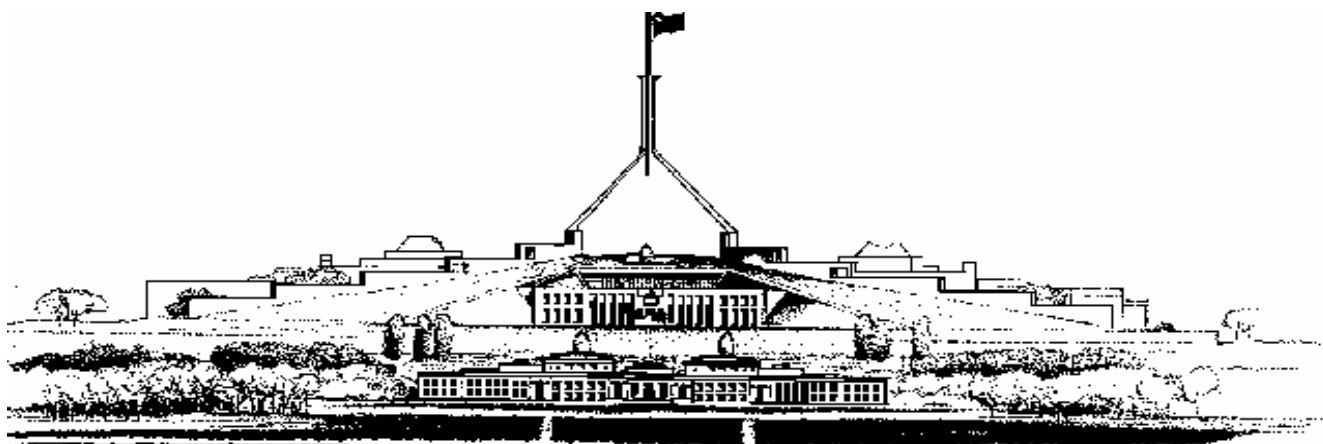




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 1, 2008

Wednesday, 13 February 2008

FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST 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://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au>

SITTING DAYS—2008

Month	Date
February	12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22
March	11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20
May	13, 14, 15, 16, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30
June	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26
August	26, 27, 28, 29
September	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26
October	13, 14, 15, 16, 17,, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24
November	10, 11. 12, 13, 14, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28
December	1, 2, 3, 4

RADIO BROADCASTS

Broadcasts of proceedings of the Parliament can be heard on the following Parliamentary and News Network radio stations, in the areas identified.

<i>CANBERRA</i>	103.9 FM
<i>SYDNEY</i>	630 AM
<i>NEWCASTLE</i>	1458 AM
<i>GOSFORD</i>	98.1 FM
<i>BRISBANE</i>	936 AM
<i>GOLD COAST</i>	95.7 FM
<i>MELBOURNE</i>	1026 AM
<i>ADELAIDE</i>	972 AM
<i>PERTH</i>	585 AM
<i>HOBART</i>	747 AM
<i>NORTHERN TASMANIA</i>	92.5 FM
<i>DARWIN</i>	102.5 FM

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

Governor-General

His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery, Companion in the Order of Australia, Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, Military Cross

House of Representatives Officeholders

Speaker—Mr Henry Alfred Jenkins MP

Deputy Speaker—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP

Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

Members of the Speaker's Panel—

Leader of the House—Hon. Anthony Norman Albanese MP

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

Leader of Opposition Business—Hon. Joseph Benedict Hockey MP

Deputy Leader of Opposition Business—Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Party Leaders and Whips

Australian Labor Party

Leader—Hon. Kevin Michael Rudd MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP

Chief Government Whip—Hon. Leo Roger Spurway Price MP

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

Liberal Party of Australia

Leader—Hon. Brendan John Nelson MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP

Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Alex Somlyay MP

Opposition Whip—Mr Michael Andrew Johnson MP

Deputy Opposition Whip—Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

The Nationals

Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP

Chief Whip—Mrs Kay Elizabeth Hull MP

Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

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

Members of the House of Representatives

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

Members of the House of Representatives

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

Members of the House of Representatives

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

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia;

Nats—The Nationals; Ind—Independent

Heads of Parliamentary Departments

Clerk of the Senate—H Evans

Clerk of the House of Representatives—I C Harris AO

Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—D Kenny (Acting)

RUDD MINISTRY

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

RUDD MINISTRY—*continued*

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

SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition	Hon. Brendan Nelson MP
Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Minister for Employment, Business and Workplace Relations	Hon. Julie Bishop MP
Leader of the Nationals; Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Local Government	Hon. Warren Truss MP
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Defence	Senator Hon. Nick Minchin
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research	Senator Hon. Eric Abetz
Shadow Treasurer	Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP
Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing and Leader of Opposition Business in the House	Hon. Joe Hockey MP
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs	Hon. Andrew Robb MP
Shadow Minister for Trade	Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP
Shadow Minister for Families, Community Services, Indigenous Affairs and the Voluntary Sector	Hon. Tony Abbott MP
Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion
Shadow Minister for Human Services	Senator Hon. Helen Coonan
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training	Hon. Tony Smith MP
Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Urban Water	Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Shadow Minister for Finance, Competition Policy and Deregulation	Hon. Peter Dutton MP
Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate	Senator Hon. Chris Ellison
Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy	Hon. Bruce Billson MP
Shadow Attorney-General	Senator Hon. George Brandis
Shadow Minister for Resources and Energy, Tourism	Senator Hon. David Johnston
Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Water Security	Hon. John Cobb MP
Shadow Minister for Justice, Border Protection and Assisting Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship	Hon. Chris Pyne, MP
Shadow Special Minister of State	Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson
Shadow Minister for Small Business, the Service Economy and Tourism	Steven Ciobo MP
Shadow Minister for Environment, Heritage, the Arts and Indigenous Affairs	Hon. Sharman Stone MP
Shadow Assistant Treasurer, Shadow Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Governance	Michael Keenan MP
Shadow Minister for Ageing	Margaret May MP
Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Personnel and Assisting Shadow Minister for Defence	Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Minister for Business Development, Independent Contractors and Consumer Affairs, Deputy Leader of Opposition Business in the House	Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs	Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for Employment Participation and Apprenticeships and Training	Andrew Southcott MP

SHADOW MINISTRY—*continued*

Shadow Minister for Housing, Shadow Minister for Status of Women	Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Youth, and Shadow Minister for Sport	Hon. Pat Farmer MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Cabinet Secretary	Don Randall MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition, Northern Australia	Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health	Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education	Senator Hon. Brett Mason
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence	Hon. Peter Lindsay MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Roads and Transport	Barry Haase MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Trade	John Forrest MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship	Louise Markus MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government	Sophie Mirabella MