescued first. By the time his rescuers returned, Jordan was gone. Once the water began to recede, Australians responded by giving millions of dollars to the Premier's flood appeal and by arriving in Brisbane by their thousands to help with the clean-up.

In my electorate, numerous local clubs, pubs, community groups, churches and individuals have held fundraisers and made substantial donations to the flood victims. Entertainers have donated their services to help at fundraising events. Local performing arts groups have held a variety show and raised thousands to support the flood appeal. Rotary clubs throughout the mid-North Coast region have been working to raise money and provide emergency assistance.

In Brisbane, thousands of Aussies arrived at volunteering centres. Some even drove from Sydney to help. Armed with shovels, mops and gum boots, they set off to spend a day helping total strangers clean mud and debris from their homes and businesses. Australians can truly be proud of the way they responded to the flood crisis.

Although spoken over 300 years ago, the words of French moralist Bruyere describe perfectly the response of the Australian public to the flood crisis when he said:

There exist some evils so terrible and some misfortunes so horrible that we dare not think of them, whilst their very aspect makes us shudder; but if they happen to fall on us, we find ourselves stronger than we imagined, we grapple with our ill luck, and behave better than we expected we should.

The floods in Toowoomba and Brisbane reminded us of the awesome power of nature, but they also reminded us that Australians can be counted on to help when disaster strikes.

In my own electorate of Cowper we did not escape unscathed from the flooding, with much of the Clarence Valley experiencing significant inundation. The towns of Ulmarra and Maclean, Minnie Water and Wooli were isolated for some days. We saw inundation in areas around these towns but, fortunately, the levee system held to prevent major damage to these centres. Unfortunately, many local farmers and business owners have experi-

enced significant disruption and damage as a result of this flooding.

The Leader of the Opposition was kind enough to visit the region and he saw first-hand the impact that these floods had on local businesses and particularly on primary producers in the area. In particular, we saw significant destruction of the local sugarcane crop, with a loss of new plantings and young crops, which will certainly manifest itself in a very low yield in around 2012, when the crop for that year should be down by as much as 50 per cent. Our local fishing industry suffered badly. Having suffered difficulties in recent years, these latest floods set the industry back further. Local dairy farmers also suffered the impact of this local disaster.

It is worth noting that almost every corner of my electorate has been affected by flooding at some stage in the past two years—from the Macleay valley in the south through the Nambucca and Bellinger valleys, Coffs Harbour, the Orara Valley and of course the Clarence valley. Natural disasters have become an expected part of life on the mid-North Coast. But, despite the fact that we expect floods to come, the damage is never easy to repair and the lost wages and income are gone forever.

One aspect of natural disasters that is often overlooked is the impact of infrastructure damage on local councils. Local councils are responsible for most of the roads, bridges, footpaths, sewerage systems, drainage and other local facilities. At the best of times, councils struggle to pay for the maintenance and repair of these facilities. When natural disasters strike, finding the money to pay for reconstruction and repairs is almost impossible. Even with Commonwealth and state government assistance, some important local infrastructure simply cannot be properly repaired within a reasonable time frame, if at all. Damaged in the devastating floods in

2009 in my electorate, some rural bridges and roads have only just been reconstructed, and at least one important regional road link is not yet fully repaired. These local pieces of infrastructure are vital to regional communities, and the reconstruction task force in Queensland must ensure that local councils have sufficient resources to quickly repair and rebuild the roads, bridges and other facilities damaged by the floods.

The scale of the natural disasters that we have experienced in the past few months is unprecedented. Seventy-five per cent of Queensland is a declared natural disaster area. Much of northern New South Wales has been declared a natural disaster area, plus areas of western New South Wales that perhaps will not see flood peaks until late March. Victoria has suffered through widespread floods. Western Australia, as I have said, is struggling with bushfires.

In the face of these daunting challenges, Australians have shown the world that we will not be defeated. No matter what nature throws at us, we will rebuild. We will help our mates through tough times. We will come back bigger and stronger than ever. On behalf of my electorate, I would like to make it clear to the people of Queensland, Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales that we feel your pain, we will support you through these most difficult times and we will be there to help in the future.

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide—Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare and Minister for the Status of Women) (12.25 pm)—The sheer scale of the natural disasters that have affected so many parts of Australia but most particularly Queensland is, quite simply, unparalleled. Floods, cyclones and fires have all done their utmost to wreak far too much havoc across the nation. We know that three-quarters of Queensland has been declared a disaster zone, but I want

to make it clear today that the effects, the grief, the shock and the empathy have been felt far, far more widely than that. Like all Australians, my thoughts remain with those who have lost so much in these tragedies—those who are still dealing with the daily grief of having lost family members or friends and the thousands who have suffered shattering effects. Across Queensland, people are already starting the mammoth task of cleaning their properties and reconstructing their homes, businesses and lives. I stand here today to assure them that they will not do so alone.

Whilst in Adelaide we may be far, geographically, from the devastation of the floods, in all other senses we have been right there. We have felt the pain, we have grieved the loss and we have resolved to rebuild alongside our fellow Australians. I rose to speak in the chamber today because I wanted to highlight to those affected the truly remarkable and generous solidarity that I have witnessed in the community that I am lucky enough to represent in this place. The overwhelming message that we send you is to reassure you that we will stand with you in your time of need. I also wanted to place on record my gratitude to those who have stood up as local heroes within the portfolios that I represent and the fact that we will use these portfolios to help ease the recovery process and help the long process of rebuilding.

I cannot explain the generosity that I have witnessed firsthand in my local community. Like so many other members in this place, my office and I have worked hard to assist with fundraising. Standing outside various shopping centres with a bucket in my arms, I cannot tell you the number of times that total strangers who were walking past placed money—in some cases loose coins and in many cases the last note out of their wallet—in that basket whilst remarking: ‘I have already given, but I can’t forget those pictures.

I can’t forget the images, the stories I’ve heard, and I’m more than happy to give again.’ We kept hearing this, time and again, in all different parts of the electorate. We heard it from people who had a lot but also from people who had very little but who were more than willing to donate that little.

There were a group of dedicated Adelaidians who organised, wrote, directed and pulled together a charity ‘SA 4 QLD’ pantomime within just a week or so. I must say that the embarrassment and humiliation that I personally felt by taking part in said pantomime was well worth the over \$100,000 that was raised in that one night by that one group of South Australians.

My electorate office has become a collection point for the Shoe Boxes of Love initiative, with over 200 shoeboxes being donated from across South Australia. People are bringing these boxes to do anything and give anything that they can to help the pain of total strangers on the absolute other side of our continent. So, to those of you who are affected, I can say with absolute confidence that you are not alone, and the people of Adelaide most certainly stand right with you.

Just as the community will not walk away from the recovery task, neither will the government. Over the previous weeks we have heard some amazing stories of courage. We have heard of some remarkable heroes—from the rescuers, from the SES personnel, from the Army and from a whole range of different service organisations—but there are also thousands and thousands of untold stories of local heroes, of people doing small things within their community and standing up and being counted when it really mattered. I think it is really important that we hear some of these stories too. I would like to take a little bit of time to share with you some of the stories of courage and generosity that I have been lucky to hear from within

the portfolios of child care and employment services as well as to inform the parliament what we will be doing in those portfolios to assist with the recovery.

On the days when the floodwaters were at their highest there were a number of instances throughout Queensland of parents physically not being able to collect their children from child care because of localised flooding. One can only imagine when going through these sorts of ordeals how much harder it gets knowing that you cannot be there with your young child during what is a terrifying experience for you both. One such case was at the long day care centre at Withcott. It had become completely isolated. The centre could not be reached by parents; the children could not be reached by their parents. That was on the first night.

That evening staff members went above and beyond the usual call of duty, caring for five very anxious and very scared little people throughout the night because they could not be with their parents. Although I would expect nothing less from the hardworking and dedicated early childhood care staff throughout this country—we are so lucky to have them—this was obviously a particularly difficult day on the job. It was handled with the utmost calm and professionalism. It was done without expectation of thanks or recognition. Today I give credit to the staff members of the Withcott Early Childhood Centre for that extraordinary contribution.

Some 21 Queensland long day care centres have been identified as having significant flood damage that will require medium and in some cases longer term remediation. Nine outside school hours care services have been affected seriously, with most of these services located on the grounds of local primary schools. In addition, 36 family day care services have been affected by floodwaters. Significant damage has occurred in at least

17 of these cases. You can only imagine the double tragedy of losing your house and your business in the same go, because of course that is where they work from.

Many more childcare services have been both directly and indirectly affected. In the case of these services the damage means so much more than a badly damaged building. It means challenges for families in finding alternative care arrangements for their children. It means the loss of a business, which in some cases provides the income for an entire family. It means children losing a home away from home, one which they have formed a personal attachment to and become comfortable in.

There are some remarkably heart-warming responses from local communities, giving all they can to help affected childcare services. In addition to government support to get these centres repaired and back up and running, there has been a tremendous response from communities right across Queensland. The Riverhills Childcare Centre and Kindergarten suffered major flood damage. After the inundation, a volunteer who had come to the area to assist in the clean-up saw the damage and reported it to their church and then arranged for members of that church to become involved. Pretty soon there were over 100 volunteers involved in the clean-up and in donating toys and books so that the centre could recommence operation.

The church assisted in getting the service up and running. They are now planning the next steps of the rebuild. While the children are currently in alternative care and the rebuild will take some time, all associated with this service are determined to get it up and running as soon as possible. A huge amount of progress has been made as a result of the local contributions. The walls are already going up on the rebuild.

Like those communities, the Australian government has acted to provide immediate assistance to childcare services and families using child care in flood affected communities. Measures under local emergency provisions have included providing favourable treatment for absences of care or due to service closure. This decision alone has allowed families and childcare services to access an additional \$12.4 million in childcare benefit fee relief just during this emergency period.

Families experiencing financial hardship as a result of the flood disaster have also been able to more readily access the special childcare benefit, which covers the full cost of child care. As at 30 January 2011, around \$1.1 million in special childcare benefit entitlements had been provided to affected families. Rules relating to operational subsidies will also be relaxed for eligible childcare services under the Community Support Program to smooth out potential decreases in funding where fewer children have been placed in child care during the emergency period.

As in child care, we will ensure that within employment services we step up to look out for those fellow Australians who have been affected. As always, it is the case with large-scale disasters that those who are hardest hit are often those who can least afford it. There are more than 73,000 unemployed Queenslanders living in flood affected areas and their resources to cope have been sorely tested over the past weeks. I wish to assure the people of Queensland, and indeed all Australians, that all the necessary assistance has been provided to these job seekers and to the employment services that support them.

To ensure that much needed income support has continued to flow to job seekers who have been affected by the floods, Centrelink has implemented a number of meas-

ures. Flood affected job seekers are eligible for an exemption of up to 13 weeks from their usual participation and job search requirements. This means that those who have been hardest hit will continue to receive payments from the government without having to actively look for work or take a job if one is offered when they are working on their own rebuild and putting their lives back together. It will allow these individuals to concentrate on rebuilding their lives and supporting their family through the difficult time in the immediate aftermath of the flooding. Activity and personal contact interview rules have also been relaxed, and Centrelink staff have been asked to review any penalty decisions that were made immediately prior to the floods.

Of course, it is not just job seekers who have been affected as a result of the floods but also the hardworking staff who provide job services to the unemployed in these areas. There were 26 employment service providers across 112 sites that were impacted as a result of flooding in Queensland. To put this in context, those services were working directly with over 29,792 job seekers. Fortunately, once the floodwaters had receded and the necessary clean-up and repairs were completed, the majority of employment services were able to reopen and, in the spirit that characterises so many of the hardworking individuals who provide these support services, many immediately applied their minds, their money and their materials to ways that they could help their communities to recover.

One service provider, Mission Australia, established a temporary call centre to assist Volunteering Queensland to manage the many calls from the public wishing to volunteer for flood recovery tasks. Mission Australia volunteers handled over 1,000 calls on behalf of Volunteering Queensland. There was a clear need, and the agency used its

organisational capacity and facilities to provide the rapid response that was required.

I should also add that it was not just employment service providers that were willing to pitch in. There were local job service providers who were inundated with calls from their clients asking for advice on how they could come and help, on how they could assist. Job seekers have assisted—whilst being under no formal obligation to do so and in receipt of no remuneration to do so—with cleaning, land clearing and fence repairs.

There have been countless stories, right across Queensland, of people stepping up when the community required them to do so. I want to put on the record just how proud of and grateful for all of those efforts I am.

Obviously, the reconstruction and recovery phase has begun and I believe that in the weeks and months ahead Queenslanders and other Australians will be well served by our employment services. Their priority will be for locals to secure the jobs that will flow during the next phase.

However, we also have to be realistic. The loss of housing and infrastructure, much of it essential to those local economies, has been absolutely incredible. The construction effort will require skills and labour—and, for some months and even years, much additional labour, which will not always be available across the vast distances which were affected by the floods. Acknowledging this, the Prime Minister has announced a doubling of the size of the relocation assistance pilot for people on income support and the directing of it to Queensland. This means that up to 4,000 eligible job seekers who want to get a job helping out with the reconstruction efforts will now receive financial support from the Australian government to move to Queensland with their families and assist with the rebuild.

The only thing that I think will linger longer in my memory than the images of beautiful, sunny Brisbane literally under water or some of those horrific images of cars floating down streets—images that you would never normally dream of seeing—is the strength and determination of Australians, including Queenslanders, in giving generously and in helping each other, their families and neighbours, to rebuild. On the days that the floodwaters peaked, I, like so many Australians, sat watching in awe of the utter devastation caused. It seemed unbelievable, and the task of recovery and rebuilding seemed so very great. But we are already seeing the spirit and the determination of so many to step up and make that a reality, and it is important that, as a parliament, we note that right around Australia there are people who are committed to helping out their fellow Australians during this very tough period.

Of the portfolios I hold, there is one that I have not mentioned yet today: that of the status of women. I want to place on record that I think there is nothing that embodied Australian generosity, and the resilience of Queensland, better than our two female leaders, Anna Bligh and our Prime Minister, doing an extraordinary job, standing up and coordinating these efforts to rebuild. They have done a tremendous job to date. I have every confidence that we will see a state rebuilt stronger and more beautiful than ever. I also want to place on the record my sympathies for and my heartfelt empathy with the people who have suffered during these national tragedies. But we endeavour to rebuild and recover together.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (12.42 pm)—On behalf of the people of Macquarie, I rise today to offer our deepest sympathies to all Australians affected by the natural disasters which have taken place across our nation in recent months. To all who have made

a contribution to the relief effort, whether through donations or a simple hug, during these dramatic and testing circumstances: I acknowledge your selflessness. Australia is a nation with a huge heart where mates help their mates in a very practical way. Communities met and mastered challenges—and, of course, we all know there are more ahead—not with words but with conviction and compassion, by putting their commitment to care for their fellow Australians into action.

Across our nation, roads, bridges, rail lines, power, telecommunications and utilities were destroyed, damaged or cut off, homes and cars were destroyed and, sadly, Australian lives were lost in natural disasters that will live long in our memories. Few states were left untouched, with floodwaters also surging into New South Wales and Victoria, leaving a trail of devastation in their wake. As rivers breached their banks and raging waters and flash flooding reached record levels, so too did the Australian spirit. Every day revealed a new challenge. The media coverage graphically displayed the tragedy as it unfolded, touching the hearts of all of us as we watched desperate acts of courage, and inconsolable despair and grief as communities mourned their losses and counted the personal cost. After the floodwaters had subsided, we were all inspired by the massive response of thousands of volunteers who rolled up their sleeves to lend a hand as the mammoth clean-up got underway.

The people of the Hawkesbury and the Blue Mountains are no strangers to natural disasters and can empathise with the flood and fire victims, having experienced the flooding of the Hawkesbury and Nepean rivers as recently as 1990, with peaks in excess of 13 metres. Fires also ravaged the Blue Mountains and the Hawkesbury in December 2001.

As recently as last week Sydney temperatures exceeded 40 degrees in a week-long heatwave that broke all living records. Fires in the Megalong Valley, Ebenezer, Blaxland Ridge and Mulgrave were brought under control by the hardworking Rural Fire Services brigades of the Hawkesbury and the Blue Mountains, avoiding what could have been another potential natural disaster.

I make a very brief mention of these events to highlight that there are many Australians who would feel a connection to those affected by the recent floods and fires, and with that connection come the understanding, support and mateship that are necessary in the emotional recovery and rebuilding process.

In the Hawkesbury local resident Toni Walker was responsible for organising the Shoe Boxes of Love campaign that saw locals buying items that would be appreciated in the flood ravaged areas of Queensland, using a shoebox as the packaging, wrapping them and then dropping them into either the Hawkesbury Community College or my office. Over 300 boxes were collected from Hawkesbury residents in just two weeks from the start of our project—a great achievement. The boxes were transported to Queensland by Robert and Paul Campbell's Charter Refrigerated Transport, while Hawkesbury Self Storage in South Windsor donated the packing boxes for transport and the University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury campus gave us the use of a van and a driver to get the boxes to Charter Refrigerated Transport. It was a great team effort.

I have lifelong friends in Gatton. They have a business in Laidley. I have chatted to them in recent weeks and during the tragedy. In fact, I spoke to my dear friend while she was sweeping out the business. At that point in time she was still standing knee-deep in water. She described how, while some of the

businesses there would be able to start again and it would be a long road ahead to rebuild, there would be many that would be unlikely to recover and start off again.

In Central and South-East Queensland in excess of 17,500 homes were flooded or isolated by floodwaters, along with 3,000 business premises. In Far North Queensland, Cyclone Yasi damaged homes and businesses, flattening fields of sugar cane and destroying approximately 80 per cent of the banana crop, as well as leaving nearly 200,000 people without power at times last week.

In New South Wales, Weddin, Wellington, Warrumbungle, Cootamundra, Coonamble, Harden and Young shires were all declared natural disaster zones. In Victoria thunderstorms and flash flooding left 25,000 without power. In Tasmania heavy rain and flash floods ravaged the northern coastal areas, while Western Australia is battling fires that, as of Monday, had seen 59 homes razed.

Our hearts go out to all who have lost loved ones and personal possessions. It is vital that we acknowledge the efforts of all of the hardworking men and women from the emergency services organisations—the fireys, the police, SES workers—and the countless volunteers who worked day and night across affected states to answer the calls of those in need. Their work and service continues. I understand some of the SES volunteers from Macquarie dived in and went to help our neighbours in northern New South Wales. In that same vein 1,200 Australian troops were called to action, providing much-needed expertise, strength and emotional support to those in need.

During the floods three C130 Hercules from the Richmond RAAF Base aircraft and mobile air load teams were active throughout Queensland for Operation Queensland Flood Assist. Their tasks included delivering groceries to Charleville and Bundaberg, deliver-

ing rations to Mackay for use in Rockhampton and dispatching more than 100 tonnes of groceries from RAAF Richmond to RAAF Townsville, where they were then trucked south.

On New Year's Eve a C130 Hercules transport aircraft with Defence staff on board took off from the RAAF Richmond airbase with a flexible habitat—a 100-person purpose-built temporary accommodation for residents of Emerald, 900 kilometres north of Brisbane. On Tuesday, February 1, two C130 Hercules from RAAF Base Richmond headed to Cairns with an aeromedical evacuation team to evacuate hospital patients before Cyclone Yasi hit. This highly successful operation saw 173 patients transferred from Cairns area hospitals to Brisbane. What made their effort even more courageous was that it took place in the dead of the night and was organised with very little notice. A C130 transported 40 litter patients, 13 walking patients and one family member as an escort, while another C130 took 32 litter patients, 10 walking patients and one family member. Two C17A Globemasters from RAAF Base Amberley also assisted in the operation, transferring another 101 patients.

RAAF Base Richmond's cyclone support did not stop there. They have been supporting Operation Yasi Assist consistently since the cyclone hit the North Queensland coast last Wednesday night. On Thursday and Friday last week a pair of C130 Hercules flew into Cairns with mobile air load teams and forklifts from Richmond and Amberley. Their task was to unload cargo from the aircraft and break down that cargo at the destination. On Saturday, 5 February they sent one Hercules with communications equipment, water and food to Innisfail via Townsville. They also sent two Hercules loaded with groceries, one carrying 11 tonnes and the other with 13 tonnes, to Cairns from Richmond. Once in Cairns, the groceries

were used to stock shelves for local residents. They did the same again on Sunday. The presence of an Australian uniform provides hope, comfort and strength. These men and women do us proud. To you all, we offer our gratitude and sincere thanks.

It is vital that we not lose sight of the fact that this rebuilding process is as much about healing the hearts and minds of the flood and fire victims as it is about rebuilding roads, power lines and bridges. It is important to pause and pay our respects to the victims of the floods and cyclone in Queensland and their families and, in so doing, to also reflect on the hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of lives that were saved by the collective efforts of professional and well-trained emergency services personnel, police and volunteers.

I again extend my deepest condolences to the families and friends of those who lost loved ones, and to the people who have lost their homes, their livelihoods and their personal treasures. May you be comforted by the spirit of community and mateship so remarkably demonstrated by the unflinching courage of the rescuers, the professional management of the emergency response teams and the army of volunteers who spread to all regions during the crisis and clean-up. It is a long road ahead. It is at times like these that the Australian spirit inspires us to action, and this action will be required for a long time ahead.

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Minister for Defence Materiel) (12.53 pm)—I too wish to add my sincere condolences to those who have had loved ones ripped from their arms by the terrible events of the last few weeks, to those who are still suffering and still recovering from the floods, the fires and the cyclone that have devastated so many parts of Australia this terrible summer. It is very clear that the worst of times bring out the

best in us. We have seen evidence of that by the truckload over the last few weeks.

We have seen it from the men and women of the Defence Force on the ground and in the air, from those who have been maintaining our Black Hawks, our Chinooks, our Sea Kings, our C130s and C17s and our Bushmasters. We have seen it in the incredible work of all of the emergency services personnel, local counsellors and frontline healthcare workers, and people—and they have been mentioned previously in this debate—who volunteered their time to set up emergency facilities and feed people. We have seen it in the work of the people of Brisbane, people who have opened their arms—who have picked up brooms, shovels and mops—to help out total strangers whose homes have been damaged by the floods.

We are a good people in an unforgiving land. When bad things happen we are capable of doing some amazing things. We saw evidence of that not just in the streets of Brisbane or the streets of Rockhampton or Tully or elsewhere; we also saw it many miles away in the streets of my electorate, in the streets of Bankstown. We felt it through our television sets. We sat glued, night after night, in disbelief when we saw floodwaters rising through Rockhampton and then through the CBD of Brisbane. We were shocked at the sight of cars being washed through the streets of Toowoomba by raging floodwaters. I remember thinking, as I was going to bed on 2 February, the night before Cyclone Yasi came through Far North Queensland: ‘What will happen when I wake up? Will the people of Far North Queensland still be alive when I wake up tomorrow morning?’

Our response so many miles away has been one of incredible and overwhelming generosity. On 14 January, I went to my local train station, Bankstown train station, with

some local SES volunteers to raise some money for the victims of the floods. I was hoping that between 6.30 and 8.00 we would raise around \$500. I was stunned when we raised more than \$3,000 in just those 2½ hours. So we decided, ‘That’s not good enough. Let’s keep going.’ We went to Bankstown Centro, our local shopping centre, and we had people throwing \$50 notes at us. We had one man give us \$500 cash. There were lots of people emptying their purses, giving us every coin they had in their purse. There were lots of mums and lots of grandmothers who would give a two-dollar coin or a five-dollar note to their grandchildren and ask them to come up to us and put that money in our tin. Others apologised that they did not have any money to give.

I think people were so generous in large part because they were so affected by what they had seen on television. Another reason they came up to us was that standing next to me were men and women in orange uniforms, the men and women of the SES. That is why they reacted in such a powerful way. It reminded me of the respect that the community has for the people of the SES.

I would like to use this opportunity to mention some of those men and women who helped me over the course of those three days: Michelle Niven, Denise Lynch, David Johnston, the incredible Jordan Ross, who got one donation for \$500, Eileen O’Hea, Kathleen O’Hea, Stuart Miller, Carol Bassam and David Drake. Carol and David are not in Bankstown anymore. They are up in Far North Queensland helping out with the clean-up after Cyclone Yasi. They will be joined by four others from Bankstown SES.

This is just one example of the generosity of spirit of the people of my community. There have been many others. Many organisations have put together fundraisers at short notice. It is not unique to Bankstown—I am

sure many members have had the same experience in their own communities—but I want to pay tribute to them, to their generosity and to the time they have taken. The Lebanese Muslim Association raised \$15,000; Bankstown City Council gave a cheque for \$20,000; Bankstown Sports Club came forward with a cheque for \$25,000 and \$20,000 worth of furniture; Bunnings at Bankstown raised \$3,900 through a sausage sizzle; Bankstown Lions Club, about \$5,000; the United Muslim Women Association, \$10,000; Bankstown RSL, \$8,000; Auburn Gallipoli Mosque, \$12,000; and Vietnam Sydney Radio, \$45,000. I spent two hours on the radio urging people to donate. We got \$10,000 in two hours. One little girl, who was eight years old, rang up to donate \$50. I asked her why she was donating, and she said: ‘Well, it’s what I saw on television. I need to help people like me,’ and I thought that was really touching.

The Vietnamese-Australian Charity Organisation held an event called the Golden Heart charity dinner. They have done this before. The Golden Heart charity dinner was first held after the bushfires two years ago, and they raised \$50,000 that night. This time, the call went out, the invitations went out, and 1,000 people responded to that invitation within three or four days. It was all sold out. They had 200 or 300 people that they could not fit in—people said they just wanted to stand at the back of the room. They raised \$145,000 in one night. Let me use this opportunity to thank the man who organised that, Dr Vinh Binh Lieu, who subsequently was named the Bankstown Citizen of the Year.

I also thank the Chinese association of Western Sydney. They held a similar event and raised more than \$120,000 in one night, including one donation from a gentleman named Henry Ngai, the owner of a company called ABC Tissues. His donation was

\$50,000. I went to a Chinese lunar new year event hosted by the Indo-China Chinese Association New South Wales last Saturday. It was a week after Cyclone Yasi had torn through Far North Queensland. I told them that that cyclone hit Far North Queensland about midnight on 2 February. That is an important date, because it is also New Year's Eve for our Chinese and Vietnamese friends. It meant that we were moving from the Year of the Tiger to the Year of the Rabbit. The Year of the Tiger is supposed to be a ferocious year; the Year of the Rabbit is supposed to be one that is calmer. Certainly the Year of the Tiger has been a very ferocious year. I told them that I would like to think that that cyclone was not as deadly as we feared that it might have been because, just as it struck, we moved from the Year of the Tiger to the Year of the Rabbit. I do not know if that is true or not, but I hope it is and I hope that we have a calmer year after the ferocity of the last few months. That day they raised another \$20,000.

There are many other organisations who I have not mentioned or whose work I am not aware of at the moment, but what I do know is that the people of Bankstown and the people of Cabramatta already have raised close to half a million dollars for their fellow Australians, and we are not a wealthy community. I am proud of the way Australians have responded in the worst of times over the last few weeks, this terrible summer, and I am proud of our community for the way that we have responded.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Egypt

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (1.02 pm)—by leave—Over the last several weeks, we have faced a consular crisis in Egypt that has been highly complex

and highly unpredictable. Our first responsibility as a government is to do whatever is possible to maximise the safety of Australians. This is invariably a challenging task given that at any one time we have more than a million Australians abroad. This has been doubly challenging given the fluid state of Egyptian politics.

From midnight Friday, 28 January, and into the early hours of Saturday, 29 January, consular staff were called into Canberra to deal with the rapidly unfolding crisis. DFAT's Crisis Centre was activated 24 hours later and has operated on a 24-hour-a-day basis since. On 30 January we also raised the level of alert to 'Do not travel'—I am advised ahead of all of our like-minded consular partners around the world. The government announced the first Qantas charter flight on 31 January. Two Qantas charter flights carrying a total of 294 passengers (30 of whom were foreign nationals) departed on 2 and 4 February. With the support of the Australian government, another 54 Australians and their dependants departed on five Canadian charter flights. The Australian embassy set up five locations to support Australians in Egypt: at the embassy itself, at the Conrad hotel, at the Novotel hotel, at Cairo airport and at Alexandria airport. In all those locations, except at Alexandria airport, we maintained a 24-hour presence for most of the week.

As the security situation deteriorated, the practical problems faced by our consular staff on the ground became more complex, challenging and at times dangerous. Roadblocks set up on the main routes to the airport created safety and security concerns for our staff—including one group of staff who were detained for several hours until the ambassador negotiated their release. These staff were doing their duty—verifying the safety of the route before we dispatched Australian citizens to the airport that day. Back in Can-

berra, over 300 officers were involved in the government's response. Our crisis centre took over 4,000 calls and our operators made over 7,500 calls to confirm the safety and welfare of Australians. In Egypt we deployed 45 officials to support our embassy and another 12 to Frankfurt to assist Australians with onward travel.

Several Australian journalists were also detained while covering these events. I spoke twice to the Egyptian foreign minister to convey the government's strong concerns for the safety of Australian journalists and other foreign journalists and our expectation of all possible assistance from the Egyptian government to ensure their wellbeing. The Australian ambassador also made early and persistent representations to seek the release of the Australian journalists who had been taken into incarceration, and the embassy has remained in close contact since to confirm their ongoing safety and wellbeing.

I would like to pay special tribute to all our public servants and local staff who worked tirelessly around the clock in Canberra and in Egypt, together with our friends in Qantas, to ensure that Australians were evacuated as quickly and safely as possible in an extremely volatile environment. For example, Tricia Martino was our regional consular officer in Dubai and one of the first on the ground in Egypt. She worked for three days straight at Cairo airport, in chaotic conditions without even having time to go back to the embassy to get a change of clothes. Tricia was one of those detained with a group of Australian officials while scoping routes to the airport and held for several hours.

Mahmoud Tawab, a driver at the Australian embassy in Cairo, deployed to the airport for more than a week, despite having to leave his wife and two children, who were restricted to the Cairo suburb of Maadi after

curfew. Mahmoud tirelessly delivered food to stranded Australians within the airport premises, within the terminals, and shielded small children and elderly Australians through the at times violent scrum of passengers trying to get onto planes.

Tricia and Mahmoud are just two examples of the outstanding dedication of our staff on the ground in Egypt, under the leadership of our ambassador, Stephanie Shwabsky. I spoke to Stephanie practically every day during the height of the crisis, sometimes several times, and I can confirm to the House that our ambassador represented the absolute best traditions of the Australian diplomatic service in her handling of this crisis.

I personally spoke to a group of Australians who had been evacuated from Egypt. Some were highly traumatised by their experience, and had seen violence first hand; bullets flying and dead bodies on the ground. But they were grateful for the support the Australian Embassy had provided. Joanne Burgess of Epping, who was one of the participants on one of the evacuation flights, described our diplomatic and consular officials in the following words:

I cannot speak too highly of your staff. Each and every one of them deserve not just my personal thanks, but as a nation we can be proud that these people are representing us overseas and here in Australia.

The trauma of dealing with what we saw and experienced in Cairo and other parts of Egypt was so much easier to deal with, because DFAT and Qantas staff had organised and planned for every contingency.

... ..

The whole team looked after us so well, it was hard to believe that they don't do this sort of evacuation more often. The evacuation was carried out professionally, but also with characteristic Aussie humour. ... At the Airport, your staff had to deal with many big and small issues, like babies and Egyptian husbands without Australian

Immigration visas, unaccompanied minors, young Aussie/Egyptian men being pulled out of the final passport check queue by Egyptian police to check if they had done their military service, before they were allowed to leave the country ... all of this, under a growing hostile Egyptian police presence. Your staff were calm cool and determined. Their presence helped and reassured us through those final minutes in Cairo.

... ..

It is such a small thing to say thank you to those men and women in Cairo and in Canberra for all they did for us on Thursday 3rd and Friday 4th of February 2011. What they did for us went far beyond just doing their job. They had been working tirelessly around the clock not just for our flight but for the previous flight the day before. They always put our comfort ahead of their own. These are wonderful people ... I was never more proud to be an Australian. So my sincere thanks go to each and every one of your DFAT staff and to our Prime Minister. I am so glad to be home ... thank you.

There is a firsthand testimony of the work done by our diplomatic and consular staff on the ground. These were difficult and challenging times; not everything would have gone to plan—not everything could have gone to plan. But I salute our staff and the excellent work that they did on the ground in the face of a crisis.

No-one predicted the scale and duration of this crisis. Hundreds of thousands of Egyptians turned to the streets of Egypt's major cities demanding a more open and transparent society and greater economic opportunity. Late last year, I reiterated that the continuing global democratic deficit represented one of the great global challenges for the decades ahead. This deficit is particularly evident across the Middle East. Democratic transformation through properly elected democratic forces is also the best long-term underpinning of security and stability.

I have spoken to the foreign minister of Egypt several times during this crisis, most

recently on Tuesday. I have also spoken to the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Amr Moussa. I have said that the Australian government's position is that fundamental political reform in Egypt must begin now; that this should be achieved peacefully, that the security forces must refrain from violence, that the rights of people to protest must be protected, that the rights of journalists must be protected and that this expectation is shared by our friends and allies across the international community.

In the course of the last week, I have also discussed the wider ramifications of the crisis with the Quartet representative to the Middle East and former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, the EU's Special Representative, Catherine Ashton, the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, and other foreign ministers attending the Munich Security Conference last weekend when the future of the Middle East was a primary subject of discussion.

The political situation in Egypt remains volatile. The political situation across the wider region is also fluid. This includes the current impasse in the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The external strategic environment surrounding these negotiations is changing. It is in our view increasingly imperative that these negotiations be brought to a successful conclusion. We believe this course of action would best support the long-term security of the state of Israel, as the security of Israel remains of deep concern to the Australian government. It also would provide for an independent Palestinian state and the opportunity for stability and economic growth for the Palestinian people.

Conclusion

The Australian government will continue to support democratic transformation both in the Arab world and beyond. Australia holds

democracy to be a universal value and a right of all peoples. And the promotion of democracy remains an important part of this country's foreign policy objectives into the future.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Cabinet Secretary and Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (1.12 pm)—by leave—I move:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Ms J. Bishop (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding 10 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (1.13 pm)—The world has watched developments in some countries of the Middle East and North Africa over the last few weeks with a mix of trepidation and guarded hope for the future. Ruled by authoritarian regimes, typically with close links to the military, many of these nations have been relatively stable for years—decades in some cases. That stability has come at a cost based on the oppression of opposition parties and individuals and a suppression of people's desire for greater freedom.

It is often said that the nation of Egypt is pivotal, as the Arab world's most populous nation, with more than 78 million people. While estimates vary, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of the capital, Cairo, and other cities 17 days ago, demanding greater freedom and the resignation of President Mubarak. The situation quickly descended into running street battles between the police and the protesters. Concerns were raised for the estimated 700 Australians registered to be in Egypt at that time although it was believed that the real number could be several thousand more, including dual nationals.

I commend the efforts of our consular officials, who must have been overwhelmed by calls for assistance. Their work was further hampered by the decision of the regime to shut down communication networks in their attempts to prevent the growth and momentum of the protests. The Australian government responded to the crisis with increased staff. However, while the international airports remained operational, commercial flights were heavily disrupted.

I know that members of our parliament were contacted by Australians in Egypt and, from my experience, both the office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade did all they could to assist. Two Qantas charter flights were arranged which evacuated more than 350 Australians. One of these flights carried an Australian woman who contacted my office via friends in Australia. I spoke to a very emotional Roseanne at 4 am Egypt time and reassured her that every effort was being made to ensure her safe return to Australia. I maintained contact with her over the following few days. I put on the record that when her case was brought to the attention of the office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs it was quickly resolved. I am pleased to report that she arrived home safely and I thank the foreign minister for his personal interest in that matter as well as many others—there were a number of similar instances. We hope and trust that all Australians are now safe from harm or, if they have chosen to remain in Egypt, are taking all necessary precautions for their safety. I acknowledge again the efforts of our diplomatic and consular officials in responding to the needs of Australian citizens at this time.

It has been widely reported that the Egyptian protests were instigated by the recent overthrow of the Tunisian government and that has been seen as the impetus for change in other nations. The Tunisian protests were

sparked by the death of a young man who, forced to sell fruit on the street, set himself alight when his produce was confiscated. To put the Egyptian crisis in context, it is fair to assume that economic hardship and poor employment prospects, coupled with corruption under oppressive regimes that suppressed basic freedoms, are at the core of many of the grievances not only in Tunisia but also in Jordan, Yemen and Egypt, leading to calls for significant economic and democratic reform.

While the motivation for the protests is deeply complex, varying from nation to nation and often without apparent and visible leadership, the increasing cost of living is undoubtedly adding fuel to the anti-government fires. While food inflation and global food prices are not the underlying cause, they have been a potent trigger. There are parallels to the unrest with the food riots in 2007-08 that threatened the stability of government and societies in numerous countries around the world. At that time, record high food prices were described by World Vision's Tim Costello as an 'apocalyptic warning' about food security. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation's global food index recently passed the record levels of 2008 with the price of cereals increasing by almost 40 per cent last year and cooking oils up by 55 per cent. The FAO is warning governments against any action that could make the situation worse, such as stockpiling. However, this call is unlikely to be heeded by governments under massive pressure from protesters, and we have seen and read reports of Egyptians struggling to pay for basic food items.

It is with great sadness that we have read reports of deaths and injuries among the Egyptian people who have taken to the streets to have their voices heard. The protests have gone through distinct phases with a period of calm following the initial clashes

with police and security forces. There were fears of the nation falling into chaos after the police were overwhelmed by the protests and they effectively abandoned their posts. This was followed by the deployment of the army, which was welcomed by the protesters. Fears of a massacre were raised after the pro-Mubarak forces appeared to launch attacks on the protesters and at times sustained gunfire could be heard. The army was criticised for not preventing this conflict and it moved to keep the two sides apart, thus restoring a semblance of relative calm. The army remains the critical player in the eventual resolution of the impasse.

The key demand of the protesters is that President Mubarak resigns from his office. Mubarak has offered up numerous concessions, including the appointment of a deputy president for the time, and he has appointed a new government. His vice-president has reportedly held talks with opposition figures, including representatives from the banned Muslim Brotherhood.

Many people around the world are hoping that Egypt can manage the peaceful transition to a new, more open government that provides its citizens with a genuine say in the running of their country. There are also great concerns that Egypt could follow the path of Iran, where a peaceful uprising against an authoritarian regime was quickly overwhelmed by radical Islamists, and that is why most attention rests on the Muslim Brotherhood. While it is generally accepted that the brotherhood represents only about 20 or 30 per cent of the population, it has managed to survive decades of repression by the Mubarak regime. This makes it by far the most organised and best equipped organisation to fill any vacuum in power. The respected US analyst organisation StratFor published a report on 5 February that ended with the following words:

...the MB—an enormously patient organization—senses its time finally may have come.

The world watches for an outcome in Egypt with anticipation and with some trepidation, but we hope that it will be a peaceful transition to a more open and democratic government with a better outcome for the people of Egypt.

COMMITTEES

Publications Committee

Report

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (1.21 pm)—I present the report of the Publications Committee sitting in conference with the Publications Committee of the Senate. Copies of the report are being placed on the table.

Report—by leave—agreed to.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010

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 DREYFUS (Isaacs—Cabinet Secretary and Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (1.22 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

CONDOLENCES

Australian Natural Disasters

Report from Main Committee

Debate resumed

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (1.23 pm)—Events often sweep us up so quickly we fail to appreciate the enormity of them at that particu-

lar point in time. It is only later, when we have the opportunity to assess what has occurred, that we are truly staggered by the impact of the events. I often reflect with constituents in the electorate that the amount of water that travelled through Queensland would have covered an area the size of France and Germany combined. When you look at the intensity of Cyclone Yasi, it was the same as that of Hurricane Katrina. Can you imagine these two events having an impact elsewhere? It would have rocked the attention of the world. In this case we had two major events affecting one state in one month, so I say again that the enormity of the events of the last month have been staggering. We stand now to console the grieving. We have solemn regard for the great sacrifice of self. We recognise the service of others and we join in a collective journey on a long path of recovery for Queensland.

Many were impacted this week by the Prime Minister's words of Tuesday in marking our condolence. Reading her speech, in particular, has made an equal impact. I wish to quote her words:

Healing great pain requires both coming together as human beings and lonely moments of quiet reflection.

This is where we stand together as members today. Across the country Australia has been moved by these events, and we match the enormity of these events with our own generosity and the generosity of the Australian people. I am proud to see the way that residents in the Chifley electorate and across western Sydney have bound together to assist those in great need. This weekend alone, for example, there were a number of events. Mount Druitt Rotary Club, led by Lindsay Trevitt; and the *Mount Druitt Standard*, our local newspaper, with its editor, Steve Darcy, held a fundraising barbeque on Saturday. It was a very hot day, but the event was designed to catch the donations and generosity

of the people in Mount Druitt. The Filipino community came together as one at an event called 'Shine' in Bowman Hall in Blacktown to raise funds for the premier's relief effort. Later that day the Pakistan Association of Australia, chaired by Iftikhar Rana, held a special fundraising dinner as well, again designed to generate funds for our friends in Queensland. All through the weekend, through those three events alone more than \$30,000 was generated for the premier's relief fund. It is truly a great symbol of the effort and commitment to help those people in need, and it reflects greatly on people's willingness to do so much to help others in great need.

I also wish to make particular mention of people within the Public Service within the electorate of Chifley, with particular regard to Mount Druitt Centrelink. A number of members of Mount Druitt Centrelink went very quickly to Queensland to assist in the overall effort of aiding people in need. I congratulate them and commend them. I also commend the people of the Mount Druitt area who have understood that taking quite a number of people out of the office at Centrelink will impact them in the short term. They appreciate that this is being done to help Queenslanders coping with truly terrible events. I would like in the debate on this motion to recognise their efforts.

The nation's heart truly ached on a number of occasions through the last few weeks, but none more so than hearing the story of Jordan Rice. Such sacrifice—we cannot begin to imagine the strength within that young boy. To be able to do what he did impacted so many people and demonstrates the power of love and kinship. The impact of that event rippled across the world. I wish to draw to the attention of the House that this week the foreign minister of Bosnia visited Australia and was hosted by the government. He brought with him a special package. That

was a series of letters that had been written by schoolchildren in Sarajevo of Bosnia-Herzegovina who had been so moved by the events of Queensland. They had taken the time individually to write and wished to pass their thoughts, their feelings and their condolences on to the family of Jordan. I was exceptionally moved by that. The Bosnian foreign minister handed that package to Foreign Minister Rudd, who is going to be delivering this to Mr Macfarlane as the responsible federal member to pass on to the family.

I do not believe it would be appropriate to read those messages at any great length here, because I think that they will want to convey those sentiments. I just want to make reference to one statement which I think, regardless of language and regardless of background, we would all truly be moved by. It reads as follows:

I hope that you will find comfort in the pride of having him for a son, the small boy who lived as a great man.

That statement was from one child to another across oceans, demonstrating the depth of human emotion and the bonds of kinship we feel regardless of country and regardless of distance. It is a truly moving sentiment and I wish to thank the Bosnian foreign minister, Sven Alkalaj, for delivering those letters to us.

I also want to extend my regard and deep thoughts for parliamentary colleagues from both sides of the chamber who have dealt with exceptionally difficult circumstances, not only in their electorates but also with their own families, having themselves as representatives of their communities worked tirelessly to assist those who required help and support, and just being there in many cases as a presence to deliver strength to people who were looking for some sort of help. They do that in a way—and I think it is important to note this in the chamber—that

puts their own regard aside. They make sacrifice as individuals themselves to help out, and I wish to extend to them an acknowledgement of what they are doing in very trying times.

I have spoken to the member for Blair on a number of occasions, and he has been telling me of the impact on his electorate. Through the course of that he mentioned to me, being a Queensland and being attached to sport—I think it is genetically imprinted in Queenslanders to have that deep love of sport—that the Ipswich Basketball Stadium had been devastated by the floods. He told me that five metres of water had swept through and ruined that stadium. It will cost about \$800,000 to fix. I had occasion on Friday night to catch up with the chief executive of Basketball Australia, Mr Larry Sengstock, who is an NBL living legend and was part of the ferocious Brisbane Bullets. He has also made a great contribution to Australian basketball with the Boomers. He is a Maryborough boy, and he was telling me that there are a number of events in Queensland where Basketball Australia and representatives of the game are intending to help out wherever they can to raise funds. I mentioned to him about Ipswich and said that I hoped that he could help out. I am told by the member for Blair that basketball runs second to rugby league in terms of popularity within Ipswich and it would be a great deed if they were able to chip in and help out in an area where sport can help bring people together in a very powerful way. Hopefully they will be able to do something in the short term to assist.

I wish to leave my remarks at that but pass on deepest regards from the residents of Chifley, who are in their own way, along with residents across in the electorate of Greenway, trying to do whatever they can to raise needed funds to help our friends in

Queensland get back on their feet and become the great state that it is again.

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (1.33 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this motion of condolence in relation to the natural disasters that have so significantly impacted on so many communities across Australia this summer, particularly the natural disasters that have devastated my home city of Brisbane and my state of Queensland. Firstly, I would like to offer my sincere condolences on behalf of all the residents of Bonner to the families and loved ones of those whose lives were so tragically lost. In particular, I acknowledge my colleagues from both sides who lost members of their communities. I know that your communities will never be the same again. I also offer my sincere condolences to everyone who suffered throughout the recent floods and Cyclone Yasi—to those who lost their personal belongings, including many irreplaceable memories, and those who returned to find their home, their ‘castle’, devastated.

Unlike those of so many of my Queensland colleagues, my electorate of Bonner was not significantly impacted by the flood in Brisbane only a matter of weeks ago. This is somewhat miraculous, given that we border on the electorate of Griffith, which I know suffered significant loss. There was certainly concern raised for the suburbs of Murarrie and Hemmant in Bonner but, given the Brisbane River did not rise to the levels originally predicted, it seems that many families and homes in these suburbs were spared. However, as many in this House would know, the eastern border of my electorate is in fact Moreton Bay, the mouth of the Brisbane River. I have had a lot of people contacting me, voicing their concerns about the plume of mud and debris dispersing through Moreton Bay.

The enormous amount of water that flowed down the Brisbane River brought with it thousands of tonnes of silt containing pollutants which are now settling in Moreton Bay. The Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management, the Healthy Waterways partnership, the CSIRO and several Queensland universities have deployed research teams into the bay in the last couple of weeks so as to understand the dynamics of the flood plume and its likely effect on seagrass, fish, dugongs, turtles, coral and other marine flora and fauna. I am completely behind these efforts and thank the many organisations for their dedication and care. So many people's livelihoods depend on the ongoing health of Moreton Bay.

Throughout the darkest days of the flood in Brisbane, my office was able to largely remain open to assist many of the residents with information and direct people to specialist assistance as required, but this was done by only one staff member and me. All the other members of my staff were forced to remain in their homes—most without power—because most of the major roads had either been cut off by floodwater or were required by emergency services. While I readily admit that this is no real impost compared to those who were evacuated or remained in their homes hoping to hold back the water, it does give this House a sense of the gravity of what occurred and that there are few people in Brisbane and across the state of Queensland who have not been touched in some way.

Given the scale of the disaster, what I have found incredible over the last few weeks has been the community compassion in Bonner for those who have been impacted. The community spirit that emerged in the face of this disaster was a true testament to the generosity and kindness of local residents. Never before have so many people offered their help and support to those in

need. I know that many in my community assisted those threatened by flood waters by filling and moving sandbags and I know that so many offered their time to volunteer in the clean-up. I saw a legion of volunteers rise up with their rakes, buckets and shovels and line up at the Brisbane City Council volunteers stations. They worked tirelessly in the mud, moving tonnes of debris, bit by bit. At MacGregor State School, just outside my electorate, I was humbled and proud to witness the thousands of volunteers who lined up patiently to help those who had been affected. They were ordinary people who just wanted to help in any way they could to do their bit and get their fellow Aussies back on their feet. In my eyes they are extraordinary.

On another practical level, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all members of the local community who so generously donated goods for inclusion in special flood care packages. My office was overwhelmed by the community's generosity in responding to the call for donations of hygiene products and other sanitary goods that are so often forgotten in care packages for those hardest hit. The local community was truly inspiring in their call to action. Thousands of much needed hygiene and basic sanitary products were received by my office and those were divided into over 100 care packages that were donated through the Red Cross to assist flood victims who lost everything. My electorate office has continued to collect donated goods for more care packages, including things such as deodorant, razors, shampoo, conditioner and other basic hygiene products, this time in conjunction with Liberal-National Party Women to support those affected by cyclone Yasi.

I would like to place on the record my admiration and appreciation for the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Campbell Newman. Lord Mayor Newman displayed incredible leadership throughout the ordeal faced by

Brisbane residents, and I would like to say thank you. There is still a big job ahead in rebuilding Brisbane, but if anyone is up to that task it is Campbell. Also, I have organised a fundraising initiative, which I will talk about at another time, to assist the victims of the floods.

On a final note, I would like to thank all Australians who have so generously donated to the various flood appeals that have been organised over recent weeks. Your generosity is humbling and, as a Queenslander, I say thank you. Again, I reiterate that the thoughts of all members of the Bonner community are with those who have been affected by recent events.

Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (1.41 pm)—I rise, as many others have and very appropriately, to convey my condolences and that of the 140,000 people in my electorate to all of those who have been affected so badly by the floods and the cyclones—and the bushfires, for that matter—around this country over the last few months. Very fortunately, I represent an urban electorate on the bay in Melbourne. We have been removed from these events, although we got a small taste recently when the tail ends of two of the cyclones that had moved through Australia resulted in unusual and very strong rains. That saw flooding in some streets in my electorate, including near my house, and gave us some sort of insight as to how quickly these things can happen. It did not result in any significant damage but some inconvenience to some families in my electorate.

My electorate, like so many others, has in some respects been struck dumb by the extent of damage and destruction that has been wreaked by the floods and the cyclones throughout so many parts of Australia, including my home state of Victoria. Many people have given very generously to ensure that in some way they can play their part in

the reconstruction and give the assistance that will be needed over a long period of time. From the floods and cyclones in the north to the floods in the south and the fires and floods in the west, these disasters have resulted in very far-reaching effects and have impacted families and businesses. The geographic reach of the disasters has been wide. It has also affected Tasmania. In nearly every corner of Australia we have seen the impacts of these natural disasters. I offer sincere condolences to all of those affected in so many places and in so many ways but particularly to the families of those who lost their lives or have been seriously injured in the various floods and Cyclone Yasi.

I also wish to express my enormous admiration and that of the people that I represent for the many thousands of volunteers and the many millions of Australians who have so generously donated. It has been a very uplifting experience that in the middle of such devastation we have seen the best of Australians.

Debate interrupted.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—The member for Goldstein will have leave to continue his remarks when the debate is resumed.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Queensland Floods

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (1.45 pm)—We have heard many poignant addresses to the House in relation to the natural tragedies which have befallen Queensland and other parts of the country. The Sunshine Coast fared rather better than many other areas in Australia, however I want to draw the attention of the House to the plight of the tiny hinterland community of Conondale, close to Maleny, which suffered considerable damage, including localised flooding, which is still impacting upon the community long after the floodwaters have subsided. Bridges

and roads need attention and there have been considerable erosion and landslips. I inspected the area with the state member Andrew Powell and it was clear that much work needs to be done. It is important that the state and federal governments, when attending to the reconstruction of infrastructure, do not overlook small communities.

The Prime Minister's office said that prioritisation has been delegated to the Queensland Premier's office. I have contacted the Premier asking that the community of Conondale in the Sunshine Coast hinterland not be forgotten. It is an important community. *(Time expired)*

Building the Education Revolution Program

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (1.46 pm)—I rise this afternoon to recognise the outstanding work being done by schools across my electorate of Greenway, and particularly the way in which those schools have benefited from their Building the Education Revolution projects which have been wholeheartedly welcomed by teachers, parents, students and local communities generally.

Today I want to mention one school, St Joseph's Primary School in Schofields. The school was able to refurbish and upgrade their existing library and build a multi-purpose learning space. The BER also enabled St Joseph's to build a new resource centre in the library, refurbish eight classrooms and build a large covered outdoor learning area. These facilities are world class and will benefit the children of Schofields for years to come.

I had the pleasure of attending the opening and blessing of these new facilities, where I spoke with the Relieving Director of Schools in the Parramatta diocese, Sue Walsh, who commented that the school now has beautiful, state-of-the-art learning spaces and facilities for the students and staff.

I must acknowledge the hard work and dedication of all the staff at St Joseph's, especially the principal, Greg Thomas, the deputy principal, Jeanette Black, the fantastic school captains, Winona Graham and Adam James, the students and their families.

I also recently had the pleasure of awarding community spirit awards to schools in Greenway. It was a fantastic experience to meet so many students across my electorate and to gain an insight into the lives of the next generation of Australians. I wait with great anticipation to hear more about the incredible talents of these young people of Greenway, including Danielle Gatt, the recipient of the St Joseph's Primary School community spirit award which is called the Mary Mackillop Award. Danielle is a most worthy winner with a very loving family.

Regional Airlines

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (1.48 pm)—Regional Express Airlines, Australia's largest independent regional airline, is based in Wagga Wagga in my electorate of Riverina. Following the September 2001 collapse of Ansett, regional aviation was provided assistance through the Enroute Charges Rebate Scheme that provides a rebate of en route navigation charges. The rebate was extended by the coalition government in the financial year 2007-08 for a further four years through until June 2012. In 2008 the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport announced the scheme would end but then changed his mind. Through the national aviation white paper the minister announced he would replace the en route rebate scheme with a revised scheme effective July 2010. Now, more than six months on, nothing has happened.

Since the release of the white paper in late 2009 there has been no consultation with the regional airline industry on the future of this scheme. The rebate provides an effective

environment whereby marginal essential air services to regional communities are sustainable. Regional airlines provide access to a whole range of services which those in major cities take for granted. They bring health and medical service and a whole range of government and community services and they provide the basis for economic growth. The en route rebate scheme is the only form of federal government assistance provided to regional airlines and the annual cost of \$6 million is a small price for the government to pay for the sustainable provision of critical regional air services.

Regional air operators such as Rex need the ability to plan ahead with confidence for the development of the services they currently provide, including to Griffith and Narrandera, as well as looking at potential new services to remote and regional communities which desperately need them. *(Time expired)*

Sudan

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (1.50 am)—I rise on behalf of the many Sudanese in my electorate to congratulate the government of Sudan, and particularly the people of southern Sudan, on the recent referendum. The results are now in and have been officially announced. There has been an overwhelming majority of people in the south of Sudan who voted in favour of independence—90-plus per cent.

After decades of conflict in Sudan this is a great step forward. I will not dwell on the horror that has gone on in years past. The silver lining of that horrible war is that my electorate is all the richer because of the many Sudanese constituents who have come there. They go to local schools and pay taxes and they contribute to my community and make it all the richer, especially in the suburb where I live. In Moorooka we have a Little Africa, a strip of restaurants and African businesses, particularly Sudanese.

I am talking about people like John Deng, who I gave an award to at the beginning of last year. With his wife and six-month-old daughter he came as a refugee and now John is a great advocate for the Sudanese community. He is actually organising a charity to raise money for prosthetic limbs for people who have been maimed by the civil war.

At the Moorooka Bowls Club on the weekend I worked with the organising committee to work towards that date of 9 July, when we will have a brand new country. After decades of conflict I look forward to celebrating that with my Sudanese community. *(Time expired)*

Queensland Floods

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (1.51 pm)—When there is crisis and disaster it is a time for action and energy not necessarily for scepticism and scrutiny. So I do not criticise authorities unless lives are at risk and services can actually make a difference. Right now there is a variety of information coming out of Queensland about the performance of departments, particularly QRAA and the special flood assistance scheme, which was denying assistance to business owners for no other reason than more than half of their income might have been derived from other employment—although that is because their businesses are on the rocks. Owners are holding those businesses together. They are on the breadline. Sometimes they are employing seven people—in cases such as Elaine Wilkie, in my electorate—who would have had to walk away were it not for this scheme. I am glad that the minister and his advisor, Brian Timms, have been very positive in this regard and have encouraged all inundated businesses to formally apply for that money.

Queensland Health, on the other hand, is not so promising. It has a culture of secrecy, paranoia and, dare I say it, bureaucratic arse-

covering that runs all the way up to that minister. This health department should have been in place earlier. They should have deployed the vital surgery packs and tetanus shots that were needed. But they did not. The communications channels were not in place. The special advisory warnings were not made on a regular basis. They were frozen in time on that website in many cases—in one case, for as long as 12 days. What we need is information that is sequenced for the phase of the disaster and tailored to local areas. We should not see the airbrushing out of warnings on the run, which we have seen so much of from Queensland Health. I urge a better performance from that department and its minister (*Time expired*)

Food for Fines

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (1.53 pm)—Today I would like to congratulate the ACT government for the Food for Fines program. Under this program the ACT government decided that, instead of charging late fines for overdue library books, the library would accept canned food donations to support OzHarvest Canberra to feed those less fortunate.

I have spoken before about the great work done by OzHarvest for my local community. OzHarvest collects perishable food from Canberra businesses, corporate offices and restaurants. This food is then provided to charities to feed refugees, the homeless, the aged and women and youth in crisis. The Food for Fines program was a huge success over the Christmas period. In lieu of every \$2 in fees, library goers were encouraged to donate one can. The program resulted in 3,000 kilograms of food being donated in December, bringing the total amount of food donated for that month to a record 16,000 kilograms.

Many Canberrans who did not have outstanding library fines also donated gener-

ously to the Food for Fines program. The outstanding support of Canberrans for OzHarvest has resulted in over 700,000 meals to our community, particularly to those most in need, since February 2008.

Turrumurra Post Office

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (1.53 pm)—I rise to speak about the Turrumurra Post Office. In mid-December I began receiving phone calls from constituents concerned that a ‘for lease’ sign had appeared outside Turrumurra Post Office. When I contacted Australia Post, I was told, ‘Oh, yes, we plan to close Turrumurra Post Office on 28 January 2011.’ At this stage there had been no notice given by Australia Post to the community. I called a community meeting on 19 January to give the Turrumurra community the opportunity to express its views.

Let me thank the nearly 300 people who attended that meeting. A senior Australia Post executive attended at my request. Subsequently, Australia Post gave a written commitment to provide continuity of service in Turrumurra, including through opening a community postal agency in Eastern Road, Turrumurra. I will be maintaining scrutiny to ensure that Australia Post delivers on its commitments.

I thank all of those who have worked to put pressure on Australia Post over this matter, including Turrumurra Community Bank and its representatives, the Turrumurra Chamber of Commerce, local residents and businesspeople and the *North Shore Times*. We have now formed the Turrumurra Post Office Action Group to keep up the pressure on Australia Post to ensure that it delivers on its commitment to maintain continuity of service to the Turrumurra community.

Youth Engagement Steering Committee

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (1.56 pm)—I was pleased today to attend the launch of the Youth Forum’s Youth Engagement Steering

Committee, which is going to advise the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, Mr Peter Garrett, about a range of important issues in education. I was delighted to have the opportunity at that event to meet Ms Tahlia Azaria, a successful member of the AYF steering committee in 2010, who will lead the steering committee in 2011 as chair.

I would like to pay particular tribute to two members of that youth steering committee from my electorate, Anthony Antioch and Mitchell Wall, two very impressive young men who I am sure will bring to bear a youth perspective on some of the critical issues that young Australians feel it is important to speak about.

I think young Australians often feel too shut out of our political process, that they do not have enough opportunities to have their voices heard in the corridors of power. The Youth Engagement Steering Committee is a way of addressing that, of bringing a breath of fresh air into our political process and ensuring that young Australians have a voice at the highest level of power.

Home Insulation Program

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (1.57 pm)—Earlier today the government, along with four members of the crossbenches, voted to hide the figures in relation to the rate of failure under the Home Insulation Program, the rate of defect under the Home Insulation Program and the rate of asbestos discovered in conjunction with the Home Insulation Program by the public. This is vital public safety information. In the words of the Electrical and Communications Association:

We believe there is a public interest issue in releasing the data on both safety inspection programs not the reverse. The government has said that the figures could scare the public. However, not knowing how big the problem is, whether your ceiling could be electrified or if there is a

potential fire hazard in your roof is more concerning.

These are the words of the experts. This program has been a disaster from the outset. The government lived in denial for months and months, with tragic consequences at the human level, at the economic level, in terms of fires and in terms of electrification. Today we saw that pattern of behaviour repeated.

We say very clearly: the experts who warned about this program should have been listened to then. They are warning about this program right now. It is time for the government to come clean, to release the data, to practise transparency and, above all else, to end the cover-up in relation to the Home Insulation Program. (*Time expired*)

Taxation

Mr LYONS (Bass) (1.59 pm)—I am continually amazed at the hypocrisy from the other side—unbelievable hypocrisy. They are the ones that brought in the seven levies, and then they say they are great—no taxes! But, if you have a surplus, that means you have overtaxed the people. It is unbelievable. I cannot understand this hypocrisy. It just absolutely amazes me. They sit on the opposite side of this House, the ‘born-to-rulers’, and come out with some rubbish that we should not have to put up with. I hope we do not have to put up with it forever. They should one day realise we are here for the benefit of the Australian people, and that is what we are going to aim for.

The SPEAKER—Order! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43.

CONDOLENCES

Atkinson, Corporal Richard Edward

Report from Main Committee

Order of the day returned from the Main Committee for further consideration; certified copy of the motion presented.

Ordered that the order of the day be considered immediately.

The SPEAKER—The question is that the motion be agreed to. I ask all honourable members to signify their approval by rising in their places

Question agreed to, honourable members standing in their places.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (2.01 pm)—I present for the information of the House a revised ministry list reflecting changes to the ministry made in January

2011. The changes reflect the appointment of Senator the Hon. Joe Ludwig as Minister Assisting the Attorney-General on Queensland Floods Recovery and Senator the Hon. Nick Sherry as Minister Assisting the Minister for Finance and Deregulation on deregulation and public sector superannuation. I seek leave to have the document incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The document read as follows—

THIRD GILLARD MINISTRY

26 January 2011

Title	Minister	Other Chamber
Prime Minister	The Hon Julia Gillard MP	Senator the Hon Chris Evans
Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government	The Hon Simon Crean MP	Senator the Hon Nick Sherry
Minister for the Arts	The Hon Simon Crean MP	Senator the Hon Mark Arbib
Minister for Social Inclusion	The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP	Senator the Hon Mark Arbib
Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information	The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP	Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig
Minister for Sport	Senator the Hon Mark Arbib	The Hon Kate Ellis MP
Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity	The Hon Gary Gray AO MP	Senator the Hon Penny Wong
<i>Cabinet Secretary</i>	<i>The Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP</i>	
<i>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</i>	<i>Senator the Hon Kate Lundy</i>	
Treasurer (Deputy Prime Minister)	The Hon Wayne Swan MP	Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Assistant Treasurer	The Hon Bill Shorten MP	Senator the Hon Nick Sherry
Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation	The Hon Bill Shorten MP	Senator the Hon Nick Sherry
<i>Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer</i>	<i>The Hon David Bradbury MP</i>	
Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations (Leader of the Government in the Senate)	Senator the Hon Chris Evans	The Hon Simon Crean MP (Jobs and Workplace Relations) The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP (Tertiary Education and Skills)
Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth	The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP	Senator the Hon Chris Evans
Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare	The Hon Kate Ellis MP	Senator the Hon Chris Evans
Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development	Senator the Hon Mark Arbib	The Hon Jenny Macklin MP
<i>Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations</i>	<i>Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins</i>	

CHAMBER

Title	Minister	Other Chamber
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate) <i>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity</i>	Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy	The Hon Anthony Albanese MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs	The Hon Kevin Rudd MP	Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy
Minister for Trade <i>Parliamentary Secretary for Trade</i> <i>Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs</i>	The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP <i>The Hon Justine Elliot MP</i> <i>The Hon Richard Marles MP</i>	Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy
Minister for Defence (Deputy Leader of the House) Minister for Veterans' Affairs Minister for Defence Science and Personnel Minister for Defence Materiel <i>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</i>	The Hon Stephen Smith MP The Hon Warren Snowdon MP The Hon Warren Snowdon MP The Hon Jason Clare MP <i>Senator the Hon David Feeney</i>	Senator the Hon Chris Evans Senator the Hon Chris Evans Senator the Hon Chris Evans Senator the Hon Chris Evans
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship <i>Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship</i>	The Hon Chris Bowen MP <i>Senator the Hon Kate Lundy</i>	Senator the Hon Kim Carr
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport (Leader of the House) <i>Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport</i>	The Hon Anthony Albanese MP <i>The Hon Catherine King MP</i>	Senator the Hon Kim Carr
Minister for Health and Ageing Minister for Indigenous Health Minister for Mental Health and Ageing <i>Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing</i>	The Hon Nicola Roxon MP The Hon Warren Snowdon MP The Hon Mark Butler MP <i>The Hon Catherine King MP</i>	Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Minister for the Status of Women Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness <i>Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers</i> <i>Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services</i>	The Hon Jenny Macklin MP The Hon Kate Ellis MP Senator the Hon Mark Arbib <i>Senator the Hon Jan McLucas</i> <i>The Hon Julie Collins MP</i>	Senator the Hon Mark Arbib Senator the Hon Penny Wong The Hon Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities <i>Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water</i>	The Hon Tony Burke MP <i>Senator the Hon Don Farrell</i>	Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy
Minister for Finance and Deregulation Special Minister of State <i>Minister Assisting on Deregulation and Public Sector Superannuation</i>	Senator the Hon Penny Wong The Hon Gary Gray AO MP Senator the Hon Nick Sherry	The Hon Wayne Swan MP Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Minister for Small Business Attorney-General (Vice President of the Executive Council) <i>Minister Assisting the Attorney-General on Queensland Floods Recovery</i>	Senator the Hon Kim Carr Senator the Hon Nick Sherry The Hon Robert McClelland MP <i>Senator the Hon. Joe Ludwig</i>	The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP The Hon Bill Shorten MP Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig

Title	Minister	Other Chamber
Minister for Home Affairs	The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP	Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig
Minister for Justice	The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP	Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (Manager of Government Business in the Senate)	Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig	The Hon Tony Burke MP
<i>Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</i>	The Hon Dr Mike Kelly AM MP	
Minister for Resources and Energy	The Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP	Senator the Hon Nick Sherry
Minister for Tourism	The Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP	Senator the Hon Nick Sherry
<i>Minister Assisting the Minister for Tourism</i>	<i>Senator the Hon Nick Sherry</i>	
Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency	The Hon Greg Combet AM MP	Senator the Hon Penny Wong
<i>Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency</i>	<i>The Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP</i>	
Minister for Human Services	The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP	Senator the Hon Mark Arbib

Each box represents a portfolio. **Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.** As a general rule, there is one department in each portfolio. However, there is a Department of Veterans' Affairs in the Defence portfolio and a Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government in the Prime Minister's portfolio. The title of a department does not necessarily reflect the title of a minister in all cases.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy

Mr ABBOTT (2.02 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. With the cost of living skyrocketing for Australian families and electricity prices tipped to double in just four years, why is the Prime Minister planning three new taxes—a carbon tax, a mining tax and now a flood tax? Shouldn't the Prime Minister be putting her hand into the government's pockets to fund flood reconstruction, not putting her hands even deeper into the pockets of Australian families?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question because it enables me to explain something he clearly does not seem to understand. First and foremost, the government's budget is composed of money that has been given to the government by taxpayers, and we take that trust very seriously. Because we take that trust

very seriously, when we make decisions about the use of government funds, we make them properly and appropriately, having considered all of the needs. That is how we have approached the flood package to rebuild Queensland and rebuild the nation; that is, for every \$1 we are asking Australian taxpayers to pay to the government through the levy we have identified \$2 in savings.

It is no mystery to me that the Leader of the Opposition misunderstands these things, because every time he comes to look at budget questions it ends in disaster. It ended in an \$11 billion black hole last year and this week it has ended up in a profound division on his frontbench, with even his most senior colleagues, including the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, believing he has got it wrong in terms of the choice of the cutbacks that he announced earlier this week.

I understand that Australians are under cost-of-living pressures—I do understand that. The government tries to work with Australian families to help with those pressures. That is why we provided the family tax payments system and why we can add to it to provide additional assistance for teenagers. That is why we provided the childcare tax rebate arrangements—and why it remains true that every user of child care is better off under this government than they were when the Leader of the Opposition sat on the government benches. That is why we created the education tax rebate and why we will add to it to enable people to deal with the cost of school uniforms. It is why we engaged in a historically large rise in our pensions—because we knew that pensioners were doing it tough. And the list goes on. But, understanding those cost-of-living pressures, we also believe it is right, at a time that the nation faces the kinds of challenges we see from the summer of disaster that we have just lived through, to ask Australians to make a contribution too. We believe it is right to do that.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition that I am still waiting for an answer to my question: why is it that he could support levies in the past, that he designed his election policies based on a \$6 billion levy, that it was good enough for him to seek to levy \$6 billion for his election policies, but it is not good enough for him to support a levy to rebuild Queensland and rebuild the nation? The Leader of the Opposition has no philosophical objections to levies. We know that. He has supported them in the past and he has designed them himself. Now is the time to step forward and to show some leadership. I am still calling on the Leader of the Opposition to find it within himself to look beyond political interest at the national interest, and that requires supporting the package

the government has outlined for a \$5.6 billion expenditure on rebuilding.

Australian Natural Disasters

Mr NEUMANN (2.06 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. How is the government delivering the right funding model and the right plan to help communities recover from recent natural disasters?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. The member who asked the question has an electorate very severely impacted upon by the recent floods. I had the opportunity to spend some time with him in his electorate. I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to visit an evacuation centre overseen by Pastor Mark Edwards. I received a very nice email from that pastor about the visit and I want to take this opportunity to record my appreciation to him for the things that he did to assist frail, aged Australians and others during the days of intensity flooding, when people were not able to stay in their residential aged care facility.

The package I have outlined as Prime Minister is the right package for this nation. We are facing a national disaster. It is a national challenge and it is a national responsibility, so it is my judgment that we should work together and respond as a nation. This is a huge disaster. A quick run through the figures tells you that. We believe it requires at least \$5.6 billion. It has knocked half a per cent off economic growth. We have responded with the biggest deployment of the ADF for a natural disaster since Cyclone Tracy. We could have taken the soft options and not worried about capacity constraints in the economy. We could have taken the soft option of not doing the right thing by the national economy. Instead, we have stepped up to the hard decision to bring the budget to surplus in 2012-13 because that is what our economy will require. When your economy is strong you pay as you go.

We have taken the hard decision to defer infrastructure because there are only so many skilled Australians that can be brought to the rebuilding task. It makes sense to take pressure off to deal with those capacity constraints—the hard decision of deferring a billion dollars in infrastructure. But that has been the right thing to do. And we have taken the hard decision to ask Australians to support their fellow Australians through a levy. That, also, is the right thing to do. Let me say to the House that when you look at the progressive design of this levy, almost half of the money raised by it will come from those Australians fortunate enough to earn over \$200,000. Now that, I think, is an important statistic for the House to understand.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition that now is the time to put aside his petty politicking and to endorse this package. He has failed in the task of generating alternative savings and we have seen the splits in his political party as a result. Look at the words of the member for Mayo who has rejected the raiding of foreign aid and has indicated that a program important to our own domestic security has been cut—a position endorsed by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Look at the words of the member for Hasluck who has said that within a budget there is some capacity, but we have to look at all the options and to take a hard line that is counter-productive to the process is problematic. They are wise words from the member for Hasluck and the Leader of the Opposition should listen to them. It is time that he stepped up and put the national interest before his narrow political interest. That is what Australians are looking to him to do.

Flood Levy

Mr HOCKEY (2.11 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Yesterday in this House the Treasurer, in relation to the Queensland reconstruction, said:

There is no way of funding it without a levy ...

I refer the Treasurer to the Prime Minister's statement at the National Press Club on 27 January, in which she said—and effectively repeated today in the parliament—that if more money was needed:

The money will come from cuts somewhere else.

How does the Treasurer explain the contradiction in these statements?

Mr SWAN—It is because there is no contradiction. Bringing the budget back to surplus, keeping our public finances strong—particularly when there are capacity constraints in the economy—is the rock of good economic management. We have to preserve our fiscal firepower if there are more events down the track. These are the basics of very strict fiscal discipline and the basics of sending a message to markets that this economy is strong, that our public finances are strong and that we can handle adverse events. Of course there is no contradiction. Those opposite are simply embarrassed. It was good enough for them when they were in government to introduce six levies. For the leader of this opposition to come into this House and stand up year after year after year—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I take a point of order on direct relevance: the Treasurer was asked a very specific question. He was not asked anything about other matters before the current flood tax that we are debating.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer will directly relate his comments to the question.

Mr SWAN—I was asked about the need for a levy—why we needed to put this levy in place. I am explaining. It is to keep our budget in surplus, to keep our public finances strong and, importantly, to rebuild Queensland because, unlike those opposite, we will not put political interests before the national interests.

I do not doubt that bringing in a levy like this can be unpopular, but I can tell you this: it is the right thing to do by Queensland and it is the right thing to do by Australia. Those opposite are taking the opportunistic path that they took during the last election campaign: putting their political interests before the national interest. All of those members over there from Queensland are acutely embarrassed by the stance of those opposite. They are going to feel the heat from their electorates because putting this levy in place to rebuild Queensland—

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will return to the question.

Mr SWAN—to rebuild Far North Queensland and to rebuild North Queensland is absolutely in the national interest. If it was good enough for the Leader of the Opposition to go around Australia during the last election campaign and argue the case for a permanent levy then surely it is good enough for the opposition to support a temporary levy to rebuild Queensland and parts of Victoria. This just shows they are putting their political interests ahead of the national interest.

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will relate his remarks to the question.

Mr SWAN—As I said in this House yesterday, it is all opposition and no leadership.

Employment

Ms LIVERMORE (2.14 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on today's employment numbers and the government's plans to continue to support employment growth?

Mr SWAN—It is my pleasure to tell the House about today's employment figures. Today's labour force figures show there are more people in work and more people looking for work. These figures are quite good. They show that in the month of January,

which of course had the natural disasters—the Queensland floods and now the cyclones—that our economy created an additional 24,000 jobs. That builds on the creation of 364,000 jobs in 2010. That is the biggest calendar-year increase in our history. It is something that the parliament ought to be proud of—to have had this employment outcome given the global economic conditions that we have seen in the last couple of years in this country. This government always puts jobs first and always puts the community first.

We have seen an unemployment rate of five per cent. We have seen a slight increase in the participation rate to 65.9 per cent. This figure, more than anything else, confirms the fundamental strength of the Australian economy. Yes, there has been an impact in Queensland. There is no doubt about that. And even in these figures you can see that hours worked were down in Queensland and there has been an impact. But what Australians can have faith in is the fact that the fundamentals of our economy are strong. And on top of that, we have got a very strong investment pipeline—ABARE estimates \$380 billion in resources alone. And we are returning to surplus faster than any major advanced economy. I think the Australian people are proud of these figures. We have bounced back before, as we did during the global recession, and we will bounce back from the impacts of these natural disasters.

Over the past three years there have been something like 740,000 jobs created in Australia and, during that period, something like 30 million jobs were shed elsewhere in the world. This government took the tough decisions during the global financial crisis to stimulate our economy, to support jobs, to support small business, to support tradies and to keep our communities strong. And just as we did that during the global crisis, we are doing it through these natural disasters—

taking the right decisions for Australia, keeping our public finances strong, but providing the necessary resources that are required to rebuild communities. We certainly do not underestimate the scale of the task before us, and that is why we moved so quickly to make the savings in the budget and put in place a modest levy.

And through all of that we have been opposed by the Leader of the Opposition. He opposed everything we did to protect our communities during the global financial crisis. If he had had his way, this economy would have gone into recession. And now he is opposing our plans to rebuild Queensland, to get the appropriate resources in the right place to help those shattered communities rebuild. Nothing could be more important to the peace of mind of those communities than to know that the government has a responsible plan which can be funded. Of course, as usual the Leader of the Opposition puts his political interests ahead of the national interest. It would have been easy for us to say: 'She'll be right. We won't do anything about this. We won't put a levy in place. We'll fudge it like the opposition always does.' But this government is doing the right thing by Australia, the right thing by our economy and the right thing for those communities.

Budget

Mr MORRISON (2.19 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2010-2011, introduced this morning, which revealed a further \$290 million budget blow-out in costs associated with managing asylum seekers due to the government's failed border protection policies. How does the Prime Minister explain to Queenslanders why \$155 million in flood mitigation works for the Bruce Highway has to be cut by the government, yet it can find over \$290 mil-

lion more for blow-outs in the immigration department?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. As the member well knows, we operate a mandatory detention system and, yes, there are costs associated with it. Those costs were met by the former Howard government—in the region of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars—in order to fund the so-called Pacific solution. We have taken a different approach but we have maintained mandatory detention. Yes, it does cost money, but it is the right policy for this country and, as a result, we will continue to fund it. I am not sure whether the member, in asking his question, is suddenly of the view that mandatory detention should be abandoned as a policy. I know that he has flipped and flopped in many directions on immigration policy since the last election, but mandatory detention remains the policy of this government and consequently we will fund it.

What arises as a result of the member's question is that, yes, budgets require choices—and they are not easy choices. We need to keep working to make those choices. We have made those choices in our \$5.6 billion funding package. The choices have not been easy. Finding two dollars of cuts for every dollar we are asking Australians to put in for the levy and deferring a billion dollars of infrastructure programs have been difficult decisions, but they are the right decisions in the national interest. The member who asked me the question sits on the front-bench of an opposition that has been unable to make these decisions. The Leader of the Opposition said: 'All of this is going to be easy. I'll be able to find this money in the budget.' And then we waited day after day after day for a funding package to be produced. And when it was produced, so hollow was it, so shallow was it, that it did not even enjoy the support of his deputy leader; so

hollow was it, so shallow was it, that the backbench are out on the doors basically saying they do not support it either.

The member who asked the question also asked me about the Bruce Highway, and I thank him for that. We have allocated \$2.3 billion to the Bruce Highway over six years. The Howard government allocated \$1.2 billion over 12 years. Let's do that maths again: \$2.3 billion over six years versus \$1.2 billion over 12 years. We have effectively doubled the effort in half the time. So, if the member wants to come to the dispatch box and say, 'Yes, the Howard government was remiss. Yes, it was a government of poor choices,' and then say, 'This government has made better choices,' that would be an accurate reflection of the facts.

But, of course, the facts will not ever cross the lips of those opposite, because this is about their political interest, not about the national interest. It is time they lifted their sights. It is time they recognised this nation has come through a summer of natural disaster. The nation needs rebuilding. We have a plan to rebuild it. It is time to stop the cheap politicking and endorse our plan.

Mr ABBOTT—Mr Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. On the Prime Minister's logic, is the government now planning a boats tax to cover the unforeseen additional expenses of border protection?

Ms GILLARD—I have contemplated a tax on three-word slogans but thought that it would bankrupt the Leader of the Opposition so quickly it would be inappropriate, so I have changed my mind—but I have contemplated that tax. Maybe we should just put a swear jar on the table here and by the end of each question time we could send some dollars to the Queensland flood relief appeal. But, knowing the Leader of the Opposition, he would say, 'Send them to the Liberal

Party instead,' if we were collecting those funds.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition: we will do what we stand for, and that is managing the budget carefully; that is making the fiscal decisions to get the budget to surplus in 2012-13; that is stepping up to the national interest and making sure that we rebuild Queensland. We will leave you with your three-word slogans and your cheap politics—it is all you know.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The House will come to order! I call the member for Lyne.

A government member—He's King O'Malley!

National Health and Hospitals Reform

Mr OAKESHOTT (2.25 pm)—King O'Malley! My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, two key principles have driven the health and hospital reform agenda so far: the principle of equity and the desperate need for a fair share of resources to go throughout the whole system and also the principle of efficiency being rewarded, not ignored. Prime Minister, can you therefore assure the House that the investment in these two key principles by many, many people to date will be at the heart of next week's reform meetings with the states and that you will deliver these principles in this, the most important, area of national reform?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. I do think I should take this opportunity to record my objection to the beard too—it is something I have said to him face to face. I do not know what has happened over the summer season, but we have Rob Oakeshott here and Dennis Shanahan up there and they are both very poor judgment calls, Mr Speaker! We will see what happens by the time the parliament sits next.

On the important question of health, I can assure the member that, when COAG meets in the coming few days and I sit with premiers and chief ministers from around the nation to talk about health, I will be centrally guided by the principles of equity and efficiency that he points to. When we look at our healthcare system, as a nation we face a profound challenge of rapidly escalating healthcare costs. We face a profound challenge where currently, under the arrangements we have known to date, the level of government most exposed to those rapidly escalating healthcare costs is the level of government least able to efficiently raise the additional moneys required. We know that if we leave that undisturbed over the long term it will ultimately overwhelm the revenue-raising capacity of states.

Of course, as states come to this task they are trying to build on the foundations left by the Leader of the Opposition, which included a \$1 billion cutback to hospitals and insufficient investment in the health workforce, so we are short of doctors, short of nurses and short of the dedicated professionals that go to make a healthcare system. But we need now to grasp this reform challenge. Clearly some great work has been done to date, but there is more to do and I am hoping that, in the coming few days, I can, in the national interest, strike agreements with premiers and with chief ministers.

I know that the member who asked the question is always very concerned about spatial fairness—the fairness between urban Australia and rural and regional Australia—when it comes to the allocation of healthcare funds and health efforts. I know he is very concerned about statistics like the cancer rates, which show survivability from cancer is lower in rural and regional Australia. I can assure him that these things are at the heart of what I am thinking about as we work through these reforms. In addition, I can as-

sure him that efficiency—activity based funding drivers that actually make sure our healthcare dollar goes where it can do the most good and work the hardest—is also at the centre of the reform agenda of the government. I thank him for the question. It is a very important issue and I hope by the time the House next meets I will be in a position to advise him of what I am very much determined should be successful outcomes from COAG.

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr ZAPPIA (2.29 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. I ask the minister: will the minister update the House on the progress of reform in the Murray-Darling Basin? What steps is the government taking in response to feedback received from the House of Representatives inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan? What would be the impact of cutting funding for buybacks?

Mr BURKE—I thank the member for Makin for the question. Over the last few days in water reform we have had some constructive suggestions and we have had some negligent suggestions that have come from various quarters. I want to thank the members of both sides of the House who have been working with the member for New England in the inquiry that has been taking place into reform of the Murray-Darling Basin and share some suggestions and feedback that have been passed on to me from that inquiry.

The information that has come is very much matching what I have been receiving in the consultations that I have been conducting in irrigation communities. I should inform the House that the concept that has been referred to me from the committee about trying to improve the management of environmental assets is a very real possibility

in trying to minimise the adjustment required for individual communities. I am currently looking at ways of formalising a process with stakeholders to come up with the best projects that might be able to deal with that. Similarly, issues have been put to me from the committee about wanting to maximise the opportunity for strategic purchases, and that is very much linked with the recommendation that has come from them regarding taxation issues. The Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and the Treasurer have been working with me on trying to find a way of maximising the tax effectiveness of those strategic purchases, and we are certainly very hopeful that we will be able to make an announcement on that soon which I think will very much meet the wishes of the committee.

There have also been some suggestions that could not be described as being quite so constructive. It was suggested by the opposition that, as an alternative to Australians contributing through the flood levy, we would stop the buyback of water in the Murray-Darling Basin. It is true that buyback, even though it was technically funded by the previous government, was something that they never delivered on. They established the office of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and then gave the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder no water to hold at all. I notice some members around have glasses of water at their desks. There is more water in those glasses than was ever purchased by the previous government for environmental water to restore the Murray-Darling to health. That puts at a disadvantage all the irrigators who have actually invested in improving their infrastructure and who then want to put the water that they no longer require on the market. But, when they want to do it, this mob opposite are saying that, if they were in government, they would not assist with that. They are saying that that

would not be available in the repurchase of environmental water.

This is a great victory for Senator Joyce over every South Australian member opposite, because the South Australian members on this side, including the member for Makin, know exactly what the last drought looked like. They know exactly what it looks like when you get acid sulfate soils. They know what it looks like when the Lower Lakes become a bed of salinity. They know what it looks like when you allow the rivers to run dry because of overallocation. But every South Australian member opposite has been defeated in a campaign by Senator Joyce to try to stop the reform of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Do not forget what that means for irrigators, because if you do not engage year after year in a strategic, voluntary buyback from people who have chosen to put their water on the market then you have only eight years before the final state water plans come into place, and that means the opposition have created a situation where, by being negligent in buyback in the coming years, they would land Australians in a situation of potential compulsory acquisition in eight years time. If you do not engage in the buyback in a strategic way, the concept of willing sellers completely falls off the table. Mr Abbott, the Leader of the Opposition, has once again put his political interests ahead of the national interest. He does not believe in water reform. *(Time expired)*

Flood Levy

Mr BUCHHOLZ (2.34 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. One of our key volunteers in the flood affected areas of the Lockyer Valley in my electorate is Gerry Keogh from the Sunshine Coast. He saw the devastation on TV, dropped everything and took four or five excavators to Murphys Creek. He has worked for nothing for the

past month and has got Humes pipes and Rocla pipes to donate hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of concrete culverts as well. But, because his own home was not flood damaged, he will have to pay the new tax. Prime Minister, how can that be fair?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question, and I would ask him to pass on my congratulations to the volunteer that he mentions. This House, of course, congratulated, through the contributions that people made on the condolence motion, the many thousands—the tens of thousands; indeed, the hundreds of thousands—of people who went to the assistance of others to deal with these natural disasters and to clean up from them. It has been a fantastic display of Australian mateship. It has been a fantastic display of the Australian way.

As we look at that fantastic display, we would also remember the people who could not physically be there but who sent donations to the Premier's disaster relief fund—the mums and dads who put some money in. Now that disaster relief fund is at \$200 million. But I would say to the member: I applaud those efforts, but I also understand, as I believe Australians do generally understand, that the \$200 million that they raised and the efforts they went to as volunteers go to help another human being. But I think they also understand the nation needs to rebuild from this. We are not talking about something that can be paid for by voluntary donations. Two hundred million dollars is an incredible amount of money for people to raise, but we are talking about needing a sum of at least \$5.6 billion to rebuild, and that is before we get to the damage that has been caused by the cyclone—and we have all seen that devastation on our TV screens.

So as a nation, in the national interest, we have to ask ourselves: how do we best do this? I have said to the nation that we best do

this by making savings on the Commonwealth budget that stand up to rigorous scrutiny. That is the difference between the savings that I have outlined and the savings the Leader of the Opposition has outlined. And I have said to the nation that we should ask those Australians with capacity to contribute to contribute in the interests of their fellow Australians. That is what the levy is, and that is why 60 per cent of Australian taxpayers will pay less than \$1 a week.

I say to the member who has asked the question, who is new to this place: levies have happened before. They happened before when the nation needed to buy back guns following the dreadful incident we saw at Port Arthur. The nation has levied before; levied to support the milk industry and the sugar industry in their adaptation to change. We have levied before to support Ansett workers when that airline collapsed. The former Prime Minister, supported by the Leader of the Opposition, asked the nation to contribute through a levy to the costs of assisting East Timor. These things have happened at times in our history when it has been right to say to Australians, 'Can you give a hand to help?' That is what I am saying to Australians now; that is what I will continue to say to Australians—that is the national interest.

Australian Natural Disasters

Mr GIBBONS (2.38 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. What assistance is the government providing to rebuild roads, bridges, rail and other essential infrastructure following the recent natural disasters, not only in my electorate in Victoria but indeed right across Australia? How is this building being financed and how is this being received?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Bendigo for his question. Indeed, his electorate is one of those that has been im-

pacted. In Victoria, over 65 arterial roads and more than 270 local roads have been closed due to flooding. Larger roads, such as the Calder and the Sturt highways have been cut off. I have been advised that many roads are still under water and damage is still being assessed. I have had a number of conversations with the Victorian transport minister, and yesterday I had another conversation with the Premier of Victoria, Mr Baillieu, as well about these issues.

Certainly, it is the case that the rebuilding will take time, but it will also cost money. It requires national leadership and a national approach. We on this side of the House have made the judgment that a national crisis and a national disaster require national leadership. That is what we have determined; that is our judgment. So we have to pay for it from somewhere.

We have paid for it with a \$1.8 billion flood levy. We have also deferred some projects and, indeed, one of the deferrals that occurred was \$20 million for the Princes Highway east in Gippsland. This was a road that was also impacted by some environmental assessments. We sat down with the respective state governments, identified projects that were potentially not going to be able to proceed and freed up that capacity. There is a limited amount of capital equipment in the country and there is a limited amount of skills. The priority is rebuilding those areas that have been affected.

I welcome the comments of the member for Gippsland, who said today or yesterday, 'I think the people of Gippsland will understand the reason for it. There is a major rebuilding effort required right across Queensland and northern Victoria, so I think people understand the need for reprioritising of the government's funding.' I thank him for those comments. He was talking about the \$20 million deferral of the Princes Highway east

that the government announced, one of the nine projects that we have deferred.

I was surprised by the tone in the question asked before about the Bruce Highway because, consistent with that, obviously the member for Gippsland had seen the comments of the Leader of the Opposition on 18 January:

Let's face it ... the Government was going to have to focus on the urgent, unavoidable and necessary repair work, ...

They called for deferrals to occur, then they opposed them. The leader of the National Party put out a media release opposing the deferrals of the Queensland projects that have been worked out with the Queensland government as being unable to proceed. But have a look at their detail, because they did not put them all back in. They put three back in the other day, and when they did that the Leader of the Opposition in his response spoke about capacity constraints in the economy as a reason for some of the other cuts that were made. I think that the inconsistency is there.

The fact is that we are still spending double the amount of money in half the time on the Bruce Highway than the previous government did. (*Time expired*)

Flood Levy

Mr TEHAN (2.43 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to a letter to me from Cheryl Schuyler from Halls Gap, who runs Grampians Gifts and Souvenirs, a business that has suffered from the Victorian floods. She said:

We have only been affected by loss of trade and downgraded income—many families and businesses have lost loved ones and have no income at all and yet the Federal Government's response is to kick people while they are down by proposing another TAX. It never fails to amaze me that a lazy government's easy solution is just to add another Tax! People are hurting badly; adding to their burden is not the right or just solution.

What is the Prime Minister's response to Cheryl Schuyler?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. I understand that when you go to the Australian community and say to some members of the community, 'We are going to ask you to pay some more,' that that is not necessarily popular. I understand that.

I understood that when I made the decision that we would have this levy. I understood it was very likely that for days and days we would see talkback radio rage, television stations conducting phone-in polls and that the quick conclusion by many would be that the community was opposed. I expected all of that, but I also thought, and I absolutely believe now, that Australians will accept that it is the right thing to do, to step forward at a time like this and to assist their fellow Australians.

I am making the same judgment call that Prime Minister Howard made when he proposed the gun buyback, that Prime Minister Howard made when he proposed the East Timor levy, that Prime Minister Howard made when he proposed the various industry restructuring funds, that Prime Minister Howard made when he proposed the Ansett levy and that Prime Minister Howard made when he proposed the levy on superannuation. I am making the same judgment call that there are some times in a nation's history when the right thing to do is to ask the community to put in some more.

Who is being asked to put in some more? No-one who earns under \$50,000 a year is being asked. Taxpayers who earn over \$50,000 a year and less than \$60,000 a year are being asked for less than a dollar a week. Someone on \$80,000 a year is being asked for less than a cup of coffee. The levy does rise and it does hit higher income earners and so it should. Almost half of the money raised from this levy will come from those fortu-

nate enough to earn over \$200,000 a year. Almost 40 per cent of it will come from those earning over \$300,000 a year. We will ask Australians to make an additional contribution—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, a point of order: in being required to be directly relevant to the question and accurate, how can the Prime Minister say how much people will pay when the Treasurer does not know how many people will be paying the tax?

The SPEAKER—The member for Mackellar knows that that was not a point of order. The offer to her for the call for a point of order is not an offer to her to enter into a debate. On the matter of direct relevance, when a question ends with 'What is the Prime Minister's response', it is a very wide question.

Ms GILLARD—I say to the member who asked the question I agree with him it would have been wrong to say to Australians, 'Shoulder this burden entirely through a levy.' So we have not done that. For every dollar we will ask Australians to contribute to this levy, we have found \$2 in savings or deferrals in the federal government budget—not easy decisions. The Leader of the National Party interjected before about infrastructural deferrals. The single biggest infrastructure deferral actually affects my electorate—not easy decisions, but the right decisions in the national interest.

You can come to this place and say, 'I will always look to do what's popular,' or you can come to this place and say, 'I'm determined to do what's right.' On this side of the chamber we are determined to do what is right. We ask the Leader of the Opposition just once—just one vote on one occasion—to set aside his political interests and to vote in the national interest.

Australian Natural Disasters

Mr RIPOLL (2.48 pm)—My question is to the Assistant Treasurer and the Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation. What action has the government taken to address concerns and confusion about private flood insurance cover in communities across Australia?

Mr SHORTEN—I thank the member for Oxley for his question about the insurance claims of flood affected victims. I know that the member for Oxley and many members on both sides of the House have been pursuing the interests of their electorates who had insurance claims following the floods.

What happens with insurance after a flood is that many Australians who do not always like paying insurance but have paid it year in, year out expect their insurance companies to stand beside them when disaster strikes—and quite rightly so. What has been happening in the recent floods—and many members on both sides have been at pains to alert the government to this—is that in many cases insurance companies have stepped up to the massive deluge of claims. In the case of the Queensland floods alone, there have been 40,000 claims. In the case of Cyclone Yasi, there have been 5,000 claims so far. In the case of the fires in Western Australia, there have been 500 and in the case of the flooding in Victoria there have been nearly 5,000 claims. Despite handling the bulk of the claims, it has become clear to the government that there are some longstanding issues which have not been addressed in a policy sense which compromise and affect the ability of insured people to recover and get on with their lives.

I go to the issue of the definition of flood—the plain English meaning in contracts—and the use of fine print to defeat people's otherwise legitimate claims. This government has, since 5 January, immedi-

ately after the Rockhampton flood, met with the insurance industry. It has, in working with the state governments and legal groups, made legal services available for the insured to be able to claim. It has put in place the capacity for the insurance industry to have a panel of hydrologists to make sure that technical experts can get on and make the claims as quickly as possible and assess their validity. But what we are seeing—and I know members on both sides of the House have raised this issue—is that in some cases some companies are relying upon the fine print to avoid honouring their obligations.

We have seen some insurance companies provide river flood coverage and get on with life, including Suncorp, and we have seen RACQ and Comminsure step forward to provide payments to policyholders without deciding the issue of flood insurance. We also need to see other companies stepping forward and resolving once and for all a proper plain English definition of flood coverage. It is not too hard, in the government's opinion, for the insurance industry to work with consumer groups and the regulators to come up with clear definitions of what is a flood.

There are different definitions. In the Wagga floods of 2009 in New South Wales, it turned out that insurance companies were using 11 different definitions of floods. This is a very difficult area for consumers to seek justice. I am aware of claims where claimants have adjusted their house and the insurance companies have then tried to say that the whole policy is void. I am aware of different companies taking different attitudes to the cause of flood damage in some of the flood affected regions. I acknowledge the work of not only the member for Oxley and the member for Blair but indeed the member for Wright and the member for Groom in chasing down insurance companies who were being recalcitrant in the definition of

flood damage and seeking consistency amongst the companies.

Where we go from here is that in the next few weeks the insurance industry has committed to developing one definition of floods across all insurance products. This is a step forward which has not happened in the past. In addition, the insurance industry has agreed that—perhaps not breaking any barriers of rocket science but to the satisfaction of consumers—there should be a plain English explanation on one page of what homeowners are insured for.

There are many more issues in resolving adequate insurance coverage in the future for the next natural disaster, and we will work on those issues, too, but I can report to the House that the insurance industry, at the prompting of the government, accepts that it has to lift its performance. At the same time, I can report that the insurance industry is handling the vast bulk of these claims in a timely fashion. This government will keep its work going. (*Time expired*)

Cyclone Yasi

Mr ENTSCHE (2.53 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister explain why none of the 106 school halls built through the so-called Building the Education Revolution school halls program over the last two years in the cyclone zone between Bundaberg and the Torres Strait and built to cyclone-proof standards cannot be used as cyclone shelters?

Ms GILLARD—I can explain that. In the construction of buildings under the Building the Education Revolution, whether they be halls, whether they be classrooms, whether they be libraries or whether they be something purpose generated for that school, the construction was done to the standard under the relevant school authority's guidelines. So, if it was in a state school, it was constructed under the state school guidelines. If

it was in a Catholic school, it was constructed under the Catholic guidelines. If it was constructed in an independent school, the school itself determined what the guidelines were. If the member thinks those guidelines are inappropriate in a local school, he would need to raise that with the relevant local authorities.

What I can say to the member—which I think, given the part of the world he represents, he would be very interested in—is that, of course, as part of economic stimulus the government did build in Cairns the disaster management facility to category 5 cyclone standard. It was then used in the management of the cyclone that has just occurred. It was, in fact, where the emergency service personnel and the people who needed to coordinate in such difficult and dangerous circumstances gathered. Others went there, too, for shelter during such a ferocious cyclone. So, in terms of providing shelters that have been of use, the member would be aware of one constructed in his local community through economic stimulus—economic stimulus wholly opposed by the Leader of the Opposition.

Queensland Floods

Mr PERRETT (2.56 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Human Services and Minister for Social Inclusion. How is the government helping the many flood victims in my electorate of Moreton to get back on their feet?

Ms PLIBERSEK—I want to thank the member for Moreton for that question and tell him and the House that this week I spoke to a lady in his electorate, Maureen Machin, who is a 51-year-old former Queensland Rail worker who lived on her own with three little dogs. She was ringing to thank us for the \$1,000 payment that she received. She was telling me about getting her little dogs safely out of her home and to the local petrol sta-

tion, going back to try to get some stuff out of her house and finding out she could not salvage anything. She had to swim out of her home. She dog paddled across a two-metre-high back fence and she was washed down the road. She ended up in the night, in stinking water, carried along by the flood, in the QEII stadium evacuation centre, which is in the member's electorate. She was there for about a week. Centrelink workers tracked her down and encouraged her to apply for the payment. She had not initially realised she was eligible, but the Centrelink workers doing their outreach found her and encouraged her to apply. They helped her fill in the form. She used that \$1,000 to pay for her immediate needs: food, clothing, a phone so she could contact friends to reassure them she was okay and medicine for one of her sick little dogs who are her only companions. She said: 'I felt blessed. There was an acknowledgement that people were down. I felt like someone had a hand on my shoulder, saying, "Keep on going." Your needs become very basic when you've lost everything.'

As well as the QEII stadium where the Centrelink workers were—there were 13 staff there—there were other staff in recovery centres at the Yeronga State School and St Aidan's Anglican Girls School in Corinda. The previous member asked about BER school halls. I am happy to inform him that the member for Moreton has told me that both of those recovery centres were in BER school halls. Of course, over 100,000 people in the Brisbane local government area which covers Moreton have benefited from the payments paid through Centrelink. More than 20,000 of those were for children. They are part of the half-million payments that have been made across the country, most of those within two days of claiming, so that people have some money to buy something to eat; to pay for a motel room; to buy necessities,

clothes and a mobile phone so they can stay in touch with people.

I heard from another fellow. Barry Kopernik and his wife, Raelene, in Rockhampton who told me that they spent every dollar of their payment within one kilometre of their home. It is not just paying for the basics that they needed but also injecting money back into the local community, supporting local businesses that need that support more than ever. I am happy to report that Phillip Coorey, with his normal perspicacity, described the government's response to the floods as, 'The flawless roll-out of a disaster plan, including emergency Centrelink payments and mobilisation of the military'. Indeed, Centrelink aimed to and, I believe, was successful in supporting Australians when they needed it—supporting them during a time of national disaster as all Australians want to help during this national disaster.

Flood Levy

Mr MATHESON (2.59 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, I have been contacted by a constituent concerned about the flood tax. He is a police officer under the age of 60 who is due to retire in the next financial year. His flood tax liability on his lump sum taxable superannuation payout is \$6,500. Did the Prime Minister realise that people under the age of 60 who happen to be retiring next financial year would be slugged so heavily, or is this just a cup of coffee a week?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. What I would say to the member is that we have structured the flood levy through the taxation system, so the taxation system obviously does work. It looks at what people earn during a financial year and consequently it is calibrated with income. That is the right thing to do. That is how we structure burdens in our society. We structure

burdens on the basis that people who have the capacity to pay more should pay more. In making that design of the flood levy, we did it deliberately so those with additional capacity would pay more.

What I would also say to the member is that it does seem to me, as we look at these questions from the opposition, a little bit odd indeed. What people may think, watching this debate, is that we may be looking at two alternate packages to fund the recovery and rebuilding that is necessary around the nation. But, of course, that is not true. There is the government's \$5.6 billion package: savings, deferrals and asking Australians for a contribution, with that contribution calibrated against income. So higher income earners pay more. People who earn less than \$50,000 a year do not pay anything; people earning \$60,000 a year pay less than a dollar a week—

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—and people like the shadow Treasurer, who is interjecting at the moment, pay more—as they should.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister was asked whether she realised average taxpayers would be slugged in this way. If the answer is no, she should say no and just sit down.

The SPEAKER—In the framing of questions it would assist, if people want the answers to be confined and directly relevant, if they contained less argument. If those who are framing the questions want me to tighten up on the argument, I am happy to do so. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I was talking about financing rebuilding the nation: the government's package of \$5.6 billion, including the levy, versus an alternative that simply does not stack up. Indeed, so fragile is it that it is opposed by the Deputy Leader of the Opposi-

tion, and members of the backbench have been out saying that they do not support elements of it. So the only proposal before the parliament to rebuild the nation—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will resume her seat while I give some guidance to those who need it—obviously, because of my sometimes fragile control of English! If the question goes on to talk about the cost of cups of coffee, it widens and allows me, I think, to allow debate. I am simply saying to those who frame questions that if they want me to be in the position to narrow the responses, they could assist me by narrowing the questions. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. So there is only one package before the parliament to rebuild the nation. How has the levy been designed? It bears design characteristics like those of the East Timor levy proposed by the Howard government. This is the East Timor levy that the Leader of the Opposition supported.

The member has raised with me the question of superannuation, and I can advise him of the following. Lump sum superannuation payments for over 60s from a taxed superannuation fund are exempt from tax and are also exempt from the levy. This covers the vast bulk of superannuants, but people should talk to their superannuation fund about whether a particular payment is untaxed. Can I also say to the member who has asked the question and members opposite that at some point they are going to have to face the decision here. When playing the politics is gone, will they stand up for the national interest? I am being criticised today for not enough exemptions—

Mr Matheson—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on clarification. The question

was asked in relation to superannuation payments for under 60s, not over.

The SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business sought, amongst other things, a point of order on the basis of direct relevance. I have ruled on that. People may not like my ruling. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am being criticised for not enough exemptions, but the member for Maranoa said this morning that he had been asked by someone in Barcaldine, ‘Look, if it is one in, all in, why are some people exempt?’ and he is criticising us for too many exemptions. It just goes to show that this is the opposition all over the place again. It just goes to show that criticisms brought to this parliament are all about the politics and not about the interest of Australians. At some point the opposition need to make a decision. Do they stand for the national interest or just for their political interest? We can see the shallow answer on display today. (*Time expired*)

Australian-Indonesia Education Partnership

Ms PARKE (3.07 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the minister inform the House as to why the Australia-Indonesia education partnership is in the national interest? How is Australia supporting counterterrorism efforts and are there any threats to these efforts?

Mr RUDD—Australia’s foreign aid program is designed to support Australia’s core national interests: our national economic interest, our national security interest and our international humanitarian interest—and that is precisely what this program in Indonesia does. So what are the contents of what happened under the previous government on this program and what we are proposing to do? Just to refresh honourable members of yesterday’s discussion of this, we had 2,075

schools built under the Howard government; we are going to add another 2,000. That is a good news story. Under the Howard government we had assistance to 500-plus Islamic schools; now we are going to add to that with assistance to a further 1,500 Islamic schools. Under the Howard government, 330,000 extra places were created for kids and we are going to add a further 300,000 places for kids. These are good contributions all round. It makes for a good policy.

If we wish to look at the human face of what this produces, I draw people’s attention to an article by Tom Allard today in the *Herald* which tells us about little Parhin. This is her photograph—a little girl in East Lombok. Her story is terrific. She has been directly helped by the Howard government program. She has been directly helped because she has had the opportunity to go to secondary school. She has the dream of becoming a doctor. Furthermore, on top of that, in her class, her graduating class, 42 of the 44 kids are going on to high school. Two years ago, about four out of 50 went on to high school. That is what this program is doing on the ground.

I have been asked about international and national reactions to this. We see in today’s *Australian* reaction from the Indonesian vice-minister for education. He has called in Australian embassy officials to clarify whether this program will continue. Furthermore, we have officials from the Indonesian education ministry making very clear-cut statements about the value of this program to the future of education in his country. As he says:

... we try to educate them—

that is, kids in these villages—

into a more pluralistic society. Australia is really helping us with education.

As for domestic reaction, we have had Alexander Downer come out and bag the decision

by the Leader of the Opposition. We have Alex II, the member for Mayo—he has also bagged the decision by the Leader of the Opposition. I am told also that the member for Cook has been out there bagging the Leader of the Opposition's decision. But there is more on today's front-page of the *Australian*, and that is from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition apparently has had something of a disagreement with the Leader of the Opposition on this matter. To quote from the *Australian*, she is devastated by Mr Abbott's insistence that the program be sacrificed, and, furthermore, she believed that she had already won the heated debate on foreign aid in the shadow cabinet and is understood to have become embroiled in an 'intense late-night argument with Mr Abbott in which he insisted on deferring the Indonesian schools program'. The problem for the Leader of the Opposition is that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is right on this—absolutely right.

The supreme irony is this: here we have the Leader of the Opposition and today we are debating his policy, which is absolutely opposed to sound counterterrorism policy in Indonesia. What is the Indonesian government doing today? It is putting on trial Abu Bakar Bashir in Indonesia for charges concerning terrorism. The Indonesian government is doing the right thing on counterterrorism. The Leader of the Opposition is doing precisely the wrong thing on counterterrorism.

Australian Natural Disasters

Mr O'DOWD (3.11 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, Mr Will Neville, Chairman of the Mission Beach Business and Tourism group, raised concerns on ABC radio today that contracts to rebuild their devastated community must give local people a fair go. I quote: 'We don't need to

get steamrolled over the top.' Given that the government's BER school halls program shut out many local contractors, what assurances can you, Prime Minister, give to local builders and tradespeople in flood affected areas that they will get a fair go?

Ms GILLARD—I believe that the member can be reassured that the rebuilding of Queensland—happening as it will through the Queensland Recovery Authority and through local councils, which is appropriate—will take into account the need for local businesses to be engaged with the rebuilding. If I can pass on a reflection from Victoria, when Victoria rebuilt after the devastating bushfire, one of the things that was discussed in that rebuilding was the need to ensure that the local economy also got the benefits of the money being spent on the rebuild.

Can I suggest to the local member the best thing to do? He will very frequently see in his community Major General Mick Slater, who chairs the Queensland Recovery Authority. I have been in communities with him. He has been everywhere and I suspect he will be everywhere on many, many, many occasions. It is the Queensland Recovery Authority that will deal, as necessary, with direct contracting and his local council, the Mission Beach local council, will also deal with direct contracting. Consequently, I would recommend to the member that he have those discussions with Mick Slater when he is available—he will be around Queensland—and with his local council to ensure money flows in his local community as he would desire to see it flow. I also say to the member that, before we get to that stage, you need to be able to finance the rebuilding. You need to be able to put the dollars in, which is why as a government we have announced a package—\$5.6 billion—to rebuild the nation. Of course, we are very likely to see those estimates rise, and we need to also meet the reconstruction costs required after

the cyclone, which he refers to, which hit Mission Beach.

Now, we have to fund that rebuilding. So you have to make some choices here—no lazy choices; no three-word slogans; no quick whiz-around with emails looking for suggestions about what to cut that will actually fix this for you. You have to stump up to the responsibility of making choices. I would say to the member opposite that it seems to me that it will be quite difficult for him to go to a community that has been so hard hit and say that he represents a political party that has been prepared to support a levy to fund its election promises but is not prepared to support a levy to rebuild Queensland. That is the essential choice facing members of this parliament.

I believe the member is a person of good will. I would suggest to him that he considers those questions and that he does not follow the Leader of the Opposition blindly down a narrow track of partisan political interests, with the national interest and the interests of Queensland swept to one side.

Schools

Ms SMYTH (3.15 pm)—My question is to the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth. How will the My School website deliver greater transparency and information to parents?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the member for her question. The fact is that My School has transformed community understanding of school performance, providing the community and parents with information about important areas of schooling, including literacy and numeracy—information that was never before available other than for education bureaucrats and officials. With some 4.6 million visits to the My School site since its launch, it is clearly a matter of great interest to all Australians.

Now My School 2.0 will take transparency to a new level, with significant new features. Importantly, financial data on each school will be reported for the first time to everyone to provide a clear picture of the resources that are provided to schools to support the education of students. The collection of this financial data is a complex task and to ensure that it is robust information and comparable, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority—ACARA—commissioned a detailed validation process undertaken by leading accounting firm, Deloitte. Later in November Deloitte identified an anomaly in the information collected, which could lead to a misstatement of recurrent income for independent schools. Deloitte recommended to ACARA that further validation and consultation take place.

On 2 December I announced that My School 2.0 would only be launched after this further validation, and consultation with independent schools, had been undertaken. I also wrote to the ACARA chair requesting a detailed timetable on how outstanding school data issues would be resolved. I can inform the House that over summer ACARA has liaised extensively with individual schools and consulted with the Independent Schools Council and relevant state and territory associations of independent schools because I wanted to make sure that impacted schools had been contacted by ACARA and that they had had time to check their data and understand how the data will be used and reported.

I can advise that every independent school in the country has been contacted by ACARA by email. Follow-up contact by telephone has been made when requested and as required and over 900 independent schools now have school finance data reports that have been quality assured by ACARA, Deloitte and my department. These schools are now being given the opportunity to re-

view what their My School finance page will look like because My School 2.0 will also include an enhanced ICSEA—Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage—where the methodology has been improved to provide a more accurate direct measure based on parent education and occupation. It is a case of making good data even better.

The change to ICSEA methodology has led to some changes in ICSEA values and less than four per cent of all schools did request a review of their ICSEA value. These schools were given the opportunity to provide more relevant data or information on changed school context. Now schools and systems have had nearly three months to provide the additional data in support of their review request. Information has been considered by the ICSEA expert panel to be satisfied that each school's value is robust based on the most accurate data available.

So today, I am pleased to advise that the further work I asked ACARA to do in relation to school data has almost been completed and that My School 2.0 will be ready for release on 4 March. With My School 2.0 ready for release on 4 March the government will deliver an important and fundamental reform—one acknowledged by the Leader of the Opposition as worthy of the name 'reform'. Importantly, it is a reform that empowers parents to influence the quality of their child's schooling and empowers education ministers, for the first time, with a national dataset to target school improvement. Importantly, it is a reform that underpins this government's substantial reforms in the area of education. We want to provide every school in Australia with the possibilities of a great education.

Queensland Floods

Mrs PRENTICE (3.20 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to her answer to my question yesterday, where she

refused to commit to funding Brisbane's flood affected infrastructure without more information. Does she agree with the comments of Brisbane's lord mayor today:

The Prime Minister can't have it both ways. On one hand she had enough information to set a flood levy but on the other hand she claims she doesn't have enough information to spend it.

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for her question and I indicate now that I will seek to deal with this matter at the appropriate time for the making of personal explanations. What I said yesterday is what I stand by, and what I stand by is that I spoke to the lord mayor a number of weeks ago in Brisbane during the flooding crisis. I have spoken to him today and I have, on all occasions, made very clear to him that we will work with his council to rebuild. I have also made clear to him that I will not commit the funding of the Commonwealth using less information than he would view as appropriate if he was making a funding decision sitting at his council as lord mayor.

I know the member has sat on that council. I accept that the lord mayor would have sat with her and other councillors and made a wide variety of funding decisions. They would have done that on the basis of information. They would have done it on the basis of likely costs. So I am not taking an approach less rigorous in making decisions about federal government funds than the lord mayor would take approaching his own decision. He would expect to know what the amount is.

As it is, the lord mayor indicated to me today that he cannot fully cost the amount yet. He has, following that conversation, sent me a letter with some preliminary figures. In the interests of fiscal rigour, I would obviously not work on the basis of such preliminary figures. We will continue to work through proper processes.

Mrs Mirabella—Well scrap the NBN, then—scrap the NBN if you've got any guts. You're a disgrace. You're a joke.

Ms GILLARD—Can I say to the member, on the comparison she makes with the levy, what an absurd comparison. What I said when I announced the \$5.6 billion funding package is that we were making room for \$5.6 billion, it was against what we knew then about damage, we would make more available as necessary, we needed to find ways to fund it and in order to do that we would make room in the Commonwealth budget through cuts and reprioritising and deferrals and we would ask Australians to make a contribution. That is what I said when I announced the levy. That is what I stand by.

I presume it is the position of the member that Brisbane City Council should be treated generously. Well, if she believes that then she has to step up to the political responsibility of saying, 'How do you fund it?' She sits on the backbenches of a political party with no idea about how to do it. Last time they tried to touch budget questions they engaged in an \$11 billion black hole, and of course the funding package they have announced is so shaky, so despicable, that even the Deputy Leader of the Opposition does not endorse it.

I would also say to the member who asked me the question, who knows her community well: how is it she campaigned in that community at the last election advocating the paying of a \$6 billion levy and now she is not prepared to go to that community and support a levy to rebuild the community? I think community members are going to be asking her some very difficult questions about that. On the question of Brisbane City Council, I await the accurate information.

Mrs Mirabella—We're waiting for accurate information too, Julia.

Climate Change

Mr MURPHY (3.24 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. Will the minister outline the government's commitment—

Mrs Mirabella interjecting—

Mr MURPHY—to building public understanding about climate change and carbon—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Reid will resume his seat. The member for Indi is warned. The member for Reid has the call. If he wishes, he may start the question again because I was distracted.

Mr MURPHY—My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. Will the minister outline the government's commitment to building public understanding about climate change and a carbon price?

Mr COMBET—I would like to thank my colleague the member for Reid for the question. Many people in the community do want access to independent information to inform them about climate change. Today, to help this need, the government has announced the establishment of the Climate Commission—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson is warned!

Mr COMBET—which will allow for independent information for members of the community. There will be a concentration on three areas in particular: firstly, the science of climate change and its impacts on this country; secondly, the progress of international action to reduce emissions; and, thirdly, what a carbon price is and how it interacts with our economy and our communities.

I think the membership of the commission is very well suited and qualified to provide this information. Professor Tim Flannery will

be the chief commissioner of the commission. As the House knows, he is one of Australia's leading science communicators, with very extensive experience in climate science and conservation, and he was Australian of the Year in 2007. Other members of the commission include well-respected climate scientists Professor Lesley Hughes from Macquarie University and Professor Will Steffen from the Australian National University; Dr Susannah Elliott, CEO of the Australian Science Media Centre; Mr Roger Beale, an economist and former head of the Commonwealth Department of the Environment; and Mr Gerry Hueston, a prominent member of the business community and former executive of BP.

These commissioners will be assisted by an advisory panel of climate scientists whose specific expertise will be called on, obviously, to provide information and advice on the science of climate change. The commission will support open and balanced discussion about climate change and what it means for the Australian economy and our environment.

The government is determined to tackle climate change. As a country, we are the highest per capita emitters of carbon pollution, and a carbon price is needed in our economy to cut pollution and drive investment in clean energy. The projected growth in our pollution to 2020 is 24 per cent above 2000 levels, which demonstrates the size of the challenge ahead of us. A price tag on pollution is the key to driving transformation in our economy. This will be a key debate this year that will influence the future of our country.

On the other side of this House, the Leader of the Opposition has the opportunity to take responsibility and stand up for the national interest of this country. So far, all we have heard from the Leader of the Oppo-

sition is 'stop this', 'end this', 'don't do this', 'no' and stunning silences in certain interchanges. The Leader of the Opposition says no to everything—'stop this', 'no', 'don't do it', 'end this'. The most telling thing about his leadership of the opposition is that at no point has he stood up and taken a principled stand to support what is right and what is necessary in our national interest. This is a key opportunity. He needs to show the leadership that is necessary for this country on such a key challenge.

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

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (3.29 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER—Does the Prime Minister claim to have been misrepresented?

Ms GILLARD—Yes, I do.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Ms GILLARD—I refer to a report today on the front page of the *Courier Mail* which states:

The Prime Minister, in responding to a question on the issue during a sitting of Federal Parliament yesterday, declared Brisbane City Council was big enough to deal with its own recovery costs.

That claim is untrue. I never said those words. They do not stand for what I said yesterday. I would refer people to the *Hansard* for the accurate version.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.30 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr ABBOTT—Yes, most grievously.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr ABBOTT—Several ministers claimed that I supported a paid parental leave levy, without mentioning that it would be entirely offset by a 1.5 per cent—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition cannot debate his personal explanation.

Mr ABBOTT—They should stop misleading the House.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (3.31 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mrs PRENTICE—Most grievously, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mrs PRENTICE—The Lord Mayor of Brisbane faxed a two-page letter and three pages of costings to the Prime Minister's office—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member must show where she has been misrepresented.

Mrs PRENTICE—The Prime Minister claimed that I referred to preliminary costings only, and I was not referring to preliminary costings; I was referring to detailed costings.

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

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS

Report No. 27 of 2010-11

The SPEAKER (3.31 pm)—I present the Auditor-General's Audit report No. 27 of 2010-11 entitled *Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin*.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.32 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

COMMITTEES

Selection Committee Reports Nos 12 and 13

The SPEAKER (3.32 pm)—I present the Selection Committee's reports Nos 12 and 13 relating to the consideration of bills. The reports will be printed in today's *Hansard* and the committee's determinations will appear on tomorrow's *Notice Paper*. Copies of the reports have been placed on the table.

The reports read as follows—

Report relating to the consideration of bills introduced on 9 February 2011

1. The committee met in private session on Wednesday, 9 February 2011.
2. The committee determined that the following bills not be referred to committees:
 - Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011; and
 - Electronic Transactions Amendment Bill 2011.

Report relating to the consideration of bills introduced on 10 February 2011

1. The committee met in private session on Thursday, 10 February 2011.
2. The committee determined that the following two bills be referred to the Standing Committee on Economics—
 - the Income Tax Rates Amendment (Temporary Flood Reconstruction Levy) Bill 2011; and
 - the Tax Laws Amendment (Temporary Flood Reconstruction Levy) Bill 2011.
3. The committee determined that the following bills not be referred to committees—

- Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2010-2011;
- Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2010-2011;
- Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011; and
- Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (MRCA Supplement) Bill 2011.

HARMAN, MS GILLIAN

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Human Services and Minister for Social Inclusion) (3.33 pm)—Mr Speaker, on indulgence: Centrelink worker, Gillian Harman, spent a month volunteering in flood-hit Queensland in Dalby. She left her home in New South Wales to work there when volunteers were called for. She returned home on Sunday night and went straight back to work in her Centrelink office in Guyra in northern New South Wales on Monday and, tragically, was killed on Monday going home from the office.

I know that the shadow minister and her local member would want to join me in saying that Gillian represented everything that is best in the Australian Public Service, giving so willingly, and it is tragic that she has been taken from her parents, Janet and Kevin Harman, and her family.

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (3.33 pm)—Any death in these circumstances is a tragedy. In the case of someone who so generously volunteered her time to assist the victims of the recent disaster, it is a tragedy upon a tragedy. All members of the coalition join in extending our condolences to the family of Gillian Harman.

The SPEAKER (3.34 pm)—On behalf of all members of the House, I associate myself and the House with the remarks of the Minister for Human Services and the member for Menzies.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Flood Levy

The SPEAKER—I have received a letter from the honourable the Leader of the Opposition proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The adverse effect of the flood levy on Australians.

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 ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.35 pm)—Over the last few weeks, every Australian has witnessed the devastation that so many regions of this country have suffered because of the summer of disaster. We have all seen the devastation. We have all felt for the people impacted. All of us, right around Australia, obviously want everything that is humanly possible to be done as quickly as possible to help those people bring their lives together again in the wake of these terrible disasters.

Everyone wants to see the reconstruction happen soon. Everyone wants to see the reconstruction happen right. Everyone wants to see the reconstruction properly funded. The difference between this side of the House and the other side of the House is that the government wants to see it funded through an unnecessary new tax and members on this side of the House want to see it funded through affordable, achievable, sensible savings from unnecessary government expenditure.

We have had a tough summer and we need a strong government to respond. A strong government should expect at least as much of itself as it does of its citizens. A strong and

brave people, as Australians are, deserve a strong government not an indulgent one. That is why the Prime Minister should be putting her hand into the government's pockets to meet the cost of flood reconstruction. She should not be putting her hand yet again deeper into the pockets of struggling Australian families.

But this is not the last raid on the Australian people that this government will be perpetrating this year; it is but the first attempt by this government to pick the pockets of the Australian people in what will be the year of the big new taxes, if this government has its way. There is the mining tax, there is the carbon tax and there is the higher tax on people with private health insurance. The Prime Minister says, 'Oh no, you don't need to worry, it's just a temporary tax; trust me,' just like she asked us before the election to trust her that there would be no carbon tax and to trust her that there would be a climate change people's assembly. We simply cannot trust this government when it comes to tax because this is a government which cannot cut its own spending and, because it cannot cut its own spending, it now wants the Australian people to cut their spending. It is just wrong.

The Prime Minister was at pains to say that the cost of reconstruction would be very high, that the government was facing a very big bill—\$5.6 billion. I agree: that is a big bill. But it is just 1½ per cent of the government's annual income. It is about 10 per cent of what the government is gladly spending on the National Broadband Network. It is just 30 per cent of what the government has spent—and in many cases wasted—on the Building the Education Revolution program. In fact, the \$1.8 billion that the Prime Minister's new tax will raise is about the same as the cost blow-out that this incompetent and extravagant government perpetrated in the school halls program and it is even less than

the \$2.4 billion that the government completely wasted in the pink batts program. It did not hit us with a levy for the National Broadband Network. It did not hit us with a levy for the BER. Now it is hitting us with a levy because it has been so wasteful and extravagant in the past. The government should pay for its mistakes. It should not try to make the people pay for its mistakes, which is why we have this unnecessary new tax.

There have been cyclones before in this country, there have been floods before in this country, but never before has there been this kind of unnecessary new tax because there has never before been a government of quite this level of waste and incompetence. Why should the Australian people be hit with a levy to meet expenses which a competent, adult, prudent government should be able to cover from the ordinary revenues of government? It raises \$350 billion a year and it cannot find \$1.8 billion to meet what should be something that a prudent government could find out of its ordinary revenues.

There are people in Queensland and Victoria today—tens of thousands of them, in fact—many of them on low incomes, who have to spend tens of thousands of dollars just to make their flood and storm impacted homes habitable. They will get no insurance payouts. They will get precious little assistance from government. People earning less than \$50,000 a year will be expected to spend far more than \$50,000 just to make their homes liveable. They will not be putting their hand out to anyone else, yet this government cannot do the minimum that it is doing without putting its hand deep into the pockets of Australian taxpayers. This is a government with an income of \$350 billion a year that cannot find \$1.8 billion without a new tax. To put that into perspective, it is like someone with \$350 in his pocket who cannot find \$1.80 for a good cause. The Australian people know what it is like to have to

tighten their belts in tough times and they deserve a government which is capable of tightening its belt when it faces unforeseen extra expenses.

It is true that the Prime Minister did announce as part of this package some cuts. She announced cuts to programs that should never have been announced in the first place, like the cash-for-clunkers programs. She announced cuts to programs which the coalition had already committed to cutting and which it was roundly criticised for by the government. This government should not be given any credit for reversing decisions that should never have been made in the first place, and certainly this government should get no credit whatsoever for cuts to flood mitigation works on the Bruce Highway. What sort of a government, in responding to a flood disaster, would cut spending on flood mitigation works? At the heart of the government's response is a new tax. This is not just any new tax. According to the Prime Minister in this very House this morning, the new tax at the heart of this government's flood response is 'an expression of goodwill between Australians'. This is a tax and a half—it is an expression of goodwill. It is 'a way of honouring the dignity and resilience that Australians have shown throughout this ordeal'. Isn't that fantastic! The next lot of people to get gongs will be hit with a new tax because that is how this government thinks you should honour people—by hitting them with a new tax.

I said this week that the Prime Minister has a decent heart, but I tell you what: she has got a tin ear. She sure does not understand anything about mateship, because if she understood anything about mateship at all she would know that mateship is not taxing people; mateship is helping people. She would know that mateship is not what you are taxed to give; mateship is what you choose to give. She would know that mate-

ship does not come from governments; it comes from people and communities.

It is true, as the Prime Minister has also said, that the Howard government did impose some levies, but the Howard government did not turn a \$20 billion surplus into a \$50 billion deficit. People trusted the Howard government with money, and the only way the current government thinks it might be trusted with money is by appointing a Howard government minister to oversee it. The only person in the Gillard government who could be trusted with money was in fact the former member for Melbourne, Lindsay Tanner, and he is gone because he did not trust the Prime Minister and he would not come back—and she would not even ask him to come back; instead, she turned to John Fahey.

We know that there is fat in this budget because the Prime Minister keeps telling us that if the bill is more than \$5.6 billion there will be more savings. If more than \$5.6 billion is needed, there will be more savings, she says, not more taxes. Well, if there are more savings to be had, let us take them now. If there are more savings to be had, let us take the fat off government, let us not take 'the lean' off citizens.

This week the shadow Treasurer and I put forward a raft of further savings, real savings over the forward estimates, real savings to eliminate the need for real tax increases. These are the proposals that I would like to sit down with the Prime Minister and discuss in a spirit of bipartisanship. These are the proposals that I would like to discuss with her in a spirit of national unity brought on by this flood crisis. If she really does want to bring the nation together—to 'get them through this together' as she said to the parliament today—she would take up this offer to sit down and negotiate savings in a spirit of national unity. If she has got more sav-

ings, if she has got better savings, I am only too happy to agree to those extra savings in a spirit of national unity. As things stand, people have suffered enough, and they do not deserve to suffer through a new tax. The one thing that they will never have to suffer under a coalition government is an unnecessary new tax, a tax that could easily be replaced by savings found from the budget.

I fear that we are already seeing signs from this government of the same kind of incompetence and ineptitude which blighted its delivery of so many programs in the past, such as the school halls and pink batts programs. The Treasurer says that his tax will raise \$1.8 billion, but he cannot say how many people will actually pay it. The Prime Minister says that she will pay \$5.6 billion out, but she cannot say what it will actually be spent on. The Prime Minister tells us that this new tax is just a cup of coffee a week, but what we heard today was that the cup of coffee a week becomes a coffee machine a week in the case of some taxpayers. The Prime Minister says that flood victims will not pay the tax. That is simply wrong. Donors will pay, volunteers will pay and victims will pay. People who have lost their businesses but not their homes will pay this new tax.

The task of government is to respond intelligently to the problems of the nation. The task of leaders is not just to feel people's pain; it is to solve their problems. I hope that the Prime Minister, in the weeks and months ahead, can confidently address the people's problems despite her previous failings, but I know that, unless she changes her mind, she will add to their pain with this unnecessary tax. As far as this government is concerned, 2011 is the year of new taxes; as far as this opposition is concerned, it should be the year in which governments finally start to live within their means.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (3.50 pm)—We have been through a dreadful summer, a summer where Australians have turned to each other, a summer where Australians have shown that they want to look after each other. Australians have acted to help each other. Australians are now looking to this parliament to give them the leadership the nation deserves at this time. Australians know that the nation needs to rebuild from the devastating summer that was. When Australians turn to this parliament they do not expect to see this tragedy being used for cheap politicking. They do not expect to see this parliament degenerate into a rabble around what needs to be done to rebuild the nation. Instead, they expect decisions to be made and action to be taken, and as Prime Minister I am going to do just that.

That is why I have outlined a \$5.6 billion funding package. That is why I have outlined plans to start the rebuilding now. That is why we are prepared to make a \$2 billion payment available to Queensland. That is why we have set in place measures to make sure value for money is obtained, including a reconstruction inspectorate, including audited accounts, including a national partnership arrangement and including the involvement of people like Mr John Fahey and Mr Brad Orgill. We want to get on with the job of rebuilding the nation. That is what the national interest requires. And the national interest requires this burden to be shared. Yes, the government have to make room for it in their budget—and we have. We have done it through making some tough and difficult decisions. We have done it through reprioritising infrastructure to deal with questions of capacity constraints. We have done it by making sure we streamline the skilled migration we may need to build the nation. We have done it by making the decisions necessary to get unemployed people to step up to the jobs they can get in rebuilding the nation.

We have put together a comprehensive package and, yes, it includes asking Australians for a contribution too. That is the right thing to do at a time when the nation needs it. At every point we have been motivated by the national interest.

Unfortunately, what we have seen on every occasion from the Leader of the Opposition is the national interest cast aside in pursuit of narrow political interests. At a time when Australians were turning to each other, urging each other to dig deeper for flood victims, the Leader of the Opposition was out there asking them to dig deeper to fund the Liberal Party. The Leader of the Opposition is very keen to throw insults around; let me say this: I have never seen such a tin heart. Of course, the Leader of the Opposition may have been let down by his party organisation, but what he needed to then do was say they had done the wrong thing. But he was asked by Barrie Cassidy:

But to do it in that way, to attach it—the fundraising request—

to a letter detailing information about the floods—you don't think that was just a little insensitive and in poor taste on the part of the party?

And the Leader of the Opposition replied:

Well people will make their own judgements.

Never a truer word was spoken. People will make their own judgments on a man who did not condemn fundraising for the Liberal Party when the nation was turning to fundraising for flood victims.

On the question of the national interest versus narrow political interest, what we have seen on each and every occasion is the Leader of the Opposition out there seeking to pursue narrow political interest. Did you hear his speech at the Gold Coast to a group of Young Liberals, when the nation was still reeling from the shock of these natural disasters, before we were even touched by the

cyclone and there was more devastation to come, when the people of Queensland and Brisbane were looking at their houses filled with filthy floodwaters and wondering how they were ever going to clean up? There was the Leader of the Opposition on the Gold Coast in front of the Liberal Party faithful, trying to work out how he could surf these floodwaters into Kirribilli. That was the main thing on his mind—all about his political interest. Could he use this somehow to put pressure on the Independents to make a different decision about the composition of the government? It is narrow political interest every step of the way.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition: people would take him more seriously if the narrow political interest had also not been on display in putting together his so-called alternative package. When we laboured over the \$5.6 billion funding package, we laboured in the interests of the nation. The Leader of the Opposition and his team laboured over the reports of focus groups to help them work out what was in their political interest, as reported in the newspaper. Were they studying documents to work out the national interest or studying documents to work out his political interest? We all know the answer to that.

Let's just go through the hypocrisy that is driving the Leader of the Opposition's campaign. He is not opposed to tax. He was a member of a government whose tax as a share of GDP was as follows. The tax to GDP figure of the Howard government when they left office was 23.5 per cent.

Dr Emerson—A record.

Ms GILLARD—This is a man who is not opposed to tax. Someone just said it was a record; actually, it was not the Howard government's record, I dread to correct. Actually, the Howard government record was at 24.1 per cent. This is a man not opposed to tax.

Currently, tax as a share of GDP is 20.9 per cent. This is a man not opposed to tax. The Leader of the Opposition is out there saying he cannot support the levy because he does not like burdens and he worries about all of this. That was his track record on tax when he was in government.

What is his track record on supporting levies? The most remarkable thing—or probably not the most remarkable; one of the most remarkable things—about the few weeks that have been is that, before I was talking about a levy, it was supported by members of the coalition. Senator Joyce and Senator Ron Boswell were out there supporting levies. As soon as I announced the levy, the coalition was opposed to it. What does that tell you? That is telling you it is all about them working out the politics, not working out the nation's interest. When the Leader of the Opposition was in government, he was very, very pleased to support levies. He gave the superannuation surcharge levy the tick. He gave the gun buyback levy the tick, though someone on \$60,000 paying that levy in 1996-97 was being asked for a bigger dollar contribution than we are asking them for today. Have a think about that—a bigger dollar contribution than we are asking them for today, but he gave that one the tick. He gave the stevedoring levy a tick, the milk levy a tick, the sugar levy a tick, the Ansett Airlines levy a tick and the proposed East Timor levy a tick. Indeed, he was so fond of levies that he went to the last election promising a \$6 billion levy to fund his election promises.

Now, of course, he comes into this parliament and says he could not contemplate a levy to rebuild the nation. What hypocrisy is this? It was good enough for the Leader of the Opposition to propose a levy to fund his election promises but it is not good enough for him to support a levy to rebuild the nation. It is all about the political interest, not about the national interest—not at any point.

Then the Leader of the Opposition says, 'Savings should be made on the budget.' Savings have been made on the budget—hard savings; proper savings; properly costed savings. The Leader of the Opposition never understands that because he has never made a hard saving or a properly costed saving. We know one of the single biggest reasons he is sitting in the chair of the Leader of the Opposition is that, when he was called on to deal with financial questions during the election campaign, he created an \$11 billion black hole. This is his track record when it comes to financial management questions: no expertise; no track record; no idea.

So, against this backdrop, you would have thought the Leader of the Opposition might have thought to himself, 'It can be a bit hard to do all of this—work the budget out.' But, no, he was out there on 27 January saying, 'It's easy enough to find savings; it's easy enough.' Then there were days and days and days and days of delay. What finally came out of the process, quickly cobbled together, with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition desperately fighting back against cutbacks she did not agree with? What has come out is a package that does not stand up to any scrutiny.

Let us just go through it. It delays funding under the BER. They want tradespeople to walk off half-completed jobs in schools. I say to that: give us the list. Let us know which schools. You should do that if you are a decent person. They, of course, have succumbed to an email campaign. So desperate were they for savings that someone scrambled through their deleted emails and found a campaign about cutting \$500 million to Indonesian schools, and they all looked at each other in their desperation and division and said: 'That'll be good enough. Why don't we whack that in there?' But no-one bothered to tell the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. She knows this is wrong, she knows this is

against the national interest and she should be saying it loud and long.

Then, of course, they said they are going to cut back water entitlement purchasing through the Murray-Darling Basin. What an act of contempt for the people of Adelaide! What an act of contempt to say that they are not worth the reform that the Murray-Darling Basin requires! The Leader of the Opposition has never found a good day to buy back water entitlements. When the river is in drought, no, you cannot buy them then, because the river is in drought. When the river is in flood, you cannot buy them then. I say to the Leader of the Opposition: if we are going to do this long-term reform, we need to buy back water entitlements. He should not treat the people of Adelaide with this kind of contempt.

Then, of course, there are GP superclinics. The Leader of the Opposition has never found a healthcare cutback he did not love, so we are not surprised that is on the list. Then he wants to rip money off disadvantaged schools around the country. There's a smart one: get the most impoverished kids with the fewest life opportunities in the nation and make sure they continue to have the fewest life opportunities in the nation! What an offensive suggestion from a man who was a member of a government that never bothered to do anything about disadvantage in schools! Of course, this list of shabby opportunism just goes on. It does not add up. It does not make sense.

Honourable members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—I say to the Leader of the Opposition that he has the ability to show that he can rise above the persona that he has developed so far. He has the ability to show he can rise above the three-word slogans. I say to the Leader of the Opposition: now is the time to put down the polling. Now is the time to cut out the scare campaign. Now is

the time to toss away the lines document his advisers have given him and do something in the national interest, and that is to support the government in rebuilding the nation, including the levy. That is the right thing to do. It is what people are looking at this parliament to do.

Honourable members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—This levy is responsible, it is fair, it is temporary, it is in the national interest and I support it. I believe the Australian people will understand why we are asking them to make this contribution. I say to the Leader of the Opposition that he should support it too. He has no alternative. He has no credibility. His own frontbench do not agree with the figures he put out earlier this week. In those circumstances, it is time for the Leader of the Opposition to say: 'I made an error on this one, I am a man capable of acknowledging that and I will support the federal government's levy. I will support rebuilding the nation.' That is the right thing to do. It is what Australians are looking for. Do not go mining for the political interest; act in the national interests. Australians are better than the Leader of the Opposition thinks. They will support this levy—it is the right thing to do—and so should he. (*Time expired*)

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Before calling the honourable member for Flinders, I remind honourable members that they are not supposed to interject from their seats.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (4.05 pm)—I seek leave to table the Prime Minister's statement on the Queensland floods on the ALP website dated 2 February, accompanied by a green dollar sign requesting contributions to the ALP, including \$10,000 for television advertising and \$50 for 30 calls for election advertising.

Leave not granted.

Mr HUNT—Why not? That's a little embarrassing, isn't it?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (4.05 pm)—The Prime Minister continues to disappoint. She continues to disappoint those who expect better from the occupants of the high office of Prime Minister. At a time when this country is looking for leadership, the Prime Minister becomes a partisan point-scorer. We disagree on the tax; we disagree on how reconstruction should be funded; but we do not impute bad motives to the government. Yet the Prime Minister, in her speech to the House just now, made it personal. She suggested bad faith. She suggested bad motives. She has impugned the reputation of members on this side of the House. She continues to disappoint. She is unable to reach the high standard that is expected of a Prime Minister of this country.

Mr Gray—Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: I ask the speaker to refer to the Prime Minister as the Prime Minister.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I am sure the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is aware of the provisions of standing order 64. The Prime Minister should be referred to as the Prime Minister.

Ms JULIE BISHOP—I do note that the Prime Minister now has a penchant for the personal pronoun at every turn.

May I suggest that it is time for the Prime Minister to take a reality check on the current debate in this country on how to fund reconstruction necessary after the recent natural disasters? There are three undeniable facts. First, it is true that an individual instance of a natural disaster may be unforeseen; that is a fact. However, secondly—and this is a very important point—natural disaster as a policy issue is not unforeseen. That, too, is a fact. We know that a natural disaster happens in some form, and probably occurs,

every month of the year in Australia, whether it be drought, storms, floods or bushfires. You do not have to be Nostradamus to be able to predict that. Donald Rumsfeld would probably call it, 'an unforeseen foreseen event'.

That then leads to the third undeniable fact: governments should always be ready for natural disasters. Natural disasters are not uncommon in Australia. Indeed, every federal budget must make contingencies to meet the government's obligations to rebuild in the face of natural disasters. However, the government—in the long tradition of Labor governments—has opted for the tax route—the lazy way out—to raise a special tax to undertake one of its core responsibilities. Instead of funding it from the money it has already extracted from the Australian people by way of taxes it is going to impose yet another tax.

It is a core responsibility of government to be ready for such events. However, because in the space of three years Labor have squandered the magnificent financial position created by the Howard government over 11½ years, they have to resort to a new tax. Previous governments did not require a new tax to fund the aftermath of Cyclone Tracy; the previous government 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; and there was no special tax to deal with the floods of 1974. Good budget management tells you that you should not rely on one-off tax rises every time a natural disaster occurs.

It is like taking out insurance; it is a prudent financial decision that should be written into any risk assessment. Instead, the sad fact is that the government is still recklessly borrowing \$100 million a day to feed its spending binge. As the shadow Treasurer said yesterday, the government is spending \$45 bil-

lion on interest repayments over the next four years alone. That is \$45 billion on the debt it has run up because it cannot manage a budget. It would not know a surplus if it fell over one. Over the next four years the government intends to spend \$1.5 trillion, and we should not underestimate the long-term damage that Australians will have to wear because of Labor's economic mismanagement.

It cannot organise itself, with the huge revenues it already collects, to finance one of its core responsibilities. Instead, Labor defaults to a new tax. It is part of its pavlovian response: tax and spend, tax and spend. Over the last three years Labor has increased taxes on cars, it has increased taxes on alcohol and increased tax on cigarettes. Its history of waste is just appalling. The waste flagship is the Building the Education Revolution. This Prime Minister's legacy from her days as the education minister is billions of dollars wasted under ministerial incompetence that we have not seen before in this country. It is a shameful record. Then there were the home insulation programs—massive waste—the solar heating program and the laptops in schools program. Labor has wasted multiple times the amount of money it hopes to collect from the flood tax.

The government has a budget of \$350 billion every year, but it cannot find \$1.8 billion to repair the country after the natural disasters we have experienced. It cannot find \$1.8 billion without Australians having to pay another tax. Labor has actually been exposed on this one because, in a moment of candour, the Prime Minister admitted that if the reconstruction costs were in excess of the estimate she could find the necessary cuts. We plead with the Prime Minister: identify those cuts now. It is not the time to raise the cost of living by slugging Australians with new taxes. People have been hit hard by the floods, Australians are already experiencing

rising interest rates, the cost of living is on the rise, electricity prices are rising, schooling costs are rising, transport costs are rising, Labor's National Broadband Network will result in higher costs for basic communications and the government plans to introduce this year not only a flood tax but a carbon tax and a mining tax.

What is quite extraordinary, though, is that yesterday in question time the Treasurer could not tell us how many people are going to be hit by the flood tax. He could come up with the final number of \$1.8 billion but he had no idea how many people would be paying it.

Mr Crean—In question time yesterday he gave the answer.

Ms JULIE BISHOP—In question time yesterday he had no idea. This will be a kick in the guts to small business people. There are no exemptions for small business from the tax, even if their commercial properties were hit by the floods or cyclones. In a very telling exchange yesterday, the member for Brisbane noted that a small business in her electorate was flooded up to its ceiling, lost vital equipment, suffered \$200,000 worth of damage and was out of business for two weeks but had to pay the tax. We asked the Prime Minister about it and her response was—and I ask members to listen to this:

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.

And, this is the point:

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.

Impacted personally—as a product of the Labor machine, the Prime Minister does not understand that when you are a small business person your business absorbs your life. You are impacted personally. In fact, the response from the Prime Minister just demonstrates that the Labor Party has no concept of small business and how they are constantly propped up by family budgets to keep those businesses afloat.

All in all, this tax is an increased cost burden on the Australian people and the government should be doing everything it can to relieve cost burdens on the Australian people. This is not leadership; this is a lazy response from a lazy government. Its first response is always a tax. It is a shame that the Labor Party does not have robust policy debates within its cabinet, but the self-described zombies accept the lazy public policy efforts of the Prime Minister, whose policy record is a shambles on Medicare Gold, on cash for clunkers, on the citizens assembly and on the East Timor processing centre. This Prime Minister has no public policy feel. Her response is a tax. The government is incapable of showing any discipline when it comes to fiscal management. It cannot manage the money it already extracts from the Australian people. It will not be able to manage the tax it raises from this levy. The government should show some discipline. The government should not impose a tax on the Australian people. (*Time expired*)

Mr CREAN (Hotham—Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts) (4.16 pm)—I think from this matter of public importance we have just seen why Tony Abbott, the Leader of the Opposition, is not fit to be Prime Minister of this country—because he has failed the leadership test. At a time when the country is seeking unity after the greatest natural disaster ever to hit us, he

seeks to divide the community for his own political ambition, not because he has a credible alternative but for his own grubby political ambition. That is not leadership; that is shameful.

This is a nation that is in mourning, it is a nation that has been devastated, but it is also a nation that came together when it mattered. It came together in grief, it came together in emergency, it came together in its relief efforts and it came together in the clean-up. What people expect of us as a parliament is that we come together in helping them to rebuild. That is why we have sought to get bipartisan support for this position. Those who are the victims and those who have helped would ask nothing less than for us as a parliament to demonstrate a preparedness to work together. Of the members that I have been around with who said that same thing to me on the ground when I visited their electorates, inspected the devastation and talked about the need for a partnership and urged me that we have to work together, I cannot believe that they have allowed their leader, with very little internal debate, as I understand it, to announce this decision to oppose the levy.

The truth is that this is going to require a massive rebuild. This is something the country has not experienced before and, quite frankly, if we can get our act together, we can generate opportunity, we can generate hope and we can generate a rebuild which is stronger than that which was devastated. But it does require us to do it together. Everywhere that I have visited I have heard positive responses to our calls for the need for a national partnership to be involved in this rebuild. With the mayors that I have spoken with and the involvement of the regional development bodies—I see a member of the opposition laughs at the suggestion of the mayors being involved—I made the point that the mayors have a critical involvement

in this selection because they will help us determine the priorities. We need to have that local input, we need to have their engagement and we need to have their commitment. That is why we have been out there engaging with them to achieve that very purpose. But we also need cooperation across the shires. That is why we need to look at the impact, particularly of the infrastructure losses, to see how the communities can be connected.

We have talked about the partnership not just with local government but also with state government, because the national disaster relief arrangements require that partnership by legislation. But it also has to be a partnership that involves the private sector, the insurance sector and NGOs. If we are to drive the partnership, we have to show the leadership. That is what this exercise is about. It is about this government, our Prime Minister, demonstrating that we are prepared to stump up, that we do appreciate the magnitude of the problem and that we are prepared to make a commitment, but it is a commitment that has to be achieved through a number of different mechanisms from our point of view. One of them is the levy, but the levy involves in a two-to-one ratio what we are prepared to put in through savings in the budget. In other words, the savings measures that we have announced to fund this effort contribute twice as much as that which would be raised by the levy.

Let me come to the levy question. I have talked about the lack of leadership demonstrated by the Leader of the Opposition, but his hypocrisy is breathtaking. This is a leader and an opposition—and I heard the interjections across the table during question time, particularly from the shadow minister for finance—who say that tax is not leadership. I think you had better go and talk to the former Prime Minister and the former Treasurer about that test. Weren't they the ones that introduced to the nation the mother of all

taxes, the GST, on the basis of their saying, 'This requires leadership and we are showing leadership'? They criticised us as an opposition for opposing them and said that we would not join them in that leadership. What cant; what hypocrisy. So don't come in here and talk about that.

Quite apart from the GST, the mother of all taxes in this country, we have six levies that they introduced, including an 11c levy on milk. That raised \$2 billion whilst it was in operation. Milk is basic food and they put a levy on it to fund the restructuring of the dairy industry. They talk about us not planning properly for natural disasters. Who could have planned for the one of the magnitude we have just had, I might add. But what about planning for the restructuring of an industry as important as the dairy industry? What was the solution? A tax on every Australian for every litre of milk that they purchased.

Then there was a 3c levy on every kilogram of sugar. Why? Because they failed so miserably in their negotiations for a free trade agreement with the United States that they left sugar out, sold the National Party down the drain and made the Australian public pay for it. Then there were the guns levy buyback and East Timor levy, both of those precisely the same formula as the levy we are proposing. So, for all the argument about the superannuation and the compensation, the levy that you imposed for the guns buyback and the East Timor levy would have applied exactly the same way. Do not give us any more of your cant and hypocrisy.

Then we had a levy for the bailout of Ansett. They refused to step in and try to save the airline. When the thing collapsed in front of them because of inaction, they put another levy on. Then there was the levy for the response to terrorism—a levy on reinsurance. That is six levies and a GST. This was a gov-

ernment that, when it was in under John Howard, became the highest taxing government in the history of the country and still retains the highest tax-to-GDP ratio that this country has ever experienced. Do not talk to us about taxation. Do not talk to us about tax not being leadership. By your own definition you fail the leadership test. They should get out of the way of this initiative.

Then they go on to say that they can do this without the levy. They say that they can do it by further cuts to the budget. Let us go to that. First of all, they delayed their announcement of what the savings were because they could not get their act together. Then they had squabbling amongst themselves about what was in and what was out. When they turned up to announce it, it was attended by the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer but not, I note, the shadow finance minister, who is back in the chamber. He would not give it ownership. He would not dignify it, because he knew it was shonky in the same way as when they went to the last election with the promises of savings and we exposed an \$11 billion hole in those savings. Now they say they want to build on it. I tell you what. Of the savings they put out the other day, \$700 million was double counted. They had pocketed the savings before and already spent them. There is a pretty fundamental message in this: when you are looking to pay for something, you cannot spend money twice. If you do not understand that, it is another reason why you do not deserve to be in.

Not only was there \$700 million that was double counted, \$480 million of it was opposed by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who just spoke in the seconding of it. This is an opposition that has no credibility whatsoever. This is an opposition that is hypocritical. This is an opposition that is divided. What we have is a Leader of the Opposition desperately scrambling to shore

up his leadership credentials, but he is doing it to try to drive disunity in the Australian public. What this nation requires is unity. It wants us to pull together. I suggest the Leader of the Opposition should drop his opposition to this tax or, at the appropriate time when asked, maintain a dignified silence. (*Time expired*)

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (4.26 pm)—In the wake of the massive disasters that we have had in my home state of Queensland—disasters which have impacted or will impact on just about every Queenslanders in one way, shape or form, the answer that this Labor government has given is an answer that only a Labor government could give: ‘Let’s have a tax to solve the problem.’ It comes on top of the mining tax that they plan to introduce, which is going to impact on Queensland, particularly regional Queensland, where the mining industry is most active in employment. It is also going to come on top of the planned carbon tax, a tax which will hit every family through the power point and a tax which will again impact on regional Queensland, where mining creates jobs.

This year is truly going to be the year of the big taxes under the Labor government. When people are doing it tough in the community with the rising cost of living, these guys are going to slug them yet again. This Labor government think that people are earning too much and have to be taxed to pay for the government’s stuff-ups eroding the surplus that this side of the House left them. The people do not have the spare change or time to buy the proverbial coffee or cake a week that these people talk about when they talk about this tax. They are too busy paying off bills. They are too busy dealing with price rises. They are too busy trying to make ends meet. But what I find very shocking is that this Labor government has tried to tie their planned flood tax to the human misery that is

associated with the widespread flood disaster in Queensland and now the Cyclone Yasi disaster in north Queensland.

The Treasurer bumbled about yesterday but eventually admitted that not one cent of the money from this flood tax is going to fix destroyed homes or property. Despite this, there is no doubt that the Treasurer, like the rest of the tax peddlers opposite, were trying to promote this flood tax as something that was going to help families rebuild their homes. While he denied saying such a thing in this chamber yesterday, the quote was in black and white. It said, 'as we rebuild infrastructure and homes'. 'We' was the word he said—the government, not anyone else. He has tried to make this inference in selling this tax. The problem is he knows that the disaster payments that flow that he bumbled on about yesterday always flow from the federal government in times of disaster without a need for a tax. He knows that disaster payments have the support of both sides of politics.

The fact is the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and the rest of this Labor government have been out there trying to con Australians into believing this flood tax is all about mateship. But the people out there demonstrated mateship in the weeks preceding the Prime Minister's announcement of a tax when they donated hand over fist for flood victims. People in my electorate responded overwhelmingly, turning up to hand over money at charity concerts, at small fundraisers or by donating directly to a flood appeal. The local newspaper, the *Daily Mercury*, on the inspiration of its editor, David Fisher, decided to forgo profits for one weekend, donating it all to the flood appeal. So we have demonstrated mateship ourselves without compulsion. But they think this tax is all about mateship. Really? This tax is about a ship, but it ain't mateship. It is about the sinking ship of debt that this lot has racked

up in the last three years, leaving this nation not a zack to pay for rebuilding after these natural disasters.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (4.29 pm)—I would give some advice to those opposite about floods in Queensland—

Mr Secker—You've got about six seconds!

Mr PERRETT—Oh, are there only six seconds?

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 4.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Calare Electorate

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (4.30 pm)—Today Senator Nash's private senators' bill, which sought to address the unfair changes Labor made to the independent youth allowance criteria last year, was passed through the Senate. This has been a big win for so many in my electorate of Calare—in particular, students, families and communities in the inner regional areas: places like Orange, Bathurst, Lithgow, Oberon, Blayney and the east side of Molong. In fact, almost the whole of the electorate is classed as inner regional. Since 1 January my office has had numerous complaints from concerned students, families and educators regarding the changes to the criteria. The full reality of the impact the changes are having is now being realised and many are struggling to cope, struggling to plan and wondering how they will get to university. Even if you live in the regional towns of Orange or Bathurst, in most cases it is more than likely that you will have to live away from home to complete your tertiary education. This is not political. Independent youth allowance is a basic necessity for regional students who want to complete tertiary education. The independent

youth allowance debacle has gone on long enough and I am pleased to hear that the Independents supported the coalition in the Senate to pass this bill. I hope that the Independents in the House of Representatives will also rise to support the bill and show their electorates that they have students' interests at heart.

Moving into 2011, the Calare electorate has moved to the Western New South Wales Local Health Network, and I am very pleased to say that we have seen some exciting developments. Whether to do with the movement to the local health network or not, there are some great changes happening. St Vincent's Private Hospital is set to reopen as Bathurst Private Hospital on the grounds of Charles Sturt University. We recently lost St Vincent's, which was a tragedy for Bathurst and the whole region because of the area it helped the Bathurst Hospital to serve. Its not existing means overloading Bathurst Hospital and that the spillover from Lithgow cannot go there or anywhere else. To place the new private hospital at the university has obvious educational and other future benefits for us. The \$7 million Wellness House for Bathurst is also in the works. It will provide a one-stop shop for health services in Bathurst.

In Orange, the new Aboriginal Medical Service, which I was pleased to attend the opening of, was the first centre of its type in the region, and the model of care is the only one of its type in Australia. We are a region that is really ahead on trying to get more people of Aboriginal descent in as nurses and doctors, particularly those with the ability to do nursing in Bathurst and Dubbo. The new Orange Base Hospital is presumably only six weeks out from opening. A report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has found that health services have become less accessible for people in rural and remote areas, with major deficits in primary, GP,

diagnostic, specialist and out-of-hospital care. While the developments that are happening in the region, private or otherwise, are great, these findings certainly do make us realise that Orange is the only serious centre of health in Western New South Wales.

Mr Speaker, I am also very pleased to tell you that over the next month or so we will be opening an electorate office in Bathurst to better service the new parts of the Calare electorate—Bathurst, Oberon and Blayney. That will make the opportunity of the people of those areas to come to me and mine to communicate with them much better.

I must congratulate a Lithgow butcher from Sunnyridge Valley Meats on paying \$283 for lamb—as far as I can see, an Australian record—at Rydal Show last Saturday. Well done. It is nice to see them coming up with a record that the big saleyards cannot yet match.

Australian Capital Territory Australians of the Year

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (4.35 pm)—I rise today to talk about the exceptional achievements of the ACT Australians of the year and their work and efforts for the Canberra community. Their nominations represent their relentless efforts and contributions to better the lives of those around them, particularly the people of Canberra.

I first of all congratulate the ACT Australian of the Year, Professor Ian Chubb AC, who is known to many in this House. Ian Chubb has provided three decades of service to tertiary education and university governance, most recently as Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University. Professor Chubb has made an exceptional contribution to the strength and standing of the nation's university, one of my alma maters, and is a worthy recipient of this very high honour.

I would also like to congratulate the ACT Senior Australian of the Year, Marie Cole-

man, who like many in this town has had the experience of serving and contributing to the government of the day. Marie is a former public servant of the Whitlam and Fraser governments, was active in providing a positive outlook for women during a period of massive social change and is very active in the local community. Marie was the first woman to head a Commonwealth government statutory agency and the first woman to hold the powers of permanent head under the Public Service Act. She was the founding secretary of the National Foundation for Australian Women, and I commend her for her struggle and congratulate her on her achievement.

I would also like to congratulate the Territory's Young Australian of the Year, David Bresnik, who is an extraordinary young man. I wish to congratulate David for his youth support volunteer work with St Vincent de Paul. David quickly became involved with sporting activities, excursions and week-long camps for children experiencing hardship and disadvantage. He is an accountant and he is a great inspiration for young Canberrans and other young Australians. I will be looking forward to spending more time with him over the next 12 months in terms of using him as a role model for students and other youth throughout Canberra.

The ACT nominee for Australia's Local Hero is Alan Jessop. Alan has collected for the Salvation Army for 22 years and continues to collect three days a week for the charity. He is a passionate contributor to our society and my community. At the age of 80, he has no intention of stopping his charity work. His dedication and diligence are remarkable. He is a Canberra institution. Congratulations, Alan.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of the public servants who received medals at the Australia

Day awards. Matthew Anderson received the Public Service Medal for outstanding public service in leading the Australian government's consular and humanitarian response to the September 2009 tsunami in Samoa. I am proud of his achievements and also the achievements of others, such as Geoff Leeper, Frank Leverett and others who received Public Service Medals across the Canberra community. They are extraordinary individuals and continue to give in their efforts to make a difference and serve their community. I am incredibly grateful for their efforts in the Canberra community and also their contribution to the nation. I thank them very much for their work in the Canberra community.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Simon McKeon, the Australian of the Year. Mr McKeon received this award because of his long efforts in the not-for-profit sector. I had the privilege of meeting him and his wife at the Australia Day citizenship ceremony at the lake on Australia Day. The Prime Minister was there for the service. It was a beautiful summer's day. Fifty new Australian citizens took part in that ceremony. It was a great day. It was a great opportunity to meet the new citizens and also some of the former Australians of the Year, and Adam Gilchrist and others. Mr McKeon, as we know, has had an active role in the private sector, through the Macquarie Group, but he has also spent a lot of time working for not-for-profit and charity organisations. He has contributed his skills and talents to help some quite worthwhile causes when it certainly would have been more lucrative for him to remain in the corporate world.

In accepting his award, he called on all Australians to donate more to charity. I echo Mr McKeon's call. He also said in his acceptance speech, which was here on the eve of Australia Day, that people should volunteer, not just to help their community and not just

to work in an op shop and those sorts of services but to get engaged on boards and use their expertise to give to charities and not-for-profit organisations that cannot afford that expertise but really appreciate, say, accountants or lawyers volunteering. Having been a board director of a number of different organisations, both not-for-profit and commercial organisations, I encourage Canberrans and Australians to, first of all, acknowledge the fact that they have valuable skills and, also, give back to the community. (*Time expired*)

Australian Natural Disasters

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (4.40 pm)—Tourism is the Gold Coast's lifeblood. The flow-through effect from tourism touches almost every other industry on the Gold Coast and, therefore, most of its workers and families. After coal, tourism is the largest export earner for Queensland and contributes billions of dollars to the state's economy. Throughout Queensland, 122,000 people are employed in tourism businesses, with an additional 100,000 people working in businesses supported by the money flowing from tourism. These include businesses such as restaurants, newsagents and a whole range of small to medium enterprises. Eighty-five per cent of tourism businesses in Queensland are small businesses, businesses to which cashflow is so important and where an unforeseen disaster can devastate. Without doubt, tourism is vitally important to Queensland and especially the Gold Coast, and the industry now needs our support more than ever.

The Gold Coast has had a relatively fortunate few months with respect to the weather in comparison to much of our great state. Our capital, Brisbane, and areas to the west, the Lockyer Valley through to Toowoomba, were decimated by floods. Our northern neighbours suffered from the most powerful

cyclone in living memory. Lives were lost, businesses were destroyed and homes were damaged, and many remain homeless or are mourning the loss of loved ones. We have all seen the images: the residents with tears in their eyes, the devastated main streets, the destroyed homes.

As the flood and cyclone images were beamed across the world, the impact on the Gold Coast was certainly felt as many holiday makers cancelled their visits to the Gold Coast. While we on the Gold Coast could look up from the shocking images on our TV and see a blue sky and reasonably dry ground, our potential visitors could not and many made the decision to keep on the safe side, cancel their holiday plans for the Gold Coast and either stay at home or holiday somewhere else—in many instances to take their holiday overseas. Later in January, as viewers and listeners heard Yasi described as 'the most catastrophic storm ever', local tourism operators lost some of their forward bookings for 2011. The average international visitor does not necessarily comprehend the size of Australia or Queensland. Indeed, CNN was so confused by the storms that it marked Tasmania as Queensland on an on-screen graphic at one stage. Whilst that was quickly corrected, it does demonstrate that understanding of our geography is not a given for some of our potential customers—people on the other side of the world.

Some potential visitors with perhaps more local knowledge made an assumption that as the Gold Coast was so close to Brisbane it too had been inundated with water. This was of course not helped by references to 'the flood in Queensland' and 'the cyclone in Queensland' without an acknowledgement of the size of our state. Social networks distributed pictures of Yasi superimposed on a satellite image of the United States, the tropical cyclone covering the nation and touching each coast. Videos of the impact of the flood

and the cyclone went viral upon minutes of their upload. The BBC ran with a headline 'Australia: Cyclone Yasi roars into Queensland coast'. With headlines like that, you can understand why readers could quite rightly come to the conclusion that the entire Queensland coast was impacted, and certainly it would not be a stretch to believe that a city with the word 'coast' comprising part of its name could be one of the areas affected.

Estimates of damage to the tourism industry by the floods and Yasi are impossible to estimate at this stage. Much depends on the psychology of individuals as they prepare to travel. What is certain, however, is that the damage will be significant and have lasting effects. As it is, 2009, as a result of the global financial crisis, was one of the worst years in living memory for local tourism. The year 2011 started with much positivity for the industry. Gains were made throughout 2010 and predictions were that 2011 was going to be a strong year. But the natural disasters have changed that outlook.

As Australians with compassion for our fellow countrymen we can do our bit. We can encourage our friends and families not just to send essential items or donate money but to visit Queensland. Queenslanders can holiday within Queensland and support Queensland businesses, and encourage overseas and interstate contacts to visit us here. All of Queensland, with its economy so inextricably linked to tourism, needs visitors and with support such as this we will witness a lasting benefit for all Queenslanders.

Schools

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (4.45 pm)—Today I would like to speak about the opening of a new 21st century learning space and classrooms for the year 5 and year 6 students at Old Orchard Primary School in the suburb of Blackburn North, which is, of course, in my

electorate of Deakin. This new multipurpose classroom project was delivered under the federal Labor government's Building the Education Revolution program, as part of the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program. It has certainly made a difference to what was a very well-loved and very well-used school.

I would like to thank the principal at the school, Duncan Cant, and Assistant Principal, Christine Hodder, for their help in organising the event on the opening day. School captains, Ashlen Campbell and Joshua Halliday, took me on a tour of their new facilities and showed me what each new room was being used for and, importantly, what each new room could be used for, as the rooms were all quite interchangeable. They had some really good features like moveable walls and different learning spaces, which their old school classrooms simply did not have.

I would also like to thank the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood. Their regional office—the eastern metropolitan region—were certainly a great help in getting that project through to delivery so that the school can now use it. I would also like to thank the builders and the tradies—the workers on the project—who did a fantastic, quality job that will stand the test of time. The building is now being used by the year 5 and year 6 students and teachers, and other classes use it when they have a need for a space that is bigger than their existing classrooms.

I also acknowledge the school community, who had to put up with so much during the construction. Unfortunately, when you build things you get in people's way. The students had to spend time in portables and it was quite difficult to get around a lot of the school during that time. But the final result is well worth it. Anyone who goes there can

immediately see what a difference it has made to the school.

The school is big and growing. It is one of the biggest primary schools in the electorate of Deakin and now, in 2011, has over 550 students enrolled. It has a great reputation as a successful school. Students come to attend Old Orchard Primary School not just from the local area but also from many suburbs beyond.

I have been a regular visitor to Old Orchard Primary School since I was elected in 2007. It has been a great privilege to go out to the school and find out what it was that they wanted from the new building project. It was a privilege to be able to advocate on their behalf to make sure that they got what they were after in terms of design—a school that they could use and that they wanted to use. That is very important.

Even though those on the other side have tried to vote this program down in this House so many times, schools like this really know the difference. Those on the other side of the chamber who do not appreciate that should most certainly not go out in their electorates and try to claim credit for something that they voted against in this House.

Old Orchard Primary School is a \$3 million project. It is a very big building. The day I was there it rained an awful lot—as it has so much in recent times. For Melbourne it was quite unseasonable for that time of year and we have had a lot more rain since then. The best thing about the new building is that it joins on to their existing building so that students can get to and from the new wing of the school without getting wet. That certainly helped on the opening day.

There are six new general-purpose classrooms and meeting spaces in the new wing. We used the meeting space, which was very large, to do a school assembly and official opening. There is also a wet area and kitchen

facilities in the new building. The old part of the school just did not have these. There are also offices and a staff room. And that is important as well.

This is the first new building put in at the school since the 1970s. Like so many schools in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne it was built many years ago and the infrastructure has not kept up. So the new buildings actually give the school a new lease of life. It looks so much better. Parents and the local community are thrilled that it is there.

Many more schools in my electorate of Deakin are getting new buildings. Old Orchard Primary School is only one of 40 schools where projects are happening. A lot have already opened and a lot more will be opening in the next few months. I know that every single school community is waiting for that day. The communities that have already received it are very happy. I look forward to going out and opening new school buildings on each and every one of those sites when they are completed. I will remind each and every school that those in the Liberal Party voted against their school buildings.

Health

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (4.50 pm)—The government's health policy is in disarray. It has been big on promises but short on delivery. After making grand statements about massive reform agendas in health shortly after it was elected in 2007 and 2010, the government has shown us no tangible progress in the health care of Australian citizens.

The health and hospitals network and the proposed GP superclinics are prime examples of Labor's approach to health—health care by press release. They announce changes to the funding mix, and announce changes to the location of doctors and nurses, but do not actually produce one extra health professional or one extra bed.

This government does not understand the importance of making investments in our health. I raised a critical healthcare issue in the parliament in November last year regarding the Australian government's funding of Australia's National Bowel Cancer Screening Program. The federal government's National Bowel Cancer Screening Program ceased on 31 December last year.

This is a critical issue for me locally and for people like Professor James St John AM, who has done great work in this area, and for the Cabrini Hospital in my electorate.

It is also a critical national issue. It is critical not only because of the number of lives affected—the lives of those who are saved and the lives of their families—but also because of its incredible success rate. It is critical because it is world's best practice and was developed here. And also because it makes economic sense.

I want to briefly deal with each of these elements but, before I do, I want to make the point that this government needs to start making clear its priorities. It has wasted \$2.6 billion on inflated costs for school halls but it cannot find \$140 million a year to fund an effective screening program. It can waste \$1.1 billion in a budget blow-out in our border protection program, but it cannot find \$140 million to fund an effective screening program. It can waste \$2.45 billion on a pink batts program, but it cannot find \$140 million to fund an effective screening program.

Unlike Cyclone Yasi and the recent floods, bowel cancer is a silent killer. It is the most frequently occurring cancer in Australia and the second largest cancer killer after lung cancer. Based on current trends, one in 12 Australians will develop bowel cancer before the age of 85. Bowel cancer will claim the lives of around 3,800 Australians this year. By comparison, approximately 2,900 women will die as a result of breast cancer.

The benefits of the Bowel Cancer Screening Program have been well established for the past 15 years. More than 90 per cent of people survive if bowel cancer is detected early, before it has spread.

Without a firm commitment from the government, experienced health professionals involved with the screening program will move into other areas or overseas. In my maiden speech one year ago I discussed the importance of innovation and encouraging our best and brightest. Cutting funding to this program will make it even more difficult to reinstate such an initiative in the future. The government should not assume it can end this program and then start it up again at whim.

The cost of combating bowel cancer is set to hit \$1 billion in 2011. Fully implemented, a population based screening program would cost \$140 million per year, but the savings made through preventing the onset of cancer will save us money, as well as prevent an estimated 30 deaths per week. According to Cancer Council Australia, early detection can make significant savings in hospital costs. Biogrid Australia estimates that removing a precancerous polyp costs approximately \$1,600, whereas treatment at a public hospital for bowel cancer can cost more than \$70,000.

The Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon. Nicola Roxon, has admitted that the government's advice is that biennial testing should be made available for all men and women over the age of 50. Such a program would achieve the economy of scale required to save billions of dollars per year in health costs as well as countless lives.

Discontinuing funding of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program makes no sense.

In my view, it is a program which the government should be seeking to expand. It

goes to the credibility of this government that it has cut the funding for this program and that it has neglected important areas of preventative health. Long-term investments in our nation's health that save money and, most importantly, save lives.

International Development Assistance

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (4.55 pm)—The 43rd parliament commenced its proceedings with a debate on our mission in Afghanistan. There was overwhelming support from the majority of speakers for our involvement in this war. Despite its risks, the terrible loss of life and, yes, even the cost, it appears that there is a core level of bipartisan support and understanding that our national interest is served by our presence there.

Of course, the cause of national interest is not always straightforward. It can be difficult to explain, particularly when it involves events and circumstances in a foreign country a long way from our own day-to-day experiences. But, from Federation to this day, leaders of all parties have been willing to put the national interest first when it comes to national security. Sometimes these things do not align with the interests of individuals or even political parties, particularly when they run contrary to popularly held but misinformed views, or when our long-term interest requires a short-term sacrifice.

I came to this place believing that an important part of my function was to lead, educate and explain, particularly when there was a misunderstanding of what lay in our national interest. That is why the proposed cuts to Australia's foreign aid budget announced by the Leader of the Opposition this week are so deplorable an example of short-term thinking, a failure of political leadership and a base appeal to our prejudices, our fears—not Australia's national interest.

It is hard to reconcile these cuts with the spirit of bipartisanship that has, in the main,

characterised our approach in this area. Indeed, I could not agree more with the opposition spokesperson for foreign affairs when she said in August last year:

Fundamental to our foreign policy objectives is a renewed focus on overseas aid. We will honour our commitment to spend point-five per cent of gross national income on overseas aid. We support the Millenium Development Goals

Or, again, in December last year, when she said ours is:

... a bipartisan commitment in Australia to ensure we meet a 0.5 per cent of gross national income target for our aid budget by 2015.

Now more than ever, when our country is experiencing what the Reserve Bank has described as the biggest resources boom since the 1850s gold rush, is the time to step up to meet our responsibilities as a good international neighbour in our region, and not to retreat from this.

The need for foreign aid is great, with 1.4 billion people living on less than a dollar a day, two billion people in the world not having access to clean drinking water and 25,000 children dying each day from preventable diseases. We know that many of the world's poor live in Australia's region. Our longstanding aid program serves our national interest, creating a more secure, stable and economically prosperous region.

Recently, many of us in this place have received more than one copy of an email in wide circulation which contained some figures about our level of foreign aid, claiming that Queensland flood victims would receive only \$1 million. These spurious claims have appeared in many online forums in recent weeks. This email appears to have emanated from a fringe political group in Queensland, and it is wrong in so many ways. Australia's overseas humanitarian assistance does not come at the expense of assistance to Australians in need and it never has. Indeed, the

proposition by the Leader of the Opposition that we should delay or cut our funding to Indonesian schools cuts to the very heart of what has been a bipartisan policy about fighting terrorism, at least since the bombings in Bali in 2002.

That is why, in 2004, with complete bipartisan support from the ALP, the then Prime Minister, Mr Howard, announced the Australia Indonesia Basic Education Program—in order to deal with the challenge of militant Islamism infiltrating the Indonesian education system. Sadly, the announcement by the Leader of the Opposition in the last week is a retrograde policy which plays right into the hands of militant Islamists and those who encourage terrorism—

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 5 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 5.00 pm

NOTICES

The following notice was given:

Mr Neumann to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes the outstanding contribution of organisations and individuals in Queensland during the natural disasters of January 2011;
- (2) acknowledges the following who all worked tirelessly to ensure the safety and security of residents in the evacuation period and beyond:
 - (a) the State Emergency Service, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Brigades, St John's Ambulance Service, Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service and Australian Defence Force;
 - (b) the Salvation Army, Lifeline, churches, charities and other community organisations; and
 - (c) flood affected school principals, teachers, staff and school communities; and

- (3) expresses its deep appreciation for the courage, commitment and professionalism shown by these organisations and individuals.

Thursday, 10 February 2011

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER** took the chair at 9.29 am.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Cowper Electorate: Government Programs

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (9.29 am)—I wish to make a statement on the consequences for my constituents of the government's ill-advised rush to increase public spending in response to the global financial crisis. We are all familiar with the Home Insulation Program, which resulted in 120 house fires, 1,500 potentially live foil roofs and 240,000 dangerous or potentially substandard non-foil roofs. That resulted in a \$424 million safety program, a \$56 million industry assistance program and an Auditor-General report showing that overpayments were around \$82 million—waste, waste, waste. We are all familiar with the Building the Education Revolution Program in which many schools were forced to pay over the odds for facilities that they did not want or were not fit for the purposes they required. We have heard far less about the social housing initiative. This is what the then Minister for Housing, the member for Sydney, said about the initiative in a media release following her visit to inspect a property at Hervey Bay:

The program is delivering great value for money ... I am delighted that a local building company is doing the work on this project and that seven local tradespeople are employed on site. This shows how important the stimulus plan has been in supporting local jobs through the global recession.

The picture is rather different in Coffs Harbour, I might say. In my electorate there is a Housing New South Wales contract for three social housing projects. It was let to a company called Perle projects. Perle has now gone into administration with debts of \$9.8 million. The administrators, Rodgers Reidy, have reported that they are only able to identify fixed assets by Perle of \$104,372.

There are serious questions to be asked about how such contracts came to be awarded to this company under the stimulus package by Housing New South Wales. There were also other projects let under this program to the University of New South Wales, to the Catholic Education Office and to the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority. I suspect the answers lie in the Gillard government's compulsion to be seen to be doing something and in the New South Wales government's lack of due diligence. The result is that 58 local companies are facing the prospect of getting as little as 10c in the dollar on individual accounts running into hundreds of thousands of dollars. This government and the New South Wales government have done more damage to these small businesses and the families that depend on them than the global financial crisis ever could. Once again, we have seen their bungling hurt the very people that their actions were intended to assist.

Greenway Electorate: Sudanese Community

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (9.31 am)—I rise this morning to recognise the historic result in last month's referendum in Sudan, which almost unanimously supported an independent South Sudan. After decades of social and political turmoil, this is a momentous leap forward for the Sudanese people. In the words of United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon, the 'peaceful and credible conduct of the referendum is a great achievement for all Sudanese'.

My electorate of Greenway is home to thousands of Sudanese people who now call Australia home. One of my greatest pleasures as a member of parliament and previously as a councillor and Deputy Mayor of Blacktown City Council is our great citizenship ceremonies which regularly comprise a large number of proud Sudanese born people who have chosen to call Australia home. Our area is enriched by the contribution the Sudanese Australian community make and I join with them in celebrating the historic result of this recent referendum.

One local resident, Faustino Aboka, who came to Australia in 2000, recently told the *Blacktown Sun* that his family and friends had been hoping and praying for independence for many years. Faustino also acknowledged the experiences he and his family have had in Australia and outlined that the Sudanese community in Blacktown will use their Australian knowledge and experience to help the new nation get on its feet. Mr Aboka and his wife, Savia, are proud Sudanese Australians. They are so proud that they recently named their firstborn daughter Julia after our Prime Minister.

To ensure that South Sudan can prosper and remain a safe and productive nation, the Australian government must have an active role in the development of this young nation. The Australian government has therefore announced \$9 million to assist in this development process. The funds will be used in the period directly after the referendum to help provide health, education and other essential services specifically to ensure that women and children are taken care of. This commitment by the Australian government is in addition to the \$113 million already given to South Sudan in humanitarian assistance since 2004.

I once again congratulate the people of South Sudan for gaining their independence. I look forward to hearing about the good work being done by the government in this new phase of Sudanese history. I commit myself to continuing to work with our local Sudanese settlement support services in Blacktown to enhance the lives of these great Australians.

Solomon Electorate: Queensland Floods

Solomon Electorate: Mental Health

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (9.34 am)—I rise to take this opportunity to thank and praise the kindness and generosity of Northern Territorians, in particular those in my electorate of Solomon, for their efforts to rally behind the victims of the recent Queensland floods. The response my office has seen is overwhelming and highlights the extraordinary compassion and empathy that is typical Territorian. My mother, Sandra, and I personally delivered 120 kilograms of specially made care packages to the Lockyer Valley. We toured the region with the federal member for Wright, Mr Scott Buchholz, and Senator Trood, where we were able to see firsthand the devastation in Gatton, Grantham and Murphy's Creek. The locals were grateful for the items that we delivered.

I would also like to make special mention of Australian Air Express, Northline, NQX Freight System Australia and Qantas, who collectively transported thousands of kilos of donated goods from the people of Solomon to Queensland, all free of charge. It is incredible that donations of clothing, footwear, books and toiletries are still being dropped off to my office. There is another shipping container almost full that will be heading to Queensland very soon. Further examples of amazing Territory generosity include one person who has donated 10 washing machines and 10 dryers, while another has donated a 2004 Commodore sedan, which he wants donated to a family who lost a car during the floods and who were not covered by

their insurance. Another one is a local building company, CReATE House, which has offered to supply five houses at cost.

There were so many Territory community groups and local businesses who undertook fundraising activities to help raise funds for the flood victims. I was delighted to be involved with local radio station Mix 104.9's fundraising activities, where we raised over \$100,000. I was amazed at how small children were emptying out their wallets and giving their pocket money. It has given me, and it continues to give me, great pleasure and pride to see my electorate donating so generously to fellow Australians in a time of need.

On a different matter, I am also pleased to announce that I have called this week for applications for my newly established mental health scholarship, which I first spoke about in my maiden speech. This endowment is to assist a student living in the electorate of Solomon who is studying towards a qualification in mental health. Mental health is a crucial issue in the Northern Territory and indeed Australia. I am committed to the improvement of mental health services in the electorate of Solomon. The scholarship will provide \$3,000 to one student per year. I look forward to announcing the recipient of the scholarship later on this year. (*Time expired*)

McEwen Electorate: Local History

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (9.37 am)—Many townships in my electorate of McEwen have very wonderful, deep and rich histories. The small towns of Wandong and Heathcote Junction are definitely no exception. These towns were once host to terracotta brickworks, timber seasoning and a milling factory, with connections to the large logging settlements and vast horse-drawn tramway lines in the Mount Disappointment State Forest. The towns also have a remarkable history involving Victoria's rail system, with the north-east line operation and a branch line from Heathcote Junction to Kilmore, Heathcote, Bendigo and Lancefield.

The Wandong-Heathcote Junction Community Group acknowledged that so much of these towns' rich history was never recorded or published. Therefore, they applied for a local history grant to collate and document this history through the production of a book. I particularly want to thank the secretary of the community group, Allen Hall, who was recently announced as Mitchell Shire's Person of the Year, for organising the book. I also want to thank the other members of the committee who have helped to put this book together and helped to deliver so much for the communities of Wandong and Heathcote Junction.

For the past three years the committee members have gathered information. They have gathered photographs and interviewed many people, including many of the elders of the community, regarding their knowledge of historical events, and have now completed this new book. Much of the content of this book has never before been published. It has been written with the purpose of recording the social, industrial, agricultural and infrastructure history of Wandong, Clonbinane and Heathcote Junction. It begins with the known Aboriginal occupation of the 1830s and goes right through to the present day. It is also an opportunity to record and preserve the recollections, the experiences, of the district's people over a long period of time.

Next month the committee will launch the book, which is titled *Ghosts, Gold and a White Elephant*. 'Ghosts' signifies the Aboriginal name for the area. 'Gold' signifies the goldmining industry that once existed in Clonbinane. The white elephant was a huge horsedrawn tram-

ways bridge that could not be used when built in the Mount Disappointment State Forest. I recommend *Ghosts, Gold and a White Elephant* to anyone appreciative of historical stories and particularly of three of our oldest Victorian towns. It follows them from a bustling period in Victoria's history, entering the 20th century, going through decades of stability from the mid-20th century and then experiencing a resurgence, as the locals believe the area is the only place to live in the 21st century. The towns' history will now be preserved and published for future generations and for the general public, thanks to the efforts of these people. I congratulate everyone on the committee for their hard work, dedication and commitment.

Dairy Industry

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (9.40 am)—When I, my family or my community are threatened, I respond. Every member of parliament is exactly the same. They do not change. Whether it be fire, flood or pestilence, we move. If we or our communities are threatened by a major conglomerate, we respond. Why would I be putting these questions to you about a major company like Wesfarmers that owns Coles supermarkets and is currently selling milk at \$1 a litre? Because my dairy farmers—and I believe I have the most of any electorate in Australia—will come under threat in the long run.

What do I do? Do I respond by attacking Wesfarmers or asking the question, 'Will Wesfarmers, a company with a history born out of agriculture, steeped in traditions of agriculture, play their part in the demise of the family dairy farm?' Or do I respond by not going to Bunnings anymore as it is owned by Wesfarmers and thereby, in a marginal seat, put off every person who works at Bunnings? Why would I be attacking a company that is delivering to the consumer milk at \$1 a litre? It is because in the long run—and that is what we have to be about in this place sometimes—it is going to mean the demise of our dairy industry on the altar of the almighty dollar for a share of the market.

We have two major supermarkets. They want a share of the people coming into supermarkets across Australia. Who is this going to hurt in the end? We are going to lose independents. We are not going to lose a Coles supermarket or a Woolworths supermarket. They are not going to go broke. But there is only so much money in a dollar that you can give to the processor or the dairy farmer. So I am responding today to say that all of those involved from the top of Wesfarmers through to their shareholders—but I am appealing particularly today to the farmers who over the years have acquired Wesfarmers shares; they may even be dairy farmers holding Wesfarmers shares—need to take a really close look in the mirror and be contacting their other shareholders and looking at the principles of those companies. We are under threat as dairy farmers. I will continue to respond every time I am under threat. (*Time expired*)

Franklin Electorate: Centrelink Services

Ms COLLINS (Franklin—Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services) (9.43 am)—I want to talk about some services in my electorate of Franklin today. One of the issues in the Kingborough municipality—that is the township of Kingston and Blackmans Bay, south of Hobart—for many years has been the lack of Centrelink services. The Kingborough municipality has been one of the fastest growing in my electorate for more than a decade now and it has been without Centrelink services. I have been fighting for Centrelink services since about 2008.

I was really pleased in July last year to be able to announce that Centrelink services would be co-locating in the current Medicare office in the Channel Court shopping area in Kingston. We announced then that services would start on 1 July 2011. It was fantastic that, with the work of the former minister, Minister Bowen, and the current minister, Minister Plibersek, the Minister for Human Services, the first day of operation of the Centrelink services in Kingston was actually in December last year. That has been fantastic. On 13 December last year, a Monday, I went down to the new Centrelink services in Kingston to see them in operation. It was fantastic to see one of the locals who launched a petition for me, Maureen Shegog, there on that day.

It has also been fantastic to hear the community feedback since that day. My understanding is that the services have been so popular and so useful that Centrelink have put on additional staff to deal with the number of Centrelink service requests that they are now getting in that Medicare office. The services opened six months ahead of schedule in the Kingston area, and I know that the local community are really pleased that they have been able to get them. I hope that co-locating the services in a more simplified model means that more Australians are able to access services, as they have been able to in Franklin.

These co-locations are being rolled out across the country. In the absence of the Minister for Human Services while she was on maternity leave, it was my privilege to introduce the legislation into the House for that to occur, so it is fantastic to see them actually in operation. The anecdotal evidence about the co-location of services in my electorate where they have got Medicare offices in Centrelink offices, in the Huon, and also in Hobart city, which is just outside my electorate but frequented by a lot of my electors, is that it is going extraordinarily well.

The co-location of services seems to be working for my constituents, and I only hope that as these services are rolled out around the country other members' electorates see the benefits, as my constituents have been privileged to do six months ahead of schedule.

Bennelong Electorate: Mobile Phone Towers

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (9.46 am)—An issue of great concern affecting residents in my electorate of Bennelong is the consultation processes governing the installation of mobile phone base stations. Recently Telstra has progressed significantly towards a decision for a new site on Mobbs Lane in Carlingford, whilst a shop owner is being enticed with a reported five-figure annual lease fee to place the base station above their shop despite the fact that it is situated across the road from a preschool and a kindergarten and is within 50 metres of a child's bedroom window.

I was encouraged that Telstra was conducting two consultation sessions with the local community to discuss the available site options, as they are required to do so under the telecommunications law. At the first meeting yesterday the Telstra representative is reported to have privately told several residents that the site decision had already been made and that they were wasting their time discussing it any further. This assertion was quickly rescinded when the representative was questioned in front of the main forum, which was attended by a *Daily Telegraph* journalist, but this attitude is certainly consistent with my previous experiences at a Telstra site in Quarry Road in Ryde. As the federal MP, I am absolutely committed to ensuring that the residents of Carlingford and of the whole of Bennelong are able to access full and transparent consultation at the start of any such decision making processes. This is an issue of

great concern for any community, and apparent tactics of intimidation designed to make residents feel helpless are not in line with a corporate citizen's responsibilities.

I pledge to the residents of Carlingford that I will stand by your side in the pursuit of the fairness and transparency you deserve. I hope that further parliamentary speeches and community demonstrations are not necessary as Telstra prove to the people of Bennelong that they will facilitate fair and transparent processes of consultation, provide a full assessment to all possible site locations, make public the reasons for preferencing one site over another prior to a decision being made and prove that the system of self-regulation in this industry is actually working. Companies that benefit from self-regulation must demonstrate that they are performing within the spirit and the letter of that regulation.

The reports on Mobbs Lane to date seem to fall far short of that standard. My role as MP is to police the compliance of the regulations to make sure that the system works. I look forward to working closely with Telstra and the people of Carlingford to prove to all of us that this is the case so that a result of mutual satisfaction can be attained. Representations regarding a proposed facility in North Ryde eventually led to transparent consultation and a willingness by Optus to review their decisions in light of the opposition expressed by the community and the pressure applied by my office. I hope that this is a standard that can be repeated.

Andrew, Mr Cedric

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (9.49 am)—Last Saturday I had the great pleasure of joining about 200 other guests as we celebrated the 100th birthday of Mr Cedric Andrew in Mackay. Any time that you celebrate a 100th birthday it is something special, but this one was particularly unique. Mr Andrew is known to be the oldest living Australian South Sea islander in Queensland and, indeed, Australia. The celebration had a very strong family sense but was also very significant at a community level as well.

Cedric was born in a grass hut on the banks of Sandy Creek at Homebush, which is near Mackay, on 5 February 1911. We celebrated not only his many long years and the contribution that he has made as a loving father and grandfather and uncle but also his leadership role within the South Sea island community. The history of the South Sea islanders, who were often blackbirded from islands such as Vanuatu and the Solomons to work in the cane industry back in the late 19th century, is very well known in the Mackay and Central Queensland region of Queensland together with the great contribution that they have made to the sugar industry and to the community generally in the years since.

Cedric is a great bloke. At the party on Saturday, guests listened as members of his family and people who had known him and worked with him for many years came to the microphone to tell us stories about Cedric's life as a canecutter and later as a railway worker. He has always fostered and shared a very strong link with his culture, his community and his people back in Vanuatu. One very special part of the celebration was the involvement of one of Cedric's family members from Vanuatu. Jameson Bani had come over from Vanuatu with gifts from Cedric's people back on Vanuatu. There really was a sense amongst the crowd there on Saturday that we were part of something very special and very significant for the South Sea Islander community. I am told by Cedric's nephew, Greg Sutherland, who himself has a very high profile in Mackay as the president of the rugby league up there, that Cedric was still partying on at 9.30. It was right to honour Cedric and I am so pleased that he enjoyed the celebration of what has been a very long, happy and productive life. (*Time expired*)

Flood Levy

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (9.52 am)—I would like to bring the attention of the House to an issue of concern in the electorate of Gippsland in relation to a media release issued by the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport headlined ‘Funds re-profiled to assist with flood recovery’. In the media release the minister announces that \$20 million of the Princes Highway East (Traralgon to Sale) project will be ‘re-profiled in light of the revised construction timetable brought about by the restrictions placed on the project under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act’. This is a \$175 million project, and I know that the people of Gippsland will be disappointed but will understand in this case the minister’s need to reprofile this funding having regard to the national effort to rebuild infrastructure related to the flood disasters, particularly in Queensland and northern Victoria. As I said, it will be an issue of concern for the people of Gippsland, but I think in the circumstances they will be very reasonable and will understand, given their own experiences of natural disasters and the support they have received in the past.

Having said that, I have written to the minister today seeking some assurances and further information about the project. Given that this project has enjoyed bipartisan support dating back to prior to the 2007 election—both sides of the House have made some significant policy commitments to the Princes Highway East duplication work—I have sought some assurances from the minister’s office to make sure my community is properly informed, particularly about what these environmental issues are and what the reprofiling actually means in terms of the current timetable. As the minister is well aware, the first stage of the Princes Highway East project is part of a much larger duplication project, which is estimated to cost in the order of \$500 million. It is certainly important from a road safety perspective and also for productivity in the broader Gippsland region.

When I say ‘productivity’ I am referring, of course, to the movement particularly of agricultural products in and out of our region but also to bringing the Gippsland region closer to the eastern suburbs growth corridor of Melbourne and bringing the beaches and lakes of our region closer from a tourism perspective. Reducing the travel time for people moving through the region is very important for us in terms of promoting our industries. The project has certainly received support in the past from both sides of this House and I hope that will continue. I have had the opportunity to speak publicly about this \$20 million deferral and I have made it clear to the people of Gippsland that I understand the circumstances and I am looking forward to working with the federal minister and the new state minister, Terry Mulder, to ensure that future funding is forthcoming for the project.

Beyond the duplication project between Traralgon and Sale, the need remains for funding more generally for the Princes Highway east of Sale, which has one of the worst accident rates in regional Victoria. I will be working very closely with the newly elected state member for Gippsland East, Tim Bull, as a partnership to ensure that both the state and federal governments make further commitments to ensuring the safety of motorists, locals and tourists, travelling in Gippsland. (*Time expired*)

Bass Electorate: Launceston Regional Tennis Centre

Mr LYONS (Bass) (9.55 am)—Last week I attended the opening of the Launceston Regional Tennis Centre, in my electorate of Bass, which is a fantastic redevelopment for the people of Northern Tasmania. The redevelopment features 11 new courts, nine of which have

the Australian Open plexicushion surface, in addition to new fencing, lighting, pathways and car parks. It is a project that has been sought by the Northern Tasmanian tennis community for more than 20 years. The redevelopment will provide Northern Tasmanians with a sports facility of professional standard and will encourage tennis development within the Launceston region. An estimated 18,000 to 20,000 tennis players are expected to use the facility each year. Melbourne Park is used 64 per cent of the time, and it is hoped this can be achieved in the Launceston. It is sure to improve the profile of tennis within the community.

World No. 5 ranked player Sam Stosur also attended the opening and was full of praise for the new facility. She said:

I think this is a great initiative and to have a tennis centre like this in a regional town will encourage a lot more people to play ... Make the most of it. It looks pretty good. With facilities like this you can't go wrong and hopefully you will start to see huge benefits.

Lleyton Hewitt's manager, David Drysdale, like Sam, spoke highly of the facility:

What we've got here, with the whole complex—

there are indoor courts as well—

is not just another tennis centre, it's something very special and better than so many others like it around Australia.

It is a fantastic facility for Northern Tasmanians, not just those passionate about tennis.

The Tasmanian Labor government and the Launceston City Council contributed \$1.4 million and \$466,000 respectively to this project. Tennis Australia contributed \$110,000. The Australian Labor government provided \$500,000 under the Better Regions Program, delivering on a commitment we made in 2007 to fund policies that have been identified by local communities as priority investments for their regions across Australia. I would like to congratulate all those who took part in making this vision become a reality. This project is yet another example of how the Australian Labor government has worked with the Tasmanian Labor government in building infrastructure that the community wants and, more importantly, that it needs.

Stirling Electorate: Reid Highway

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (9.58 am)—I rise to talk about an issue that I have discussed in this place on many occasions, and that is the overpass at the intersection of Reid Highway and Mirrabooka Avenue in my electorate of Stirling. I am very pleased to report that we have some positive news on that front: the state Liberal government has come up with the money to fund the total for that overpass, which will cost \$30 million. Sadly, in the past 6½ years that I have been in parliament, both state and federal Labor have consistently promised my community money for this project, but of course when it comes to the crunch they have never delivered one cent and it is up to the Liberal government in Western Australia to fund that in total. I think that is embarrassing; it is a very poor reflection on this Commonwealth government, which has consistently promised my community that this would be built.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! In accordance with standing order 193 the time for constituency statements has concluded.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010**Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 9 February, on motion by **Mr Brendan O'Connor**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (9.59 am)—I rise to talk about the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2010. The main purpose of this bill is to strengthen the powers of the Australian Crime Commission's Chief Executive Officer in dealing with ACC employees who engage in serious misconduct or corruption, and to strengthen the powers of Commonwealth law enforcement agencies to gather, examine and use evidence in the investigation and prevention of criminal offences.

The bill will align the dismissal powers of the CEO of the ACC to deal with serious misconduct and corruption with those of the Australian Federal Police Commissioner, provide more flexible arrangements for appointing ACC examiners and extend the application of certain search related provisions in the Crimes Act that apparently only apply to searches conducted under warrants in relation to premises so that they also apply to searches conducted under a warrant in relation to a person.

The bill will also insert rules to govern when documents are produced under the Crimes Act; streamline and extend provisions governing applications for and determinations of orders in relation to the Crimes Act; allow the AFP Commissioner to delegate responsibility for dealing with things seized and documents pursued, again under the Crimes Act; introduce a new standing power for the Australian Federal Police to take fingerprints and photographs of arrested persons when taking them into custody in relation to a Commonwealth offence; and amend the Australian Federal Police Act to enable the commissioner to authorise a payment in special circumstances that arise out of or relate to a person's engagement as an AFP appointee.

To expand a little bit on the amendments made by the bill, it will make two sets of amendments to the Australian Crime Commission Act. As mentioned in the bill's explanatory memorandum, schedule 1 will amend the ACC Act and the Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Act 1979 'to provide the ACC CEO with powers mirroring those of the AFP Commissioner to deal with serious misconduct and corruption'. The main effect of these changes is that the ACC CEO will be able to make a declaration that a staff member's conduct amounts to serious misconduct and can therefore 'disapply' the Fair Work Act 2009 in order to dismiss that staff member. The explanatory memorandum goes on:

Schedule 2 will amend the ACC Act to allow for greater flexibility in the appointment of examiners. The ACC Act currently only allows the appointment of full-time examiners. This does not meet the operational needs of the ACC. The amendments will allow the ACC to utilise part-time examiners as well as full-time examiners.

The bill will make a range of amendments that improve the operations of the Crimes Act. The bill's explanatory memorandum notes:

Part 1 of Schedule 3 will extend the application of certain search-related provisions in the Crimes Act that currently only apply to searches conducted under warrants in relation to premises so they also apply to searches conducted under a warrant in relation to a person. These amendments will help police deal more effectively with electronic equipment, such as laptop computers and smartphones, located during searches under a warrant in relation to a person.

Further amendments to the Crimes Act include the following:

Part 2 of Schedule 3 will make three sets of amendments to Part IAA ... The first set of amendments will insert rules about when documents produced under Division 4B must be returned to the person who produced them or to the owner. The second set of amendments will streamline and extend provisions governing applications for, and determination of, various orders in relation to things seized and documents produced. The final amendment will allow the AFP Commissioner to delegate responsibility for functions related to returning things seized and documents produced to a Commonwealth officer if he or she is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the officer is able to properly exercise the relevant powers, functions or duties.

Part 3 of Schedule 3 will amend the Crimes Act to provide police with a standing power to take fingerprints and photographs of arrested persons. This amendment will assist police to confirm the identity of arrested persons, prove matters relating to identity in court ... and maintain accurate records of arrests.

To expand on the amendments made to the AFP Act, schedule 4 will enable the commissioner to authorise a payment in special circumstances that arise out of, or relate to, a person's engagement as an AFP appointee. This will bring the AFP into line with other Commonwealth agencies with respect to making payments to employees and other persons in special circumstances. It will also avoid the problems currently encountered with delays in obtaining approval for ex-gratia payments.

Moving to the end of the speech—clearly, things are under control! In the report by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission on the Australian Crime Commission annual report for 2007-08, there was the following recommendation:

The committee recommends that the Australian Government review existing arrangements for the suspension and dismissal of Commonwealth law enforcement agency employees believed on reasonable grounds to have engaged in serious misconduct or corruption, and that the Government take action as appropriate, bearing in mind the need to respect the rights of employees.

The Parliamentary Joint Committee on the ACC noted the dismissal power available to the AFP and stated:

... it is of concern to the committee that ACC employees suspected of serious misconduct or corruption remain within the organisation and may seek to jeopardise investigations, thereby potentially compromising the security of the ACC's operations.

In its 2008 submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission, ACLEI noted that in the context of its own establishment:

... there was no perception of a significant or systemic problem with corruption in either the ACC or the AFP. The possibility that corruption could develop is ever present particularly if sufficient deterrents and detection measures were not in place.

This bill addresses these important concerns and therefore has the support of the coalition.

It is always difficult to deal with matters of suspected corruption within law enforcement agencies in the same way that you might deal with other criminal offences because, clearly, it is very difficult to apply the rights that people enjoy through the court system, for instance, to policing agencies if there has been suspected corruption of officials within those agencies.

As has been noted in the submissions to the parliamentary joint committee, it is clear that there was some concern about some difficulties within the existing regime as to how officers within the ACC might be dealt with if they were suspected of corruption. Clearly, that is an

important area to address. I am pleased this bill does that and it therefore enjoys the support of the opposition.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (10.06 am)—The member for Fowler will be making his contribution to the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 [2011] debate a little later, and I thank the House for allowing me to make a contribution at this time. This bill will improve the Australian Crime Commission's ability to deal with serious misconduct by staff and make a range of amendments to strengthen law enforcement agencies' powers to gather, examine and use evidence to investigate and prevent the committing of criminal offences.

The amendments have been identified primarily through ongoing discussion with portfolio law enforcement agencies. The amendments are vitally important because I believe it is paramount that those agencies that the legislation will impact on can have ownership of the legislation. These discussions with the portfolio law enforcement agencies will ensure they have ownership and that the legislation is not just put in place without their feeling that they have had input into it. Amendments to the Australian Crime Commission Act 2002 align the dismissal powers of the CEO of the ACC to deal with serious misconduct and corruption with those of the AFP commissioner and provide for more flexible arrangements for appointing examiners.

I am sure the member for Cowan will be making a contribution and supporting the member for Stirling's position on this. I am sure the member for Cowan will shortly arrive in the chamber and make a contribution to this debate following mine.

Amendments to the Crimes Act 1914 will help the police deal effectively with portable electronic and data storage devices found when searching a person under warrant. Part 2 will insert rules to govern when documents relating to serious offences and serious terrorism offences should be returned. It will introduce a new standing power for the AFP to take fingerprints and photographs of arrested persons when taking them into custody in relation to Commonwealth offences. There are also amendments to the Australian Federal Police Act 1979 to allow the Commissioner of the AFP to make a payment to an AFP appointee.

From the details I have read out you can see what an important piece of legislation this is. The Crimes Act will be strengthened and that will strengthen law enforcement agencies' powers to gather and examine evidence, as I have already stated. The government very much appreciates that it has the full support of the opposition on this legislation. That shows that it is targeting the right place in relation to law enforcement agencies. When you have legislation of this type it is really important that you have the support of both sides of parliament. For it to successfully operate, you need that approach to the legislation.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 10.11 am to 10.42 am

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (10.42 am)—Today I will take this opportunity to speak on the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 but I will confine my comments to the matters concerning changes to the way the Australian Crime Commission can operate as foreshadowed in these amendments. I certainly have an interest in such matters, being a former member of the Australian Federal Police and a current member of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity.

As we know, the Australian Crime Commission took over from the National Crime Authority, and its primary purpose is the investigation of organised crime. Its current determinations, or work priorities, include the criminal intelligence examination of matters such as amphetamine-type stimulants and new synthetic drugs; child sex; cocaine; complex organised technology-enabled crime, including identity crime; established criminal networks in Victoria; high-risk crime groups and high-risk crime groups in South Australia; illicit firearm markets in New South Wales; Indigenous violence or child abuse; money laundering; people smuggling; serious organised crime penetration of the border; superannuation and investment fraud; terrorism and various other matters. In the last financial year, there were 433 examinations of such matters. When we look through this list of offences and situations, it is clear that there can be a large amount of money generated in committing these sorts of crimes. And with money comes organised crime: syndicates, collaborators, conspirators—all with the common purpose of generating money illegally, and always at the cost of the innocent and the weak.

In preparing for today, I suddenly remembered last night one of those definitions that were drummed into us at the Federal Police College back in 1986, that being the definition of an investigation. It was that ‘an investigation is a search for the truth in the interests of justice and in accordance with the specifications of the law’. That definition brings in a number of concepts, which include ethics, and that is what my fairly limited, short contribution today is about—the ethical behaviour of those charged with undertaking these investigations and these criminal intelligence examinations. It is certainly the case that, where there is big money and organised crime, there is also the potential for corruption.

We can look back at the 2004 detection and then subsequent convictions of ex-Victorian police officer James McCabe and New South Wales police officer Samuel Foster on matters relating to corruption and other serious misconduct. As encouraging as those sorts of past detections have been, the question that needs to be asked is: what more can still be done or needs to be done? It has always been my view that the likelihood of corruption is greater in the state police forces because of the frustrations with the legal and justice systems. The frequency of contact with criminals and the value to criminals of corrupting police do seem to be higher at the state level when these matters are combined. That of course does not preclude corruption taking place or not taking place among permanent Federal Police officers; but, for the reasons I have outlined, I believe that it is less likely.

Nevertheless, to deal with the very few that turn from the path of justice and truth, further options for appropriate action by the CEO of the ACC are required. I note that the provisions of the bill in this capacity were influenced by the 42nd Parliament’s Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity. The committee’s 23 February 2009 report on its inquiry into law enforcement integrity models included the following:

The committee recommends that the Australian Government review existing arrangements for the suspension and dismissal of Commonwealth law enforcement agency employees believed on reasonable grounds to have engaged in serious misconduct or corruption, and that the Government take action as appropriate, bearing in mind the need to respect the rights of employees.

On 13 March 2009, the ACC Chief Executive Officer, John Lawler, responded to the recommendation when he said of the ACC:

Indeed, it has access to and the storage of, as I have spoken about, very significant intelligence holdings so the thresholds around accountability and integrity and responsibility are naturally higher with the

ACC than they might be in other walks of life. My view is that, if we are entrusted with those powers, with those authorities or with that information, we need to have in place robust mechanisms whereby those people who would abuse those trusts can be dealt with in a way that protects the integrity of the organisation and what parliament designed for it. I have to say that some of the current arrangements do not provide the mechanisms to do that in the way that they should.

That brings me to the enhanced dismissal powers that the amendments in the bill provide to the CEO of the ACC. It allows termination in cases where there has been serious misconduct that is having or is likely to have a damaging—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! There being no quorum, the meeting of the Main Committee is suspended until further notice.

Sitting suspended from 10.49 am to 11.01 am

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! A quorum having been formed, the proceedings of the Main Committee will resume.

Mr SIMPKINS—I do appreciate the opportunity to again make some comments about this bill. I want to go to the part of the bill dealing with amendments relating to the enhanced dismissal powers of the CEO of the Australian Crime Commission. The amendments allow for termination in cases where there has been serious misconduct or where there has been conduct which is having, or is likely to have, a damaging effect on morale or on the reputation of the Australian Crime Commission with the Australian public or other agencies, including overseas agencies. From the opposition's perspective, in line with the usual bipartisanship that is associated with matters on which we have absolute common ground, we welcome these changes. The integrity and the standing of the Australian Crime Commission in its dealings with other agencies are sacrosanct.

In terms of intelligence, trust, as we know, is everything. Those organisations that may share information with the ACC must be confident in the commission's ability to properly control that information; otherwise that information will not be shared in the future. That would make the Australian Crime Commission unable to properly pursue its priorities.

I will conclude my contribution by saying that I have complete confidence in the Australian Crime Commission and the Australian Federal Police. Corruption is a very rare event, but precautions are always required to deal with such problems quickly and to ensure that the standing of these agencies remains high, because their standing is important and it is always in the national interest. I certainly endorse this bill as it stands.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (11.03 am)—I am very happy to follow the member for Cowan, who I know to be a former police officer and also a former military police officer. I applaud his commitment to law enforcement.

I also lend my support to the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2010. As has been indicated, organised crime and the threat to safety in our community are things that our government is certainly taking intensive action to detect, disrupt and deter, as all governments should do. The government has introduced and enabled a suite of legislation and technologies aimed at doing that—from phone tapping and interception powers through to provisions relating to unexplained wealth—which are, quite frankly, designed to deter organised crime from setting up business in our communities.

Organised criminal networks are extremely sophisticated. Any view to the contrary is just wrong. Organised crime should, in many respects, be looked at as a business—a nefarious business, granted, but still a business. We need to look at and address various areas of the business of organised crime, including the issue of profit motive. Ongoing challenges to our law enforcement agencies include how we gather intelligence, how we distribute that intelligence and how we engage with state and territory jurisdictions, with a view to setting aside some of the effects that organised crime has on our society. As I said, organised crime is a very sophisticated business. The Commonwealth Organised Crime Strategic Framework recognises that we must ensure that our law enforcement agencies have the powers that they need in order to combat criminal networks. I strongly support the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill, which amends the Australian Crime Commission Act 2002, the Australian Federal Police Act 1979, the Crimes Act 1914 and the Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Act 1979.

As you would appreciate, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have on many occasions expressed my respect and appreciation for the work of our police. They are often called upon to risk their lives in order to protect our communities. It is important that we recognise their endeavours in this respect. The bill will enhance the powers available to the Australian Federal Police and provide the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Crime Commission—currently Mr John Lawler—with powers, similar to those of the Australian Federal Police Commissioner, to appropriately deal with staff who engage in serious misconduct or corruption. I will speak a little more about that later on.

Given that organised crime reportedly costs the Australian community in the vicinity of \$15 million each year, it has to be recognised that it is a significant national threat. The Prime Minister is certainly committed to doing whatever is possible to support and protect our community in that regard. The powers that the Australian Crime Commission staff have are quite extensive, including the power to collect information, accumulate intelligence, and the coercive power to force people to answer questions et cetera. They have those powers for a very good reason. But, where there are extraordinary powers of that nature, there also lies an extraordinary level of responsibility on the organisation and the people who work in that organisation. That is not to say that the staff of the Australian Crime Commission should be treated differently from other public servants in many respects, but, as with people who work in defence and intelligence organisations, they are privy to some of the most private information about people as well as to strategic information about crime itself and, as a consequence, they cannot be seen in all respects—whether they are staff or officers—just as employees for the purposes of various acts, including the Workplace Relations Act.

This bill will allow the commissioner of the Australian Crime Commission to act on issues of misbehaviour in a way that mirrors the abilities of the Australian Federal Police Commissioner and is similar, if not identical, to what applies in every other police jurisdiction in this country. I should say that bringing forward this bill follows a unanimous recommendation of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity, which sought to grant these powers to the commissioner of the Australian Crime Commission. People who are involved in these institutions need to understand not only the role that is given to them under the act but the trust that is put in them when the powers are conferred on those organisations with which they are involved. It is a special class of respon-

sibility. If it were a normal police force all the people involved—staff and officers—would have taken an oath of office. In the police force, they are not classified as employees. They have an oath of office; they are in fact officers. This bill brings that sentiment on par as it applies to the Australian Crime Commission. It is not something foreign to most of the staff of the Australian Crime Commission, who are either seconded from police forces around the country or are former police officers themselves. Effectively, this piece of legislation does much to ensure the integrity of the organisation, an organisation in which we vest considerable powers. I think that is right and, as I say, it was subject to the unanimous recommendation of the parliamentary joint committee on law enforcement integrity.

As I said earlier, the Australian Crime Commission has the ability to use coercive powers to require people to answer questions, and the actual questioning in that area is undertaken by what are called the examiners. Presently there are a limited number of examiners in the authority and there is a lot of crime to detect and to investigate. This bill makes amendments to appoint part-time examiners. Given that the needs of examination can change from topic through to geography, it is appropriate that we have greater flexibility in the exercise of coercive powers and compulsory questioning by examiners. I think it is something that many of us associated with policing would say is overdue because of the amount of pressure that has been put on the Australian Crime Commission, but it is certainly very much a relief to those of us who take an interest in that organisation that this bill is going forward to bring about added flexibility in addressing the issue of part-time examiners to exercise those investigative powers.

The bill also amends the Crimes Act 1914. I believe it is necessary to adapt our laws to the rapidly changing technological advances in our society. As a matter of fact, I spoke briefly yesterday on some aspects of scams and phishing. A lot of these technologies are deployed in serious and organised crime, and these amendments will help police deal effectively with the increasingly popular electronic equipment, whether it is laptops, USB drives or flash drives, assisting them in locating and searching such equipment when undertaking investigations, subject to search warrants. Allowing police officers to seek an order from a magistrate to assist with assessing electronic data seized under a warrant will be pretty helpful in determining the value of evidence in matters that are being investigated. If an item is believed to be linked with a terrorist act or a serious offence, the magistrate will have power to make orders to prevent the return of such items to the people concerned, regardless of charges.

Measures have been taken to ensure that people's rights are not abused. A procedure has been developed where, should an officer seek to exercise these powers, all reasonable steps will have to be taken to discover those persons who have an interest in the property or thing to be confiscated and to notify them of the purpose of the application. The person of interest will then have the opportunity to speak for themselves before the order is actually given.

The bill will also provide the Australian Federal Police with powers to take fingerprints and to photograph persons in lawful custody. The fingerprints and photographs will be taken only with respect to serious criminal matters or indictable offences, and that actually does bring the Commonwealth into line with the majority of state and territory jurisdictions.

In the short time I have available I take the opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of four local police commanders: Superintendent Peter Lennon, from Fairfield, Superintendent Danny Doherty, from Liverpool, Superintendent Ray King, from Cabramatta, and Superinten-

dent Darrin Wilson, from Green Valley. Clearly these are very, very committed police officers, as are the men and women who serve under them. They do a sterling job in protecting the community and the safety of the people in my area.

I would like to particularly acknowledge Leading Senior Constable Tiffany Duane, from Fairfield Police Station, for her outstanding work and for the contributions she has made with respect to domestic violence. Tragically, although there has been an improvement in all other crime statistics, one statistic that remains stubbornly high is domestic violence. It is clearly a scourge on our modern society and something that has a cost not only to individuals and families but to a community as a whole. I do pay regard to the work that Tiffany has done. She has been recognised by being named the Rotary Fairfield Police Officer of the Year. I think that is a reflection of how important it is that we do have people prepared to go out there and champion the issue of domestic violence.

I have been advised that the four police commanders that I mentioned, from Green Valley, Liverpool, Cabramatta and Fairfield, took it upon themselves to take up the challenge of an interbranch competition to determine which region has the best record of blood donation. I think that is not a bad way for police officers to act. They are clearly committed in terms of fighting crime and what they do about public protection, but their generosity in participating in a blood donation competition shows to me and my community that the police genuinely do care.

Police officers and the police force generally protect our Australian community, and it is important that our laws give them the powers that they need and the tools that they need to do their jobs properly. As society evolves, particularly in relation to technological advances, and as time passes, organised crime networks are becoming more sophisticated. We have got to make sure that our law enforcement officers have the same degree of technology available to them to be able to combat crime and protect our communities. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information) (11.18 am)—in reply—I thank all members who have spoken on the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2010. I thank the Government Whip and member for Fowler for his contribution. I know he is a very strong advocate not only for policing but for our doing more in the area of serious and organised crime. I would also like to thank the members for Stirling, Shortland and Cowan for their contributions and support for this bill.

As members know, organised crime inflicts substantial harm on the community, business, government and national security. This bill builds on a range of measures the government has implemented to prevent, disrupt and investigate organised criminal activity, including the two serious and organised crime acts passed by parliament last year. It reflects the government's continuing commitment to strengthening our law enforcement agencies' capability to fight serious and organised crime. For that and other reasons, I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

CONDOLENCES**Atkinson, Corporal Richard Edward**

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

That the House record its deep sorrow at the death on 2 February 2011, of Corporal Richard Edward Atkinson while on combat operations in Afghanistan, and place on record its greatest appreciation of his service to our country, and tender its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (11.20 am)—I rise to add my voice to those of my fellow members and the many Australians who have also passed on their condolences for Corporal Richard Atkinson, who bravely lost his life during operations in Afghanistan. It was with deep sadness that I heard of the loss of Corporal Richard Atkinson, a 22-year-old constituent in my electorate of Solomon, in the Northern Territory.

Corporal Atkinson was posted to the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment, based at the Robertson Barracks in Darwin, after joining the Army in 2007. He completed his recruit and combat engineer basic training that same year, his first. Corporal Atkinson showed strong leadership and dedication to his role and, for his efforts, was promoted to lance corporal in 2009 and, further, rewarded with his promotion to corporal just prior to his section's deployment to Afghanistan in October last year. Corporal Atkinson was leading his combat engineer section as a search commander when he was killed in action. He will always be remembered as a brave and dedicated soldier. His sacrifice for his country must never, ever be forgotten.

Corporal Atkinson leaves behind his parents, Ross and Kate; his brother, James, and his sister-in-law, Sumah; and his fiancée, Dannielle, a former neighbour of mine and constituent of my electorate. My absolute heartfelt and sincere condolences go out to her and Corporal Atkinson's family, friends and comrades during this very sad time.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (11.23 am)—I very much thank the member for Lyons, who has kindly agreed to allow me to speak now, very briefly—

Mr Adams interjecting—

Mr FITZGIBBON—The very, very good member for Lyons, I should say! I have some other commitments—not that I rank those other commitments as a priority over this condolence motion; I certainly do not. But I appreciate the member for Lyons giving way to me.

I am of course here to support the condolence motion moved by the Prime Minister—a condolence motion reflecting the life and good deeds of Corporal Richard Edward Atkinson. I did not know him, although it is possible I might have met him during my time as the Minister for Defence, but I do not need to have known him well to understand who he was and what he was. He would have been typical of those who serve in the Australian uniform on operations overseas.

He was a volunteer, of course. It is always very important to highlight that, because the Australian community does need to understand that people like Corporal Atkinson do what they do both voluntarily and enthusiastically. They know the very serious risks involved and the potential consequences of those actions. On almost every occasion, and no doubt it is the case in this instance, they do so with the full support of their family, friends and loved ones. I think that is a very important message for the Australian community as it begins, even more as time goes on, to question Australia's participation in Afghanistan. These brave young Australians understand why we are there, and they understand the risks. We are there for a very

important reason, and we in this place should not ever speak in a way which indicates that we ourselves question those very important reasons. These men are there to make the world a safer place and to make Australia a safer place. It has been said many times in this place that most of the terrorist attacks that have injured or killed Australians have had some link back to Afghanistan and training by Islamists in that part of the world—not just Afghanistan but the north-west frontier provinces in Pakistan on the border of Afghanistan.

So today we mourn him, but we thank him for what he has done for his country and we thank his family for allowing him to do what he obviously wanted to do, knowing the very great risk involved. It is also an occasion to reinforce the need for those of us in this place to understand that if we are going to send our troops into dangerous places we need to be properly resourcing them. I have no doubt that we are properly resourcing them. Questions have been asked about that from time to time. They even relate to some incidents that occurred in this place earlier in the week. We all need to remain vigilant, each and every one of us, in ensuring that government ensures on all occasions—without any question, without any exceptions—that our troops fighting in theatre have all the support and capability they need to do their job as effectively and as safely as possible. Again, to Corporal Atkinson I say: ‘Thank you for what you did and thank you for your sacrifices. We will never forget your deeds. Hopefully we will ensure that we follow our mission through in Afghanistan and in doing so ensure that your efforts were not given in vain.’

Mr LYONS (Bass) (11.27 am)—I rise on this occasion to pay tribute to Corporal Richard Edward Atkinson, a Tasmanian digger on his first appointment in Afghanistan. Corporal Atkinson was a brave young Australian serving his country, and his life has been cut short far too early. My heart breaks for his family—his dad, Ross, and his mum, Kate—and for his fiancée, Dannielle. I cannot imagine the anguish that they must feel at the loss of a son, brother and fiancé. His death is a tragedy, and I extend my deepest sympathies to all who had the pleasure of knowing him.

Corporal Atkinson attended Launceston Church Grammar School in my electorate of Bass. His principal recently spoke highly of him, talking of his popularity and leadership within the school community. He was clearly a man who cared for his fellow man and for his country. These same leadership abilities Corporal Atkinson demonstrated while at school he exhibited in the Australian Defence Force. He was promoted to lance corporal in 2009 and by all accounts displayed strong leadership in bringing his section together during their preparation for operations in Afghanistan. His dedication to his section was rewarded with his promotion to corporal just prior to their deployment.

His death is the 22nd since our troops entered Afghanistan, and at age 22 he was far too young. At this sad time, fallen diggers’ families are no doubt remembering their men who have died or been injured supporting our nation. Lest we forget the great sacrifice they have made. May I also add that our thoughts and prayers are with Corporal Atkinson’s colleagues, who are also feeling this great loss. They have lost a mate and a strong member of their unit. Our thoughts and prayers are also with the soldier who was injured in this tragic event. May he soon recover.

Let me reiterate Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s sentiments. Our mission in Afghanistan is an important one. I am confident Australians are most proud of Corporal Atkinson and his dedication to his country. Corporal Atkinson and our other troops in Afghanistan are making a real

difference. We have heard in media statements from family members and close friends that Corporal Atkinson was a family man with a great sense of humour and mateship. We have lost a true Aussie hero. Often it seems we take our military and the things it does on our behalf very much for granted. This has been a raw reminder of the sacrifices our Defence Force makes and a reminder of how lucky we are in Australia.

Major Cameron Ellis, who commands Australian Mentoring Taskforce 2, says the death of Corporal Atkinson was a tragic and 'stark, knife to the guts reminder' of how important their job is as well as an incentive for troops to continue their efforts. His death will not be in vain. Corporal Atkinson will be remembered as a brave young Australian who served his country well. His courage, loyalty, resilience and determination were the making of a fine soldier. The Atkinson family can be very proud of Richard. He will remain in their hearts and minds and in the hearts and minds of all Australians. Rest in peace, Corporal Atkinson. Your bravery and courage will not be forgotten. Lest we forget.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Minister for Indigenous Health) (11.33 am)—Madam Deputy Speaker Livermore, this is the first occasion that I have had the opportunity to see you in the chair. A wonderful thing it is.

Can I follow on from my friend the member for Bass and offer my sympathy at the death of Corporal Richard Atkinson. I express my condolences to his fiancée, Dannielle; his parents, Ross and Kate; his brother, James; and sister-in-law, Sumah. I would also extend my thoughts to Corporal Atkinson's comrades in the Australian Defence Force. I know that operational deaths are felt deeply across the wider defence family. As we know, Corporal Atkinson was born in Hobart in 1988, which is one year after I joined this parliament. He joined the Army in 2007 and he successfully completed his recruitment combat engineer basic training prior to being posted to the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment based in Darwin. Corporal Atkinson was just 22 years old when he was killed as a result of an improvised explosive device in the Tangi Valley in the Deh Rawud region of Afghanistan. He was participating in a partnered patrol with the Afghan National Army. As a result of the IED blast, a second soldier was seriously injured, and he is in a satisfactory condition.

I was fortunate enough to visit Robertson Barracks, in Darwin, just as Corporal Atkinson and his colleagues were due to deploy to Afghanistan last year, following extensive preparation. More recently I was in Afghanistan—only a fortnight ago—with many of his comrades, prior to his unfortunate death. This week I contacted Brigadier Gus McLachlan, Commander 1 Brigade in Darwin. He assured me that he had made all the necessary support arrangements for the family of Corporal Atkinson.

I know that Corporal Atkinson displayed strong leadership in bringing his section together during their preparation for operations in Afghanistan. I know that Corporal Atkinson was an outstanding career soldier, and this has been testified to by Brigadier McLachlan on a number of occasions. He was also a decorated soldier, having been awarded the Australian Active Service Medal with Clasp: International Coalition Against Terrorism, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the NATO Medal with Clasp: International Security Assistance Force, the Australian Defence Medal and the Army Combat Badge.

Corporal Atkinson died serving his country and is owed a great debt of gratitude which we know can never be repaid. He has brought honour to our nation, the Australian Defence Force,

the Australian Army and, most especially, his family. While I know that I never met Corporal Atkinson, those who knew him describe him as a 'funny man, always putting smiles on other people's faces', and a person with a real taste for adventure. Corporal Atkinson's commanding officer, Major David French, spoke of his professionalism. He said in the eulogy at Tarin Kowt:

Akka was never happier than when he was on the job and he was bloody good at it ...

A ramp ceremony will be held later today at RAAF Base Darwin to honour the arrival of Corporal Richard Atkinson back in Australia. He will be mourned but honoured by his colleagues, for whom he was a mate. On behalf of the government and myself, I offer whatever support I can provide to Richard Atkinson's family and friends through this difficult time and assure him and them that the sacrifice of this astounding young soldier will be remembered. We will not forget him.

I will conclude by making an observation. I said at the outset that this young man was born one year after I was first elected to this parliament. I do not regard myself as being that old, but he was one year older than my son. When you visit and speak to Australian Defence Force personnel, these brave young men and women who serve this nation, you see that the cream of Australian youth have joined the Australian Defence Force to defend our nation and you see how proudly they wear that uniform, how justly proud they are of the job they do. The sacrifices they make on our behalf can never be underestimated and I do not think are often properly understood. They show enormous valour and courage.

Corporal Atkinson's service to this nation epitomises the sacrifice that has been made by so many in the past for all of us, so when we mourn his passing we need to celebrate his life and the contribution he has made. It is no easy thing to say goodbye to your family, put on the uniform and carry a weapon, because immediately you do that it demands things of you that those of us not in uniform can never really contemplate. So I say to his comrades and to his family that we do appreciate and really value the service that he has given to our great nation. It should make us all the more determined to ensure that, as all of our Australian Defence Force members, wherever they may be, carry that uniform with such great pride, we take pride in making sure they have got the wherewithal to do the task that we require of them.

Lest we forget.

Mr TUDGE (Aston) (11.40 am)—I rise to join the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in the condolence motion in honour of Corporal Richard Atkinson, who was tragically killed in action by a roadside bomb on 2 February 2011.

At just 22 years of age, Corporal Atkinson was on his first deployment to Afghanistan. Our thoughts are with his family—his mother and father, Kate and Ross; his brother, James; his sister-in-law, Sumah; and in particular his fiancée, Danielle. It is a time of great sadness for them. Whilst this condolence motion is in no way likely to ease their pain, we mourn the death of Corporal Atkinson, a brave young soldier who had so much life ahead of him and we wish those close to him courage and strength into the future.

Whilst Corporal Atkinson died tragically, he died with great honour serving our nation in the cause of making Afghanistan a place safer from terrorism. His sacrifice is not in vain. He also served in Indonesia in 2009 on Operation Padang Assist. We mourn with Corporal Atkinson's colleagues in the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment and the wider Australian Army. They

have lost a mate and a fellow soldier. In particular our hearts go out to his comrade Sapper Rose, who was wounded in the same incident, and to his family and friends. I wish him well in his recovery. It is also a difficult time, I imagine, for the 21 families who have also tragically lost loved ones. They must sadly grieve for the loss of another Australian soldier.

Corporal Atkinson's death is the 22nd loss our nation has faced in Afghanistan, and to date there have been 168 Australian Defence Force personnel wounded in Afghanistan, many grievously so. We make no mistake: deployment in Afghanistan is dangerous work. However, it is extremely important work that serves to make our world a safer place and that has the full support of the coalition. We support all of our soldiers, pray for them and give thanks for their individual efforts and sacrifices.

We will remember Corporal Richard Edward Atkinson as a hero of our nation. Lest we forget.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (11.43 am)—I want to join the members for Lingiari and Aston in remembering Corporal Atkinson, at 22 a very brave and a very young man. He was a member of Darwin's 1st Combat Engineer Regiment and he died when our enemies exploded an improvised device last Wednesday week.

Our thoughts are with Corporal Atkinson's family and his fiancée, Dannielle. I am very pleased to hear that the Minister for Defence is ordering even more devices that can be used to combat these weapons used by the Taliban which have caused most of the casualties against our Australian service people who are fighting there. I will say something about that fighting in a minute and the justice of the cause, despite the difficulties, in Afghanistan. First of all, I want to associate myself with the comments of the Prime Minister about Corporal Atkinson's fiancée. She said:

Her pain—

that is, Dannielle's pain—

I believe, is almost beyond our imagining and we should not pretend that the uttering of words of condolence in this chamber today will ease that pain. But today we honour her sacrifice and we are united in wishing her the courage and the strength she will need for the future.

I was asked by the former defence minister, the member for Hunter, to be involved in a ramp ceremony for Private Greg Sher, one of our 22 heroes who have been killed in action in Afghanistan, and I have stayed in contact with the family since. In speaking in this chamber about his demise I said that as a member of parliament I do not think I had done anything as difficult as participating in the ramp ceremony, with the family standing opposite and the coffin holding his body coming off the plane that had arrived from Afghanistan. I will never forget seeing the faces of his parents standing opposite me. It makes all of us understand the true seriousness of our involvement in a war of any kind. The fact that we sit here in this Australian parliament, in the bubble in Canberra, and ask people to be involved in these very difficult circumstances on our behalf is really brought home to us by the honest representation that I think the leadership of this country on both sides undertakes when they participate in these very difficult funerals and ramp ceremonies, and the many ordinary members of parliament too who go along and do their best to assist the families. I think it really makes us understand the true seriousness of our involvement in Afghanistan.

Corporal Atkinson was a very dedicated soldier with long career aspirations. His major, Major French, said, 'Akka was never happier than when he was on the job and he was bloody good at it.' Corporal Atkinson is one of many thousands of heroic young Australians who have served with valour and skill in Afghanistan. A member of his family said: 'Rich was the funny man, always putting a smile on people's faces. He was hoping to start a family this year with Dannielle. He was a dedicated soldier with long career aspirations.' Again, I think that is something that is important for us to understand. Although Corporal Atkinson was on his first deployment to Afghanistan, many of our people in the full-time military services have been on several deployments, including in East Timor, Iraq and particularly now in Afghanistan.

In my view, Corporal Atkinson is the real face of the Australian soldier. Both his regiment, the commando regiment formerly 4RAR, and the Special Air Service Regiment are doing magnificent work on this country's behalf in Afghanistan. From a purely military point of view, if one is to read all of the current literature on the success of our forces in Afghanistan, it is clear that Corporal Atkinson and his mates are continuing to achieve the high standard of military professionalism that we have come to expect of our forces.

Indeed, it was interesting to read recently that Australian service personnel are finding these deployments more and more effective. They are being more militarily effective against the Taliban than they were in the past, and after all that is the reason we asked them to be involved. They are not simply involved in nation building. When I get emails from people questioning foreign aid to Afghanistan, I think of the important role that those young men and women out there in Afghanistan are fulfilling for this nation. They are preventing the kind of murderous activity we saw in Bali from coming here. It was wonderful to see our VC recipient, who I will be speaking about later, say that so clearly when he was interviewed about this. He knew exactly what he was doing and it is my experience that our young professionals in the armed services know exactly what they are doing there on behalf of Australia.

Corporal Atkinson's contribution was for Australia's sake and not simply for our good neighbourly intention of helping to reconstruct Afghanistan. He was there to make sure that the kinds of attacks that have occurred against Australians in Mumbai and in Bali do not come to mainstream Australia. Until Australia has an understanding and an assurance like all other countries represented in ISAF that the previous Taliban regime will not host al-Qaeda, which we all remember was the situation prior to the murder of 3,000 people on 11 September, we will be there. However difficult it is, the Taliban and their evil associates in al-Qaeda should understand that. Australians understand what they are about and, until we can be assured that these people will not be able to use that area to generate activity in our part of the world, Australia will be involved—and very effectively. I say this because I want the Atkinson family to understand that people across this country appreciate their sacrifice. As the Prime Minister said, we cannot pretend to understand the deep desperation that the family feels. But our service personnel are working in a just cause. They are working with full understanding and they are working with the backing of the overwhelming majority of the Australian people, even though we would prefer not to be there, not to be spending our blood and treasure in Afghanistan.

It was mentioned last weekend that the Taliban insurgents are losing their stranglehold over key southern provinces. Corporal Atkinson was killed by Taliban forces desperate to claw back control of the Tangi Valley in Afghanistan's Deh Rawud region in the wake of a success-

ful coalition effort to drive them into the mountains. This is helping to achieve security for people in the towns, villages and cities there. Corporal Atkinson made an incredibly valuable contribution, as do all our young men and women there.

I want to join with the minister, the member for Lingiari and the member for Aston and associate myself with our deep condolences to the family and our pride in the effort of Corporal Atkinson and his colleagues in the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment, our pride with the fellows in the 1st Commando Regiment, formerly 4RAR, and, of course, our pride in our people in the SAS, who are over there fulfilling the nation's best intentions to assist the people of Afghanistan, but above all to prevent murderous attacks on civilians from coming here. I commend this motion and I honour the contribution of Corporal Atkinson.

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong) (11.54 am)—I rise to join the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and many other colleagues in honouring the sacrifice of Corporal Richard Atkinson. Only 22 years of age, Corporal Atkinson was tragically killed while on combat operations in Afghanistan. A proud member of the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment and on his first deployment to Afghanistan, Corporal Atkinson will be sadly missed by his family, friends and a grateful nation. At this time our deepest thoughts and prayers are with his fiancée, Danielle; his father and mother, Ross and Kate; and all their extended family.

Corporal Atkinson loved being in the Army and loved being with his mates. In his eulogy, at a special memorial service at Multinational Base Tarin Kowt, Major David French told of Corporal Atkinson's cheeky nature, his commitment and professionalism to the task at hand and of his natural leadership abilities. 'Akka' he said, 'was never happier than when he was on the job and he was bloody good at it. So farewell, Digger. While we mourn and miss you here, others who have gone before you will welcome you to the fold. Travel safely mate, we miss you.' These powerful words were expressed by one soldier to another and say it best.

Let it be known that Corporal Atkinson's ultimate service to his country was not in vain. His efforts in Afghanistan and those of his fellow service men and women are helping to make that country a better place and the world more secure. It is an international mission, in which Australia plays an important part, and is making a real difference. The mission in Afghanistan is and will be long, hard and painful. Twenty-two Australians have already been tragically killed and 168 wounded, including Sapper Rose, who was injured by the same improvised explosive device that took the life of Corporal Atkinson. We say to each of our fallen soldiers, fellow service men and women, and particularly today to the family and friends of Corporal Atkinson: our thoughts and prayers are with you always and a grateful nation will never forget.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (11.58 am)—I rise to honour and respect the life and sacrifice of Corporal Richard Atkinson on this day, which marks the final journey of his life. I offer my heartfelt condolences to the Atkinson family: his mother, Kate; his father, Ross; brother, James; sister-in-law, Sumah; his fiancée, Danielle; and his extended family, their friends and his Australian Defence Force mates in the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment. I also honour and respect the sacrifice made by his family. Every day this fine young man will be in their thoughts and hearts. For his mum and dad, they will remember Richard as a baby—the little boy—his many antics, his achievements and his aspirations as a young man. His brother will remember all their fun and games and many adventures. His fiancée, Danielle, will remember how much they loved each other and the dreams they had of the future that they would

share. In spite of the terrible grief of the Atkinson family they will all know why Richard chose the path he did, why his personal qualities made him a leader, why he loved his job, why he was regarded as a great young soldier with steely resolve and why he always wanted to do his job properly and lead from the front. They will know why the words of Major French, which we have heard today, are so relevant:

... as the search commander, Corporal Atkinson's job was to direct from the rear.

"But he wasn't that type of guy. He called his junior blokes back behind him, and with his best mate Rosey went forward to confirm the location of the device. I've got no doubt that as he did so, he had half a grin and a quick remark at the ready. Akka was never happier than when he was on the job ..."

Major French went on to say:

... he was someone ... who after his death would never have wanted anyone to do anything in his name, "but simply get the job done for the same reasons we always have—for each other, for our mates, for our mission.

He said:

And he was bloody good at it.

Richard epitomised the motto of his Combat Team Charlie—that is, 'Never alone, fight together.' That is something that Sapper Rose would know very directly at this moment.

I honour Richard Atkinson. As my colleague Stuart Robert said so eloquently, he fell fighting for freedom for the Afghani people and freedom for all Australians.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore)—I understand that 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.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (12.01 pm)—I move:

That further proceedings be conducted in the House.

Question agreed to.

ROBERTS-SMITH, CORPORAL BENJAMIN, VC, MG

Consideration resumed from 8 February 2011.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (12.01 pm)—On indulgence: I rise to lend some comment to the awarding of the Victoria Cross to Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith VC, MG, a soldier standing over 200 centimetres tall, half Spartan, half Athenian. He is Spartan in raw courage and incredible valour in concern for his mates; in strength; in commitment; and in dedication. He is Athenian in his love for his family, his wife and two beautiful daughters; in his recognition and care for nature; and in his kind and gentle words to all he speaks to. He is a modern day warrior, perhaps a modern day poet, and truly a great Australian soldier.

Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith VC was awarded the nation's highest honour, the Victoria Cross, on 23 January 2011. The Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, awarded the medal at an investiture ceremony at Campbell Barracks, the home of the Special Air Service Regiment in Perth. He probably now is one of the most highly decorated soldiers in the nation, wearing both the Victoria Cross and the Medal for Gallantry, which was awarded for bravery in Afghanistan in 2006. At the investiture ceremony, a wonderful picture was painted as the Chief

of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Houston, made the point that Corporal Roberts-Smith had brought credit not only to himself and to the uniform he wears but to his nation. He spoke of the enduring sacrifice of soldiers and of the Special Air Service Regiment as one of the finest fighting forces in the world, and he spoke highly of our newest VC recipient—indeed high praise from Caesar himself!

The true impact of the Victoria Cross, however, is perhaps demonstrated more fully by the fact that CDF then stood and saluted Corporal Roberts-Smith, something that he has the honour to do and something that all serving military personnel will do when they meet Corporal Roberts-Smith VC. The awarding of the medal is also significant in terms of what it has brought to our nation and its people. The military has once again presented its heroes that the nation can look to, aspire to, acknowledge and seek to emulate, not so much in deed but definitely in thought and, more importantly, in character. His valour and his courage lie at the nation's very core.

Corporal Roberts-Smith exemplifies the best of us in that he won this amazing medal not so much for destroying enemy combatants in war but more for the reason for which he did those deeds: he sought out and closed with the enemy because his mates were at enormous risk. When asked why he ran 20 metres into withering machinegun blasts, he answered that it was because one of his mates was taking enormous fire and he thought he would just have a crack. Truly Australian.

It should come as no surprise that Corporal Roberts-Smith, born and bred of the very essence of that which defines us all, put his life on the line for his mates. His concern was always for his fellow soldiers, and that concern overrode the very basic instinct of survival, the very basic instinct of self-preservation, and he overcame that while fearing fear itself and took himself to those great lengths—charging a machinegun post, despatching enemy gunners and then continuing to fight for the following hours.

Some would argue this is the stuff of fiction; how writers would eloquently write about how romantic war could be. This is indeed the stuff of legend, carved out of the harshness of an Afghani landscape, where bravery and fear are very real, where shed blood is the result of actions. That is why the Australian Defence Force in all its elements, not just the Special Operations Task Group but the men and women of our Mentoring Task Force, is held in such high regard. We ask no quarter, we give no quarter, and certainly Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith VC emulated that to the extreme.

I recently stood in the House and spoke on a condolence motion for Corporal Richard Atkinson. I am aware that I am following on from the conclusion of that condolence motion. Many members stood to express their great sympathy and to acknowledge the sacrifice of Corporal Atkinson, the twenty-second Australian to lay down his life in action in the combat operational zone in Afghanistan. I also take this opportunity to personally thank all members for their gracious words of support to the family and friends of Corporal Atkinson. Thank you for taking the time to acknowledge his sacrifice. It is important. In time his fiancée, Dannielle, his mum and dad and his brother and his brother's wife and his future nieces and nephews will read the words of members of this parliament, and they will see how the nation stood to honour him. Amongst all the sadness, amongst the difficult times, words expressed by the nation's leaders make a difference. Words are indeed powerful.

It is fabulous that here in this place, in the nation's capital, we are able to express both great admiration for the works of our national heroes and great gratitude for their truly selfless acts of bravery. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. We see this not only in Corporal Richard Atkinson but, importantly, in Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith VC, who sought to go forward to protect his mates regardless of the personal sacrifice. It is a tribute to him and all who follow him.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Minister for Indigenous Health) (12.08 pm)—I thank the member for Fadden and compliment him for his contributions not only today but also on the condolence motion for Corporal Atkinson. For the second time in just two years our country's highest military honour, the Victoria Cross for Australia, has been awarded to a Special Air Services Regiment soldier. I will comment further on the regiment a little later. I endorse the remarks made by the member for Fadden. Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith was honoured with the VC last month after demonstrating the most conspicuous gallantry in circumstances of extreme peril during engagement in Afghanistan in June 2010. We know that his bravery almost certainly saved the lives of a number of his comrades.

This outstanding individual had already received the Medal for Gallantry for actions in Afghanistan in 2006. As such, he has now become our nation's most highly decorated soldier. I congratulate Corporal Roberts-Smith, his unit and his family on this inspiring achievement.

I say that having as a backdrop the condolence motion, the debate on which we have just completed, about the death of Corporal Richard Atkinson. His death is, in a way, as inspiring—to know that young people are prepared to put on this great uniform and fight for our nation and be prepared to pay the ultimate sacrifice. This is precisely what Corporal Roberts-Smith was prepared to do on the day that he won his Victoria Cross. He needs to understand, and I am sure he does understand, how proud of him are the Australian Defence Force—his defence family—and the Australian nation.

I also congratulate a second soldier from Corporal Roberts-Smith's unit, named only as Sergeant P, who was awarded the Star of Gallantry for his brave actions during this same engagement in June last year. These guys who work in the regiment are not all anonymous, but they crave anonymity for security reasons and for the purposes of their work. So unfortunately we cannot identify Sergeant P publicly, but he and his colleagues, who proudly wear the beret and are able to wear the beret, are a unique bunch of Australians. I was recently in Afghanistan with a number of special forces soldiers, two of whom—comrades of Corporal Roberts-Smith—were travelling with us constantly. It was for that reason that I was unable to attend the ceremony in Perth on 23 January this year, because it was then that I was visiting our troops in Afghanistan, where I was again able to see at first hand the fine work of that our Defence Force personnel are carrying out in the name of our great country.

It is, of course, not surprising that during the trip the bravery of Corporal Roberts-Smith was commented upon by a number of Australian Defence Force personnel. His deeds in the face of a numerically superior enemy are impressive not only to his colleagues but also to the wider Australian community. I remain astounded by and am incredibly proud of our deployed personnel and the way they conduct themselves, often in very difficult, trying and very dangerous circumstances far away from home and their loved ones. Like many of those who wear the sandy beret, Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith is modest when recalling his achieve-

ments, but I think it is worthwhile reading into *Hansard* the details of the event for which this Victoria Cross has been awarded:

On 11 June 2010, a troop of the Special Operations Task Group conducted a helicopter assault into Tizak, Kandahar Province, in order to capture or kill a senior Taliban commander.

Immediately upon the helicopter insertion, the troop was engaged by machine gun and rocket propelled grenade fire from multiple, dominating positions. Two soldiers were wounded in action and the troop was pinned down by fire from three machine guns in an elevated fortified position to the south of the village. Under the cover of close air support, suppressive small arms and machine gun fire, Corporal Roberts-Smith and his patrol manoeuvred to within 70 metres of the enemy position in order to neutralise the enemy machine gun positions and regain the initiative.

Upon the commencement of the assault, the patrol drew very heavy, intense, effective and sustained fire from the enemy position. Corporal Roberts-Smith and his patrol members fought towards the enemy position until, at a range of 40 metres, the weight of fire prevented further movement forward. At this point, he identified the opportunity to exploit some cover provided by a small structure.

As he approached the structure, Corporal Roberts-Smith identified an insurgent grenadier in the throes of engaging his patrol. Corporal Roberts-Smith instinctively engaged the insurgent at point-blank range resulting in the death of the insurgent. With the members of his patrol still pinned down by three enemy machine gun positions, he exposed his own position in order to draw fire away from his patrol, which enabled them to bring fire to bear against the enemy. His actions enabled his Patrol Commander to throw a grenade and silence one of the machine guns. Seizing the advantage, and demonstrating extreme devotion to duty and the most conspicuous gallantry, Corporal Roberts-Smith, with a total disregard for his own safety, stormed the enemy position, killing the two remaining machine gunners.

His act of valour enabled his patrol to break-in to the enemy position and to lift the weight of fire from the remainder of the troop who had been pinned down by the machine gun fire. On seizing the fortified gun position, Corporal Roberts-Smith then took the initiative again and continued to assault enemy positions in depth during which he and another patrol member engaged and killed further enemy. His acts of selfless valour directly enabled his troop to go on and clear the village of Tizak of Taliban. This decisive engagement subsequently caused the remainder of the Taliban in Shah Wali Kot District to retreat from the area.

Describing the events which led to the award of the VC, Corporal Roberts-Smith said:

I just looked across and saw my mates getting ripped up. I just decided to move forward because I wasn't going to sit there and do nothing. I thought I'd have a crack, not let my mates down.

When you hear those words—and not only his view of it at that time but the description of the action that took place—for those of us who have not experienced this, I think it is almost unbelievable. The element of bravery which is part of the Australian way of doing business in the Australian Defence Forces is really intriguing. Here we have someone who took it upon himself to clearly lay his life on the line in the most obvious way by attracting fire for his mates. We throw barbs across the chamber and feel a bit personally damaged at times, but we can never, ever appreciate what it is to be in such danger. When you contemplate what it is this man has achieved, he must be a mighty bloody warrior.

And he is not on his own. He is, as I said at the outset, our nation's most highly-decorated soldier. I know that his mates, those whom he works with, all share the characteristics which he exhibited. Having met and worked in different ways with members of the Special Operations Task Group, most particularly members from the Special Air Service Regiment, I believe that we should be internally proud of what they do and understand that their capacity to be able to do the work and have the courage to make the sorts of decisions which Corporal

Roberts-Smith made, is due to the training that they have received, the leadership that they are shown, and the leadership which is developed within them. They are extraordinarily competent and professional individuals, and Corporal Roberts-Smith is a compliment to them and to all those who serve. I know that his valour is an inspiration to the soldiers whom he fights alongside and of course is in keeping with the finest traditions of the Australian Army and the Australian Defence Force.

Today we can publicly salute the courage, spirit and strength of Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, VC, MG. I congratulate him, and I know that his wife, Emma, and his daughters, Eve and Elizabeth, will come to appreciate in future years the value of these achievements and the truth of what he has done. His family must be so proud of him and I know the nation certainly is.

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (12.20 pm)—When our service men and women leave this country to serve overseas, we know in our hearts and minds that it comes with an element of risk. In the past few weeks, Australians have seen the turmoil that serving our country can bring but also the celebration bestowed on a soldier for his courage and bravery illuminated in a time of battle.

In the light of tragedy, it seems an appropriate time to celebrate a moment of gallant behaviour shown by Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, who was awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia in recognition of extreme devotion and heroism. The Victoria Cross is the highest and most respected military award which can be given by our country. Benjamin Roberts-Smith is one of three recipients of the honour who are still living, and he is the first from Western Australia since World War II. Every VC winner has put his life on the line for his mates. Benjamin Roberts-Smith risked his life to relieve his comrades who were under withering machine-gun fire at the time of the incident. Corporal Roberts-Smith did what he could to bring his mates home.

The greatest responsibility, and the one which is at the core of the Anzac story, is to bring your mates home. Corporal Roberts-Smith did just that. I take special pride in the work of the men and women of the Australian Defence Force, as my home town of Wagga Wagga in the electorate of Riverina is known as the home of the soldier. Every Army recruit who signs up to train and learn the roles of Anzacs comes through the gates of Kapooka—Australia's renowned Army recruit training centre.

As well as Corporal Roberts-Smith and another recent Victoria Cross recipient, Mark Donaldson, the Riverina has had four recipients of the VC medal since the award was first handed out during the Boer War. William Jackson from Gunbar, who served in World War I, was only 19 when he received the honour. John Ryan from Tumut also served in the Great War, as did Walter Brown, who later settled in Leeton. Reg Rattey from Barmedman, who served in World War II, is the fourth recipient.

It is an honour to soldiers past that the tradition lives on in a new generation—a generation that is showing itself to be as brave and as selfless as the generations before. To Corporal Roberts-Smith I, with the rest of the Riverina, say thank you for your courage, your quick thinking, your valour and your service to our nation.

On Wednesday, 2 February at 9.30 am Afghanistan time, an improvised explosive device exploded, fatally wounding Corporal Richard Edward Atkinson. The recent awarding of the

VC brings home the harsh realities of the death of Corporal Richard Atkinson, and it brings to mind the very incongruous nature of both death and valour, with the VC being the highest honour in wartime. At 22 years of age, Corporal Atkinson had only just begun his life as a soldier, but he was about to begin his life as a man. How courageous is it that a man so young chooses to leave behind his loved ones to fight for the freedom that the people of Afghanistan deserve and to preserve the rights of the Australian people. The freedoms that the people of Afghanistan deserve are the ones that we take for granted. The men and women who serve so bravely for us in Afghanistan are people of whom we can all be immensely proud. They are working to bring peace and stability to this country. Australia is there to help them, because we are not immune from the terrorist acts that have been planned from Afghanistan for so long.

Australian soldiers have been killed as a result of terrorist activity while directly protecting our freedom to live unencumbered by the threat of terrorist activity. Their work is of great importance and, while we will mourn the death of Corporal Atkinson forevermore, we should also be eternally proud of the work that our soldiers do.

Australia lost a brave young man who paid with his life, a very high price indeed. He will be mourned by his family, friends and mates in the Army, the wider Defence Force family and all Australians who value and respect the commitment of Defence Force personnel who work in this country's best interests. We wish the soldier who was injured at the time all the best for a speedy recovery. Our thoughts are with him and his family. Today we stand alongside the family, friends and colleagues of Corporal Atkinson as we mourn his loss. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith VC and Corporal Richard Atkinson are owed an eternal debt of gratitude by all Australians.

Lest we forget.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (12.25 pm)—On 16 January, as locals have done for the last 70 years, a commemoration was held in the St Kilda Cemetery for Captain Albert Jacka VC and bar. As I have done every year since becoming the member for Melbourne Ports I attended this moving ceremony for our local war hero at St Kilda Cemetery. It is usually addressed by someone from the family or an eminent historian like Geoff Blainey or one of the great local leaders of our veterans organisations, like Brigadier Jack Rossi.

Jacka was awarded Australia's first Victoria Cross in the First World War for gallantry, valour and selflessness. On 19 May 1915, the Anzacs were entrenched above the beaches at Gallipoli and the Turks launched a major assault on their position. A section of the trench at Courtney's Post was captured. When the Anzacs struggled to drive them back, Jacka, taking advantage of a diversion created by the bomb throwers at one end of the Turkish position, took on the Turks, killing all of the occupants of their trench. We have just heard the member for Lingiari describe in detail the actions of Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith VC, who has just won his award for his role in Afghanistan. How strikingly similar they were to the actions of Jacka. The citation for Jacka's VC reads:

For most conspicuous bravery on the night of the 19-20 May, 1915, at Courtney's Post, Gallipoli Peninsular. Lance Corporal Jacka, while holding a portion of our trench with four men, was heavily attacked. When all except himself were killed or wounded, the trench was rushed and occupied by seven Turks.

Lance Corporal Jacka at once most gallantly attacked them single-handed and killed the whole party, five by rifle fire and two with the bayonet.

While 90 years later we honoured and remembered Jacka's bravery, we were unaware that eight days later, on 23 January, we would again be honouring an exceptional piece of bravery by another Australian soldier in the line of duty. Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, like Jacka, was an ordinary bloke, a somewhat large bloke, who did something extraordinary, and he has received the nation's highest honour for his actions in Afghanistan. Roberts-Smith's gallantry has been recognised once before, in 2006, when he was awarded the Medal for Gallantry. His actions on 11 June 2010 epitomise the definition that is appropriate for the award of the Victoria Cross.

Roberts-Smith's story is one in which we see not only the bravery and valour of one soldier but also, I would argue, the continuum of Captain Albert Jacka's great service in the First World War. It is typical of those heroes who step forward in the various conflicts that Australia has been involved in in the defence of our nation. Every time one of our armed forces engages an enemy in the line duty they do so for their mates, their family and their country. Every day they put their lives at risk and every day they act alone and take a level of bravery and gallantry that turns them into Australia's heroes. I was going to read the details of Corporal Roberts-Smith's actions when his special operations group conducted a helicopter assault on Tizak to capture a local senior Taliban commander, but the member for Lingiari did it so well I do not think it is necessary to repeat it.

It was not simply for his mates that Benjamin Roberts-Smith did that. Sitting at a breakfast table in faraway Melbourne, I heard him interviewed the following morning on the ABC. He was asked about why he did what he did. He said:

"I believe that we—

that is, the soldiers fighting in Afghanistan on Australia's behalf—

are making a difference in stemming the flow of terrorism into Australia, and I want my children to be able to live as everyone does now without fear of getting onto a bus and having it blow up."

So we see this picture of Corporal Roberts-Smith, his lovely wife Emma and their twins, Eve and Elizabeth; we see his extraordinary gallantry; but we also see his clear-sighted understanding of why he is doing what he is doing. That makes us all proud of him and his deeds. It makes it even more a source of pride that we have one of our leading soldiers like his mates who knows what he is doing, why he is doing it, why he is there on the country's behalf.

Tattooed across Corporal Roberts-Smith's chest are the words, 'I will not fail my brothers.' This pledge rang true on 11 June, and for his actions the nation is indebted to him. Corporal Roberts-Smith told the *Australian* at the point where he saw the Taliban fellow about to throw a hand grenade:

"At that point I decided I'd had enough. I wasn't going to wait until someone got hit. I know their families, they know mine. I'm not going to let someone get hit while I sit here doing nothing."

That kind of spirit and commitment to the safety of others—the commitment to help and risk one's own life to better others—is the same spirit that Albert Jacka showed in that trench in Gallipoli, Courtney's Post, all those years ago, and of course Jacka repeated many times in France, where he won the MC and rose to the rank of captain. The same spirit was shown by a current recipient of the VC, SAS Trooper Mark Donaldson, who exposed himself to heavy

machine gunfire to retrieve a wounded translator. It is the spirit which Australian soldiers should live up to and embrace.

Corporal Roberts-Smith and his troops' victory in Tizak is just one of many that Australia has seen recently in Afghanistan in Oruzgan province. I want to say something about this because I think it is important not to see Benjamin Roberts-Smith's actions in isolation. He would want us to see his deeds in context of the Army's military activities, for Benjamin Roberts-Smith is part of a highly successful operation that is going on in those two provinces in Kandahar and Oruzgan.

Three Australian soldiers were recently profiled in the *Australian*. They were not identified for security reasons. The three men from 2nd Commando Regiment revealed that there was a slow but definite improvement in the military situation in Afghanistan. All three spoke of the importance of Australia's contribution in Oruzgan and said that the difference on the ground in the southern provinces was remarkable. Sergeant R said:

"We are more mobile, (able to) establish ourselves and disrupt and get in there and get under their skin." Having served in Afghanistan three times, the sergeant stated that his platoon used the 'tethered goat' approach to draw out insurgents. He said that on recent tours the tactics are keeping the Taliban on the run, with 90-kilometre motorised patrols into the enemy's heartland. Captain A reported that his platoon's operations in the southern province of Kandahar and in the Mirabad Valley of Oruzgan had made substantial differences. The platoon's operations had allowed coalition forces to establish a permanent security presence in the area.

These three men, like Corporal Roberts-Smith, have also been awarded for their bravery and valour. The dangerous and risky operations our diggers undertake in Oruzgan and in the southern province of Kandahar are enormously important for the battle against the Taliban. Last month Australian and Afghan troops removed significant quantities of explosives and weapons from the insurgents in those areas. They seized an insurgent cache that included 400 kilograms of explosives and 22 ready to use IEDs—improvised explosive devices. The Australian Defence Department revealed that in the last week of January this year operations within the Baluchi Valley north of the Australian base in Tarin Kowt had received considerable success against the Taliban.

These victories and the individual commitment to duty that Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith has shown by his actions on that day in 2010, and all those serving in Afghanistan, shows that we are making a difference—our presence and operations—to drive back the Taliban. The Taliban, we remember, hosted al-Qaeda, which has indulged in many attacks on Australians, whether on September 11 when Australians were killed in New York, or in Bali or even in Mumbai. These fellows are helping dismantle the Taliban in Oruzgan and Kandahar and they are being extremely effective.

Corporal Roberts-Smith's heroism makes it possible, through these military accomplishments, that we here in Canberra are able to work with the government of Afghanistan and we have the political space and time to stand up the Afghan national defence forces. After all, Australian people do not want to be sacrificing our blood and treasure in Afghanistan forever, but it is due to the sustained work and heroism of people like Roberts-Smith and SAS Trooper Mark Donaldson that we have the ability to do the political task, and that is to make sure the Afghans can stand up and defend their own country from the terrorists who would threaten

this country. It is only because of people like Roberts-Smith and all of the other blokes who are fighting with the 1st Commando Regiment and the SAS that we are able to do the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan and give the opportunity for the training of the Afghan National Army. It is because of Roberts-Smith and people like him that Australia is able to make a contribution to achieving that worthy and just political cause, that just end, in Afghanistan.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! I apologise to the honourable member for Kooyong, who was seeking the call, but standing orders do require that after 12.30 I invite a member to propose the question that the Committee do now adjourn. The honourable member for Kooyong and other speakers will have the opportunity to contribute to this debate when the House and the Main Committee resume after the break for a week.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (12.36 pm)—I move:

That the Main Committee do now adjourn.

Pensions and Benefits

Mr O'DOWD (Flynn) (12.36 pm)—I rise to speak in the Main Committee today out of concern for those people in the community who have a disability or are on a pension or who are a carer for someone with a health problem or disability. I would also like to talk about a chap in my electorate who is raising and caring for his three sons who suffer from autism. The gentleman himself is receiving a disability pension. His sons are aged between 14 and 20. Some years ago his doctor advised him to take his sons from the city to live in the country to improve their quality of life and to raise them in a less stressful environment. He sold his home in Brisbane and moved to a rural community north of Bundaberg.

The proceeds from the sale of his Brisbane home amounted to \$400,000. He paid \$350,000 cash for farmland that allowed him to generate a small income by raising a family of pigs and a few cattle. Most of the remaining \$50,000 was consumed by stamp duty and other costs associated with buying the property. He built a modest shed that has only three walls, with a tarp making up the fourth wall. The shed has a dirt floor. He generates his own electricity because the power authorities demanded an excessive fee to connect the power. His diesel generator runs eight hours a day on chicken fat that he buys from a local takeaway chicken shop; this way he is able to keep his fuel costs for his truck and generator to \$12 per month. His property was recently flood affected and he lost one-third of his cattle, swept away in the floodwaters. He applied for flood relief but, because that little corner of the electorate where he lives was not declared, his claim was rejected.

He is not looking for a handout or compensation; he simply wants to borrow about \$40,000 from a bank or a lending institution to install a solar electricity system to lessen the time he has to use his generator and to make some improvements to his less than acceptable living quarters. The really crazy part about this is that he had satisfied all the conditions for the old solar grant but, because he has no cash and cannot borrow, he cannot get the subsidy. Under the ruling of the national consumer credit code, which was updated as a result of the global financial crisis by the Rudd government and supported by the coalition, pensioners and people on disability assistance are finding it impossible to borrow money.

The chap I am representing here today is a thoroughly decent man with good intentions. He actually wants to save the taxpayers money by ensuring that his sons are raised with a good

work ethic and skills given to them on the farm. He has set up a trust to ensure that, when he passes, his sons will each inherit a third of the land and, therefore, be independent and able to make a small living. Because of their disability, they are unable to handle the stress of being crowded by other people and it makes sense that they be able to stay in this environment that assists their quality of life.

This case is not an isolated one. My office has received many calls from people on pensions who are now not able to borrow because of this new ruling imposed by the national consumer credit code. There is something fundamentally wrong here with rulings in legislation that discriminate against battling Australians, and I ask the parliament do something to correct this imbalance. What is wrong with the federal government assisting by providing the necessary guarantees for pensioners and people with disabilities so they can obtain loans to improve their position and take pressure off them at times of great stress?

I implore the government to work with me to address this unfair situation and to give these people back their dignity. They have contributed to Australian growth and prosperity and it is time for us to give them a fair go.

Reid Electorate: Australia Day Awards

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (12.43 pm)—Today I acknowledge the many wonderful Australians in my electorate of Reid who received due recognition at Australia Day celebrations this year. Just as we celebrate the citizenship of people from so many different corners of the globe who have made Australia their home, we celebrate the diversity of talents that make Australia such a wonderful place to live. While we can be proud of the mateship we see displayed in times of hardship and tragedy, there are many Australians who show us that spirit and determination are characteristics we should display every day.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the three constituents who received national recognition for their outstanding service: Mrs Aileen Mary Morris OAM for her service to the Catholic Church and to aged persons; Ms Maureen Houssein-Mustafa OAM for her service to vocational education plus training to the community; and Mr Andrew George McCallum AM for his service to the community in a range of leadership roles in the social justice sector, particularly supporting the welfare of children and their families. These people who received awards for their outstanding community and personal endeavours are a stark reminder that, irrespective of our beginnings or our backgrounds, we can use our talents to make Australia a better place.

At the local Canada Bay Council Australia Day Ceremony, Mayor Angelo Tsirekas presented the Citizen of the Year Award to Mr Joe Di Giacomo of Abbotsford. Mr Di Giacomo has been a community leader for so many years, strengthening and supporting the Italian culture through his active involvement in language classes and events. Mr Di Giacomo is also well known for his involvement with the commissioning of the statue *La Famiglia*, which is sited in Five Dock and pays tribute to the early migrants and their positive influence on our diverse culture.

Young Citizen of the Year was awarded to Ms Chantelle Hayek, a year 12 student at Dornemy College, Five Dock, for her work as Environment Prefect. Ms Hayek has initiated a number of exciting environment programs.

Sports Citizen of the Year 2011 is Ms Alyssa Healy, of Breakfast Point, who is a member of the very successful and victorious Australian Women's Cricket team. Ms Healy was an important member of the team that recently beat England in the Ashes. So well done to Ms Healy. The men's team would do well to take a few pointers!

Ms Clare Hooper of Drummoyne was awarded the Arts and Culture Citizen of the Year. Ms Hooper was diagnosed with special needs from an early age and has found art the medium to communicate and express her emotions.

Auburn council awarded their Citizen of the Year Award to Mr Bala Belandra. Mr Belandra has been a community volunteer since the early nineties. Mr Belandra is known for his indiscriminate support for all in need, particularly in his role as chair of a consultative committee, representing new and emerging cultures; a member of the Drug Committee Action Group; a member of the Auburn Small Community Organisation Network; and Chair of the Auburn Neighbourhood Community Centre, as well as Chair of Auburn Diversity Services.

Auburn council awarded its Young Citizen of the Year 2011 to Mr Mohamed Taha for his most recent efforts to raise money for a young man suffering from bone cancer. Mr Taha organised an event that attracted over 600 people and raised around \$13,000 to assist the family with medical expenses. Mr Taha is also a volunteer at a variety of council, community and spiritual events and is often a member of student leadership forums.

Auburn council's Community Event Award went to the Celebration of African Cultures Festival. The festival has become a very popular and successful event in Sydney that promotes harmony between diverse African cultures through music, dance, art, craft and fashion.

Father Chris Riley was Auburn Council's Australia Day Ambassador and is a wonderful community leader, not just through his local efforts but Australia wide. As CEO of Youth Off the Streets, Father Riley oversees the operation of 25 programs, with over 200 employees and more than 600 volunteers. His organisation has become one of the largest youth services in Australia, offering crisis accommodation, residential rehabilitation, clinical services and counselling.

Strathfield council's Citizen of the Year went to Niall King, who has dedicated much of his time to fundraising with Strathfield Rotary Club. Over his years of fundraising, Mr King has raised more than \$250,000 for the Trish Multiple Sclerosis Research Foundation for research into the cause of the disease. The Studdy MS Centre in my electorate of Lidcombe was also the recipient of a level, shaded area and garden, coordinated by Mr King.

Strathfield council's Young Citizen of the Year went to Mr Prashanth Sellathurai, a dual 2010 Commonwealth Games gold medallist in gymnastics. Mr Sellathurai has helped local schoolchildren learn about a healthy and active lifestyle.

Congratulations to all new Australian citizens who made the pledge on Australia Day and of course a big thankyou to all Australia Day Award recipients for their marvellous contributions. The awards remind each and every one of us that we can make a difference if we choose to put something back into our community.

Flinders Electorate: Bass Coast

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (12.48 pm)—I want to raise three issues in relation to the economic health and welfare, as well as the physical health and welfare, of the people of the Bass Coast. The first is in relation to Warley Hospital. Warley Hospital was closed down shortly after the

Labor Party came to power at the federal level. They did not continue the pledges made by the previous government for funding of \$2½ million to continue the operation of Warley Hospital. There was no action by the then state Labor government in Victoria. The hospital was closed down. The people of Phillip Island and nearby districts were left without a hospital.

At the federal level, the coalition have a standing commitment to provide \$2½ million to help assist with the reopening of Warley Hospital, most preferably as an adjunct, a satellite, a campus, a component of the broader Bass Coast Regional Health Network. Given the change of government in Victoria, I will be approaching both the Premier and the new health minister, Mr David Davies, in writing, seeking to commence a process with them to improve health services by reopening Warley Hospital—again, most preferably as an adjunct to the existing Bass Coast Regional Health Network. It is vital to the people of Phillip Island. I will not rest until we have achieved it. Our commitment at a federal level remains good and solid, and I would urge the state government to match that commitment. But this process for reopening Warley Hospital begins now.

The second point I wished to make is in relation to the San Remo lobster fishermen. I know many of the fishermen. We have been in contact with them. There are six boats operating out of San Remo. Up to 95 per cent of their catch is generally exported to China. However, the industry has been dealt two significant blows in recent months. First, in November, China imposed a ban on all Australian lobster imports in an effort to crack down on Chinese importers avoiding state taxes. Second—a factor beyond the control of governments—is the continuing high exchange rate for the Australian dollar, which is generally a good thing for Australia but can have negative consequences for specific sectors. As a result, local lobster that was selling for \$65 a kilogram last year is now closer to \$40 a kilogram, perilously close to break-even for local lobster fishermen.

New Zealand and South Africa have struck agreements with China in relation to lobster exports to ensure they do not face a significant tariff. Meanwhile, Australian lobster faces a 28 per cent tariff and the temporary ban. It is time for the Australian government to step in and deal with the tariff issue and the ban on Australian lobsters. This is unacceptable. It is slow, there is a delay and the government must take action. There has been paralysis and inaction—not good enough. In the meantime, the Tasmanian government have offered a deferred payment scheme for fishing licences to their lobster fishermen. The previous Victorian state government did no such thing; now that we have a new government, I would urge them to adopt the Tasmanian interim measure of a deferred payment scheme for licences, and I will be contacting and approaching them to that effect.

The last element of the Bass Coast that I wish to raise is this: Bass Coast Shire has still not received a cent in rates from the desalination plant, despite the then state government acquiring the land in 2008. That is not for want of asking on the part of the Bass Coast Shire. The former state government previously promised to pay rates. I would ask that the current government, now that they have been elected—with a very strong start—recognise that Bass Coast Shire is not a wealthy municipality and badly needs the rate revenue, and take steps to ensure that there is a return on this lost land. It was farming land that was part of the area that is subject to inundation, which is why this desalination plant is proceeding so badly. We all knew it was built on a floodplain. It has had multiple floods since it was built. It was a bad project to start with. Unfortunately, it is proceeding where it is, but it is time now to see if

recompense can be made to the people of Bass Coast, with appropriate support from the state, in terms of a return for the land that was taken from the community.

Multiculturalism

Ms VAMVAKINO (Calwell) (12.53 pm)—I would like to draw the attention of the House to the debate in recent days around the issue of multiculturalism and, in particular, to articles published in the *Herald Sun* newspaper in which former Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett warns of growing so-called enclaves and calls on migrants to embrace the Australian way of life. In particular, the call goes out to those of the Muslim faith. Mr Kennett's comments are in a similar vein to those of British Prime Minister David Cameron, who at a conference in Munich on 5 February linked multiculturalism to the rise of Islamic terrorism. Similar comments have also been made by other MPs in this place, and they are comments that are inconsistent with the bipartisan approach to multicultural policies over successive governments.

I have previously spoken in this place about multiculturalism and the benefits that migrants have brought to this great country, and I have spoken and will continue to speak about the policy of multiculturalism, which has enabled the growth and development of a vibrant, cohesive Australian community and a contemporary Australian identity.

The *Herald Sun* article was accompanied by a graphic which statistically illustrated non-Christian religious so-called enclaves of Muslims in my electorate of Calwell and Jewish enclaves in the electorate of Melbourne Ports. I have many concerns about this graphic, simplistic portrayal of multicultural communities and its stereotyping of so-called ethnic enclaves along non-Christian religious lines. Such delineations are dangerous. They are a common narrative in Britain and the rest of Europe and should not become part of our narrative here in Australia.

Despite being inaccurate—40 per cent of the people living in the suburb of Dallas in my electorate are actually Muslim, not Jewish—I feel the graphic is fast becoming symptomatic of an emerging portrayal of migrant populations currently being fuelled by religious fear and cultural ignorance. Both the Muslim community and the Jewish community have been a part of our migrant story since they began their post Second World War migration to Australia. It is a natural phenomenon for migrants to initially gravitate towards their own communities. In fact, it is this very settlement pattern that has enabled us as a country to repeatedly build on the foundations laid by each wave of new migrants, and we have done it successfully. The fact that the Jewish community has gravitated to and settled in the Caulfield area of Melbourne has in no way impeded or prevented their contribution to Australia, nor has it impeded their integration into the Australian community. The same applies to the Muslim community in my electorate.

These so called enclaves are home to first, second and third generation Australians who ultimately have a right to live where they choose. We in this country enjoy freedom of movement, and that means the right to buy a house where one chooses without public commentary and assertions being made about the religious or cultural nature of the neighbourhood. While Prime Minister Cameron laments that Britain has failed to provide a vision of society where everyone belongs, Australia can proudly lay claim to a multicultural model that can be held up as an example for the rest of the world of a country where everyone belongs and has equal standing and equal rights.

Australia has nurtured its own unique brand of multiculturalism which is underpinned by the principles of access and equity and equality of citizenship and has been translated into practical strategies and programs such as our successful settlement services and our English language support programs. These have seen the successful settlement of about seven million migrants since the Second World War. Contrast this to Germany's treatment of its migrants, where migrant workers are denied German citizenship and viewed as foreigners, creating therefore an underclass that is not allowed to be an equal part of German society. Is it any wonder that they have ended up living parallel lives?

In contrast to Mr Cameron's assertion that his nation's tolerance of segregated communities has weakened its collective identity, Australians can proudly say that, since the abolition of the White Australia policy, we have embraced, welcomed and offered equal opportunity and the right to participate in our democracy to all our migrants without reference to race or religion and so we do not have the high level of incidents or social unrest that have characterised countries such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany. We as Australians have grown not as a divided society but as an inclusive one, and this is because of multiculturalism.

There have always been those who fear unfamiliar cultures and religions, but there has always been enough goodwill and good sense in the Australian community to enable progressive people and governments to argue the merits of multiculturalism and tolerance as a basis for establishing modern Australia. As the government's document on the people of Australia states, we are not a multicultural society by accident but rather one amalgamated from design and necessity. The world can start following our example.

Alpine Grazing

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (12.58 pm)—The beautiful alpine region in my state of Victoria is under threat from a recent decision by the new coalition state government to allow cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park. Cattle were removed from the Alpine National Park in 2005 following an investigation by the alpine grazing parliamentary task force. Cattle are still able to graze in state forests adjacent to the park and other areas in the region, but last month the Baillieu government reintroduced cattle grazing under the spurious guise of scientific research into the alleged benefits of cattle grazing for fire control.

Up to 400 cattle have been introduced to six so-called research sites in the Alpine National Park. There is no scientific justification for allowing the return of cattle to the park. In fact, the excuse of scientific research has less validity than Japanese claims about scientific whaling. The most significant peer reviewed research on alpine grazing was carried out shortly after the 2003 fires in the park. In that study, approximately 100 kilometres of transects across grazed areas of the Bogong High Plains were measured. The report examined grazed and non-grazed areas inside and outside the park and concluded:

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

... ..

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

At the end of January this year, 125 Australian scientists called on the Victorian government to postpone its cattle grazing trials in the Alpine National Park. In a letter to the state

environment minister, Ryan Smith, the scientists said that trials to test whether grazing reduces bushfire risks lack scientific integrity and warned the government that they may have broken federal laws. The Environment Defenders Office confirms that under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act any action likely to have a significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance must be referred to the federal environment minister and that this includes any plans to return cattle to the park.

It is my understanding that the Victorian government has so far failed to refer the action of returning cattle to the park to the minister, nor has the federal minister requested a referral. According to reports, the cattle are already doing significant damage in the park. An early investigation conducted by Dr Henrik Wahren of Latrobe University's Research Centre for Applied Alpine Ecology showed alpine tree frogs and their wetland habitat being trampled. He said that the wetland habitat of the alpine tree frog is heavily used by cattle and, given the level of damage already observed after just two weeks, it is likely to be severely degraded by the time the cattle are removed for the season in April. The tree frog and alpine wetlands are listed as nationally threatened under the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

The Victorian state government's return of cattle grazing to the Alpine National Park under the guise of scientific research is an act of environmental vandalism. It is a clear breach of environmental law, and the federal minister needs to act. Yesterday the federal minister responded to my concerns by saying his personal view was that the alpine area was not a farm. I agree with him, but the Alpine National Park needs more than words. The federal minister has the powers under the EPBC Act and needs to use them, and if he does not I propose to take action. I am currently preparing a private member's bill that will outlaw grazing in the Alpine National Park. If we do not see progress from the minister on this matter I will introduce the bill.

Yesterday a coalition of environment groups led by the Victorian National Parks Association made clear that they will not accept this return to cattle grazing, and I want to congratulate the VNPA for their spearheading of this campaign. These alpine areas are important wilderness and heritage areas, and an expansion of cattle grazing would threaten an important part of Victoria's tourist economy. This cannot be allowed to continue. It is a national park not a paddock, and I will work with the many people in my electorate and across the country to ensure it ends.

Mental Health

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (1.02 pm)—I rise to talk about two events that have taken place in my electorate of Page over the last week. Both of them are quite dear to my heart in different ways. Firstly, at my invitation the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Mark Butler, joined me in having a community conversation on the broad issue of mental health and where the mental health reforms are, so that he could have direct input from people in my electorate.

I did that in two parts. There was an open conversation co-hosted by me and Professor Deborah Saltman and Professor Iain Graham from Southern Cross University's School of Health and Human Sciences. We invited the community, and community members were able to have a few hours for an open discussion with the minister, which was very useful. At the end of the conversation I said that sometimes when ministers go around and hear from communities they might not always get new ideas—this time he did get a couple—but it rein-

forces commonly held ideas and views that we have in the community about the ways that we should respond to people with mental illness and to their carers and family.

The minister was welcomed by a local choir, the Hearing Voices Choir, which has been set up over the last few years in Lismore and is sponsored by New Horizons, a service provider. The people in the choir have mental illness, and it has been a wonderful thing for them. We all like singing, even if we cannot sing. I can hear members laughing! We enjoy singing; it is what we do. Singing can actually bring some joy. I know people in that choir who have not talked a lot over the last few years and who have really come out of themselves. They sang the minister in, which was really nice, and they stayed and joined us. I really appreciated it.

One idea came up from one of the members. He said that people with mental illness—and he was generalising—may spend a lot of time at night not sleeping between those hours of 10 and 4. They listen to a lot of commercial radio, and I thought, ‘I think some of that might do your head in!’ But that is when they are awake at night and listening. He said, ‘Wouldn’t it be nice if there could be a little bit more in the way of messages by speaking directly to people who have mental illness.’ We then pondered how we could do that and all the difficulties of it, but it was a nice idea and a good idea—one that the minister was able to take away—and we might even work on that locally.

Among the other things that came up was a very common issue which has been around for a long time and is very difficult to resolve but has to be resolved—that is, people working together. Also, when someone has a mental illness, if they present themselves at a health service, they should be able to get through the door no matter what manifestation they have of the illness or what age they are. I have an example: one woman had a child of 11 years old and could not see the child psychiatrist because the child psychiatrist treated children from 12 to 25 and therefore had no treatment. That is just ridiculous, because if you had a broken arm you would get through the door, and it has to be the same with mental health—you should be able to get through the door and you should not have to shop around. It is one of those frustrations that happen to people with mental illness, their families and their carers.

Everybody often looks to the federal or state government—whoever they may be—to fix it, but I said: ‘A lot of that can be fixed locally. It is not up to a minister for mental health or someone else to reach his hand down and do it; we can fix those things locally.’ There was a real commitment to that that day, and, because we had the health services, the NGOs, all of the practitioners and the people themselves there, it was good. People want an adult headspace. We talk a lot about the youth headspaces, but an adult headspace was one of the issues that we talked about. There were many other things like that. I did say there were two issues, but I only got to deal with that one. I will come back to the other one at another opportunity.

Main Committee Meeting Times

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper) (1.07 pm)—Before I put the question that the Main Committee do now adjourn, standing order 186 states:

The Deputy Speaker must set the meeting times of the committee, notify the times to all members, and take the chair when the committee meets.

This morning, following a vote in the main chamber, the Main Committee—which had suspended its proceedings to allow the vote to take place—resumed with me in the chair. One member was talking, and then the government member left the chamber, apparently on in-

struction. I subsequently found out that there had been an agreement between the whips that the Main Committee would not resume until after the series of votes in the main chamber had taken place.

I gently remind honourable members, including the whips, that the Deputy Speaker sets the times for the meeting of the Main Committee, and while I am entirely happy to be very reasonable, if there is an agreement between the whips that the Main Committee ought not to meet until a series of votes has taken place, or ought not to meet at some particular time, then I think it should be conveyed to me as Deputy Speaker. It was just a little bit embarrassing both for the member who was speaking and, I think, for this chamber when we lost a quorum and I had to suspend the meeting of the Main Committee at that time. I do not believe there was anything intentional in it, but if there is an agreement between the whips that for some reason the Main Committee ought not to meet then please convey it to me, and usually I will be more than happy to facilitate the implementation of that agreement.

Question agreed to.

Main Committee adjourned at 1.09 pm

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
Practice Incentives Program: Practice Nurse Incentive
(Question No. 118)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 25 November 2010:

- (1) What sum of money is currently spent on the (a) Practice Incentives Program (PIP) practice nurse incentive, and how many practice nurses does this support; and (b) Medicare Benefit Schedule practice nurse items.
- (2) How many (a) nurse services have been administered each financial year since the introduction of the Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS) practice nurse items, and (b) practices currently employ more than five practice nurses.
- (3) What consultation did she undertake before (a) announcing in the 2010 Budget that the incentives for practice nurses would be capped at five, and (b) removing the MBS practice nurse items for treatments such as wound care, immunisation or a pap smear.
- (4) Were these changes recommended by the Primary Health Advisory Panel.
- (5) Was a review undertaken of the existing PIP practice nurse incentive; if so, have the findings been made public.
- (6) How many (a) registered, and (b) enrolled, nurses will the 2010 Budget measure support for practice nurses support, and (c) treatments administered by practice nurses will the 2010 Budget measure fund.
- (7) What is the cost modelling for this Budget measure.

Ms Roxon—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) (a) Expenditure for the PIP Practice Nurse Incentive is demand driven. In 2009-10, funding of around \$55.3 million was provided to 2,504 practices to support them to employ practice nurses. Data on the number of nurses employed by these practices is not collected.
- (b) In 2009-10, expenditure on the Medicare Benefit Schedule (MBS) practice nurse items (items 10986-87, 10993-99) was approximately \$88 million.
- (2) (a) The first two MBS practice nurse items (items 10993 and 10996) were introduced on 1 February 2004. The other items have subsequently been added, most recently in 2007-08. The following table shows the total services for MBS practice nurse items (items 10986-87 and 10993-99) on the Medicare Benefits Schedule since 1 February 2004 are:

Financial Year	Total Services*
2003/2004	1,136,200
2004/2005	2,691,658
2005/2006	3,211,621
2006/2007	3,659,667
2007/2008	5,218,255
2008/2009	5,461,758
2009/2010	7,621,039

* MBS items 10986-87 and 10993-99

(MBS items 10986, 10987 and 10997 may be provided by a Practice Nurse or a registered Aboriginal Health Worker).

- (b) The data from the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) National Practice Nurse Workforce Survey Report 2009 indicates that 6.7% of practices have more than five practice nurses.
- (3) (a) The National Primary Health Care Strategy was informed by extensive health reform consultations undertaken by the Department including submissions received through the consultation process. A number of submissions commented on how the current funding arrangements impact on practice nurses' ability to operate at their full capacity and the task oriented and limited 'for and on behalf of' funding of the MBS practice nurse items.
- The incentive cap of five per practice acknowledges that most practices currently have five or fewer full time equivalent GPs.
- (b) See response to (3)(a).
- (4) See response to (3)(a).
- (5) A review of the PIP Practice Nurse Incentive was undertaken in 2005 as part of the budget process. The findings of this review have not been made public.
- (6) (a) (b) It is estimated that the Practice Nurse Incentive Program will support approximately 4,600 full time practice nurse positions. The 4,600 full time practice nurse positions include replacement funding for the current PIP Practice Nurse Incentive payments (836 FTE), and providing incentives for the equivalent of an estimated 3,757 FTE practice nurses in practices that do not currently receive an incentive. This is in line with the primary focus of the initiative, which is to strengthen and support the role of existing practice nurses. The AGPN National Practice Nurse Workforce Survey Report in 2009 indicates that 84.8% of practice nurses are Registered Nurses and 15.2% are Enrolled Nurses.
- (c) How many treatments administered by practice nurses will the 2010 Budget measure fund.
- The Practice Nurse Incentive Program will not fund individual treatments. Instead, it will enable practices to expand the scope of their practice nurses and utilise nurses to best meet the needs of patients. This will include continuing to provide services such as immunization, wound management and cervical smears.
- (7) The Department undertook extensive modelling for this Budget measure. As with all Budget measures the modelling is not publicly available.

Primary Care Providers, General Practitioners and Practice Nurses

(Question No. 124)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 25 November 2010:

- (1) According to the most recent Annual Survey of Divisions, for each Division of General Practice, how many (a) primary care providers, (b) General Practitioners, and (c) practice nurses, were practising.

Ms Roxon—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The information provided below is taken from the 2008-09 Annual Survey of Divisions (ASD). Results of the 2009-10 ASD are not yet available.

ID	Division Name	No. of General Practices	No. of GPs	No. of Practice Nurses
NSW				
201	Central Sydney General Practice Network	293	688	95
202	Eastern Sydney Division of General Practice	152	445	58
203	South Eastern Sydney Division of General Practice	83	221	31

ID	Division Name	No. of General Practices	No. of GPs	No. of Practice Nurses
205	Bankstown General Practice Division	93	212	24
206	WentWest Ltd	206	539	117
208	Northern Sydney General Practice Network	89	352	49
209	St George Division of General Practice	118	253	35
210	Macarthur Division for Fairfield/Liverpool Region	195	362	42
212	GP Network Northside	154	544	123
213	Manly Warringah Division of General Practice	70	244	58
214	Sutherland Division of General Practice	69	237	57
215	Macarthur Division of General Practice	90	220	67
216	Illawarra Division of General Practice	87	298	104
217	Hunter Urban Division of General Practice	140	514	266
218	Hunter Rural Division of General Practice	72	226	125
219	NSW Central Coast Division of General Practice	95	346	169
220	Shoalhaven Division of General Practice	35	113	71
221	Southern General Practice Network	56	228	121
223	Hastings Macleay General Practice Network	37	386	52
224	Mid North Coast Division of General Practice	48	140	75
225	Northern Rivers General Practice Network	70	159	125
226	Tweed Valley General Practice Network	30	220	46
227	New England Division of General Practice	29	122	38
228	Riverina Division of General Practice and Primary Health	41	73	105
229	NSW Central West Division of General Practice	55	153	99
230	Dubbo Plains Division of General Practice	37	204	59
231	Barwon Division of General Practice	17	113	28
232	Murrumbidgee Division of General Practice	21	63	38
233	NSW Outback Division of General Practice	14	54	15
235	Southern Highlands Division of General Practice	18	39	24
236	North West Slopes Division of General Practice Ltd	23	68	34
237	Nepean Division of General Practice	77	58	48
238	Blue Mountains Division of General Practice	24	183	26
240	Hawkesbury-Hills Division of General Practice	88	87	40
Vic				
301	Melbourne General Practice Network	148	265	70
302	North East Valley Division of General Practice	69	483	140
304	Southcity GP Services	70	278	63
305	Westgate General Practice Network	49	371	74
306	Western Melbourne Division of General Practice	100	211	101
307	North West Melbourne Division of General Practice	95	276	106
308	Northern Division of General Practice - Melbourne	89	305	83
333	Melbourne East GP Network - formally Whitehorse DGP	71	261	41
311	Greater Monash GP Network	59	233	40
312	Monash Division of General Practice	47	164	63
313	Bayside General Practice Network	43	200	67
314	Knox Division of General Practice	88	234	136
315	Dandenong & Casey General Practice Association	72	347	133
316	Peninsula GP Network	59	294	116
317	GP Association of Geelong	42	290	129
318	Central Highlands General Practice Network	30	233	79
319	North East Victorian Division of General Practice	57	148	62

ID	Division Name	No. of General Practices	No. of GPs	No. of Practice Nurses
320	Eastern Ranges GP Association	13	179	50
322	GPA South Gippsland	34	91	75
323	Central West Gippsland Division of General Practice	37	136	68
324	Otway Division of General Practice	28	155	75
325	Ballarat & District Division of General Practice	44	123	61
326	Central Victoria General Practice Network	25	122	40
327	Goulburn Valley Division of General Practice	31	99	58
328	East Gippsland Division of General Practice	22	113	47
329	Albury Wodonga Regional GP Network	33	112	78
330	West Victoria Division of General Practice	24	92	57
331	Murray Plains Division of General Practice	26	66	49
332	Mallee Division of General Practice	140	82	129
Qld				
401	South East Alliance of GP (Brisbane)	98	620	133
402	Brisbane South Division of General Practice	85	451	112
404	General Practice Logan Area Network	80	335	145
405	GPpartners Limited	202	328	278
406	General Practice Gold Coast	127	904	227
407	Moreton Bay General Practice Network	64	562	60
408	Ipswich & West Moreton Division of General Practice	63	194	91
409	GP Connections	49	197	83
410	Central Queensland Rural Division of General Practice	24	196	47
411	Mackay Division of General Practice	37	101	53
412	Townsville Division of General Practice	34	139	82
413	Far North Queensland for Cairns Region	39	208	55
414	RHealth	60	175	90
416	North & West Qld Primary Health Care	31	306	71
417	Far North Queensland Rural Division of General Practice	30	165	54
418	Sunshine Coast Division of General Practice	126	181	304
419	Capricornia Division of General Practice	42	492	89
420	GP Links Wide Bay	62	170	106
SA				
501	Adelaide Western General Practice Network	94	219	74
502	Adelaide Northern Division of General Practice	69	259	78
503	Adelaide North East Division of General Practice	56	218	85
504	GP partners Adelaide	108	235	75
505	Southern Division of General Practice	103	421	177
506	Barossa Division of General Practice	9	482	26
507	Yorke Peninsula Division of General Practice	8	42	31
508	Mid North Division of Rural Medicine	15	34	32
509	Riverland Division of General Practice	7	57	30
510	Limestone Coast Division of General Practice	15	49	43
511	Eyre Peninsula Division of General Practice	30	76	59
512	Flinders and Far North Division of General Practice	16	77	16
513	Murray Mallee General Practice Network	7	46	27
514	Adelaide Hills Division of General Practice	19	43	33
WA				
601	Perth Primary Care Network	149	103	252
603	Osborne GP Network	90	679	135

ID	Division Name	No. of General Practices	No. of GPs	No. of Practice Nurses
604	Canning Division of General Practice	73	399	113
605	Fremantle GP Network	70	288	139
606	Rockingham Kwinana Division of General Practice	21	320	55
607	GP Down South	39	112	97
609	Great Southern GP Network	23	186	43
610	Kimberley Division of General Practice	9	103	20
611	Goldfields Esperance GP Network	19	62	15
612	Midwest GP Network	21	59	42
613	Greater Bunbury Division of General Practice	19	70	33
614	Pilbara Division of General Practice	15	75	22
615	Wheatbelt GP Network	22	51	14
Tas				
701	General Practice South	90	55	145
702	General Practice North	43	397	114
703	General Practice North West	27	166	65
NT				
801	General Practice Network NT	119	116	183
ACT				
901	ACT Division of General Practice	94	376	114

Practice Incentive Program: After Hours Incentive

(Question No. 125)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 25 November 2010:

- (1) In respect of Practice Incentive Program (PIP) payments for (a) tier 1 after hours, (b) tier 2 after hours, (c) tier 3 after hours, (d) sign-on for asthma, (e) sign-on for cervical screening, (f) outcomes for cervical screening, (g) sign-on for diabetes, (h) outcomes for diabetes, (i) e-health, (j) sign-on for indigenous health, (k) outcomes for indigenous health, (l) employing a practice nurse, (m) procedural general practice services, (n) quality prescribing, (o) teaching, (p) domestic violence, (q) Service Incentive Payments (asthma), (r) Service Incentive Payments (diabetes), (s) Service Incentive Payments (cervical), (t) Service Incentive Payments (aged care access initiative), and (u) the Practice Incentive Program in total: (i) how many practices are receiving this type of PIP payment, (ii) how many services have been delivered for each quarter since December 2003, (iii) what is the total amount of funding paid for each quarter since December 2003.
- (2) How many teaching sessions have been held under the PIP for each quarter since December 2003.

Ms Roxon—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) (a) PIP After Hours Incentive - Tier 1:
 - (i) In August 2010, around 4,600 practices received PIP Tier 1 After Hours Incentive payments.
 - (ii) The incentive aims to encourage general practices to have arrangements in place for their patients 24 hours a day. As there is no requirement for practices to provide the services themselves, data is not collected on the number of services provided.
 - (ii) As quarterly PIP payments may be temporarily withheld, for example while confirming claim details, annual rather than quarterly data is provided to accurately reflect expenditure.

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP After Hours Incentive Tier 1						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
26,293	26,554	27,001	27,671	27,943	28,491	29,387

(b) PIP After Hours Incentive - Tier 2:

- (i) In August 2010, around 2,900 practices received PIP Tier 2 After Hours Incentive payments.
- (ii) As this initiative supports general practices to provide 10-15 hours of after hours cover themselves, rather than a specific number of services, data is not collected on the number of services provided by practices.

(iii)

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP After Hours Incentive Tier 2						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
20,105	19,937	20,148	20,106	20,113	20,127	20,485

(c) PIP After Hours Incentive - Tier 3:

- (i) In August 2010, around 1,300 practices received PIP Tier 3 After Hours Incentive payments.
- (ii) As this initiative supports general practices which provide cover 24 hours a day (such as rural practices), rather than a specific number of services, data is not collected on the number of services provided by practices.

(iii)

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP After Hours Incentive Tier 3						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
7,894	7,916	7,805	7,536	7,626	7,737	7,895

(d) PIP Asthma Incentive – sign-on payment:

- (i) By August 2010, around 4,600 practices had received a one-off sign on payment for registering for the PIP Asthma Incentive.
- (ii) The sign-on payment is paid to practices for registering for the incentive rather than the provision of services.
- (iii) The table below reflects total expenditure for sign-on payments and service incentive payments (SIPs), as the Department of Health and Ageing's financial reporting system does not identify expenditure on individual components of the PIP Asthma Incentive.

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Asthma Incentive (sign-on payments and SIPs)						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
2,666	1,851	2,048	1,933	2,557	2,491	2,576

(e) PIP Cervical Screening Incentive – sign-on payment:

- (i) By August 2010, around 4,700 practices had received a one-off sign on payment for registering for the PIP Cervical Screening Incentive.
- (ii) The sign-on payment is paid to practices for registering for the incentive rather than the provision of services.
- (iii) The table below reflects total expenditure for sign-on payments, SIPs and outcomes payments, as the Department of Health and Ageing's financial reporting system does

not identify expenditure on individual components of the PIP Cervical Screening Incentive.

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Cervical Screening Incentive (sign-on, SIPs and outcomes payments)						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
4,752	13,166	12,996	13,394	13,939	15,175	14,450

(f) PIP Cervical Screening Incentive – outcomes payment:

- (i) In August 2010, around 3,300 practices received a PIP Cervical Screening Incentive outcomes payment.
- (ii) To receive an outcomes payment, practices are required to screen a percentage target of its female patients aged between 20 and 69 years within a 30 month reference period. The Medicare Australia system automatically calculates payments to practices reaching this target and data on the number of overall cervical screens undertaken is not collected.

(iii)

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Cervical Screening Incentive (sign-on, SIPs and outcomes payments)						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
4,752	13,166	12,996	13,394	13,939	15,175	14,450

(g) PIP Diabetes Incentive - sign-on payment:

- (i) By August 2010, around 4,700 practices had received a one-off sign on payment for registering for the PIP Diabetes Incentive.
- (ii) The sign-on payment is paid to practices for registering for the incentive rather than the provision of services.
- (iii) The table below reflects total expenditure for sign-on payments, SIPs and outcomes payments, as the Department of Health and Ageing's financial reporting system does not identify expenditure on individual components of the PIP Diabetes Incentive.

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Diabetes Incentive (sign-on, SIPs and outcomes payments)						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
10,842	12,191	14,583	14,888	16,390	15,764	17,236

(h) PIP Diabetes Incentive – outcomes payment:

- (i) In August 2010, around 2,100 practices received a PIP Diabetes Incentive outcomes payment.
- (ii) To receive an outcomes payment, practices are required to provide an annual cycle of care for a specific proportion of their practice patients. The Medicare Australia system automatically calculates payments to practices reaching this target. The number of completed cycles of care is at Question r (iii).

(iii)

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Diabetes Incentive (sign-on, SIPs and outcomes payments)						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
10,842	12,191	14,583	14,888	16,390	15,764	17,236

(i) PIP eHealth Incentive:

- (i) In August 2010, around 3,900 practices received PIP eHealth Incentive payments.
- (ii) The incentive aims to encourage general practices to adopt electronic tools. There is no service delivery component for this incentive.
- (iii) The PIP eHealth incentive commenced in August 2009.

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP eHealth Incentive						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	77,005

(j) PIP Indigenous Health Incentive – sign-on payment:

- (i) The PIP Indigenous Health Incentive commenced in May 2010. As of 31 July 2010, around 1,300 practices had received a sign-on payment.
- (ii) The sign-on payment is paid to practices for registering for the Incentive and not for the provision of services.
- (iii) The PIP Indigenous Health Incentive commenced in May 2010. The Department of Health and Ageing's financial reporting system does not identify expenditure on individual components of the PIP Indigenous Health Incentive.

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Indigenous Health Incentive						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,575

(k) PIP Indigenous Health Incentive – outcomes payment:

- (i) The PIP Indigenous Health Incentive commenced in May 2010. The first Tier 1 outcomes payments were made to eligible practices in August 2010, at which time around 110 practices received Tier 1 outcomes payments. The first Tier 2 payments will be made to eligible practices in February 2011.
- (ii) To receive an outcomes payment, practices are required to provide each registered patient a target level of care within a calendar year. Data is not collected on the overall number of services provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients with chronic disease in PIP practices.
- (iii)

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Indigenous Health Incentive						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,575

(l) PIP Practice Nurse Incentive:

- (i) In August 2010, around 2,490 practices received PIP Practice Nurse Incentive payments.
- (ii) The PIP Practice Nurse Incentive supports practices to employ a practice nurse. Data is not collected on the number of services delivered by practice nurses.
- (iii)

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Practice Nurse Incentive						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
22,955	35,550	37,197	51,218	50,357	51,655	55,382

(m) Procedural General Practitioner Payment:

- (i) In August 2010, around 320 practices received a PIP Procedural General Practitioner (GP) Payment.
- (ii) The PIP Procedural GP Payment requires practices to meet certain targets of surgical, anaesthetic and/or obstetric services. Data is not collected on the overall number of services provided by practices.

(iii)

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Procedural GP Payment						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
0.740	3,340	4,884	9,293	9,484	9,537	4,633

(n) PIP Quality Prescribing Incentive:

- (i) In May 2010, around 960 practices received the annual PIP Quality Prescribing Incentive payment.
- (ii) Practices receive the quality prescribing payments for participating in a range of educational activities rather than for service delivery.

(iii)

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Quality Prescribing Incentive						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
n/a	n/a	n/a	2,823	2,299	2,376	2,716

(o) PIP Teaching Incentive:

- (i) In August 2010, around 1,100 practices received PIP Teaching Incentive payments.
- (ii) The table below shows the number of teaching sessions provided by GPs from PIP practices.

PIP Teaching Incentive – number of sessions					
	August	November	February	May	Total
2003-04	n/a	n/a	17,503	9,146	26,649
2004-05	10,445	19,177	24,296	12,761	66,679
2005-06	12,938	22,809	28,821	15,033	79,601
2006-07	15,212	26,326	31,018	17,760	90,316
2007-08	16,822	27,156	29,715	18,653	92,346
2008-09	16,445	29,952	35,666	19,192	101,255
2009-10	21,278	36,516	47,749	24,581	130,124
2010-11	34,545	n/a	n/a	n/a	34,545

(iii)

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Teaching Incentive						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
n/a	n/a	n/a	11,318	9,270	9,757	13,114

(p) PIP Domestic Violence Incentive:

- (i) In August 2010, around 236 practices received PIP Domestic Violence Incentive payments.
- (ii) As the PIP Domestic Violence payments are made to practices with an appropriately trained nurse, which agree to act as a referral point to domestic violence services for women experiencing domestic violence, service data is not collected.
- (iii) The PIP Domestic Violence Incentive payments commenced in May 2008.

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Domestic Violence Incentive						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	260	522

(q) PIP Asthma Incentive - service incentive payments:

- (i) In August 2010, around 1,330 practices received SIPS through the PIP Asthma Incentive.
- (ii) The number of completed cycles of care for patients with moderate to severe asthma is shown in the following table.

Year	August	November	February	May	Total
2002-03	n/a	n/a	6,581	5,805	12,386
2003-04	7,783	7,953	5,399	4,559	25,694
2004-05	6,290	6,472	4,945	4,386	22,093
2005-06	5,615	5,913	4,527	3,570	19,625
2006-07	4,751	4,701	5,167	4,839	19,458
2007-08	7,439	6,909	5,183	5,582	25,113
2008-09	7,027	6,872	5,386	5,577	24,862
2009-10	7,254	6,919	5,447	5,883	25,503
2010-11	8,052	n/a	n/a	n/a	8,052

- (iii) The table below shows total expenditure for sign-on payments and SIPS, as the Department of Health and Ageing's financial reporting system does not identify expenditure on individual components of the PIP Asthma Incentive.

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Asthma Incentive (sign-on payments and SIPS)						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
2,666	1,851	2,048	1,933	2,557	2,491	2,576

(r) PIP Diabetes Incentive – service incentive payments:

- (i) In August 2010, around 3,127 practices received SIPS through the PIP Diabetes Incentive.
- (ii) The number of completed cycles of care for patients with established diabetes mellitus is shown in the following table.

Year	August	November	February	May	Total
2002-03	n/a	n/a	20,674	28,495	49,169
2003-04	28,129	27,629	25,577	31,964	113,299
2004-05	32,216	33,295	31,573	33,429	130,513
2005-06	36,046	38,299	35,127	34,908	144,380
2006-07	36,932	39,877	38,702	38,447	153,958
2007-08	39,631	40,785	39,390	41,803	161,609
2008-09	41,309	42,170	39,789	43,286	166,554
2009-10	41,919	43,059	40,138	44,183	169,299
2010-11	45,283	n/a	n/a	n/a	45,283

- (iii) The table below reflects total expenditure for sign-on payments, SIPS and outcomes payments, as the Department of Health and Ageing's financial reporting system does not identify expenditure on individual components of the PIP Diabetes Incentive.

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Diabetes Incentive (sign-on, SIPs and outcomes payments)						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
10,842	12,191	14,583	14,888	16,390	15,764	17,236

(s) PIP Cervical Screening Incentive – service incentive payments:

- (i) In August 2010, around 2,882 practices received SIPs for each cervical smear taken on an under-screened woman aged between 20 and 69 years through the PIP Cervical Screening Incentive.
- (ii) The number of cervical smears taken on under-screened women aged between 20 and 69 years are listed below.

Year	August	November	February	May	Total
2002-03	n/a	n/a	10,577	12,917	23,494
2003-04	13,004	12,903	11,433	14,205	51,545
2004-05	14,593	14,732	12,824	16,228	58,377
2005-06	19,159	15,337	13,522	15,050	63,068
2006-07	15,240	16,055	20,321	24,296	75,912
2007-08	20,649	20,426	16,336	19,438	76,849
2008-09	19,155	17,302	14,403	18,832	69,692
2009-10	17,896	15,621	12,900	16,056	62,473
2010-11	16,289	n/a	n/a	n/a	16,289

- (iii) The table below shows total expenditure for sign-on payments, service incentive payments (SIPs) and outcomes payments, as the Department of Health and Ageing's financial reporting system does not identify expenditure on individual components of the PIP Cervical Screening Incentive.

Annual expenditure (\$m) for the PIP Cervical Screening Incentive (sign-on, SIPs and outcomes payments)						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
4,752	13,166	12,996	13,394	13,939	15,175	14,450

(t) PIP General Practitioner Aged Care Access Incentive – service incentive payments (Aged Care Access Initiative):

- (i) The PIP General Practitioner (GP) Aged Care Access Incentive (ACAI) payments are generally made to GPs, rather than practices. In August 2010, around 1,800 SIPs were made through the PIP GP ACAI.
- (ii) The PIP GP ACAI commenced on 1 July 2008. Payments are only made to practices when they reach the target levels of service provision to residents of aged care homes.

(iii)

Annual Expenditure (\$m) for the PIP GP ACAI						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	7,903	9,641

(u) Practice Incentive Program – total:

- (i) In August 2010, around 4,913 practices received PIP payments.
- (ii) The PIP incentives are generally designed to encourage general practices to improve the quality of care provided to patients, rather than for the provision of services.

(iii)

Annual Expenditure (\$m) for the Practice Incentives Program - total						
2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
214,399	253,524	262,667	279,262	279,693	290,349	243,979

(2)

PIP Teaching Incentive – number of sessions					
Year	August	November	February	May	Total
2003-04	n/a	n/a	17,503	9,146	26,649
2004-05	10,445	19,177	24,296	12,761	66,679
2005-06	12,938	22,809	28,821	15,033	79,601
2006-07	15,212	26,326	31,018	17,760	90,316
2007-08	16,822	27,156	29,715	18,653	92,346
2008-09	16,445	29,952	35,666	19,192	101,255
2009-10	21,278	36,516	47,749	24,581	130,124
2010-11	34,545	n/a	n/a	n/a	34,545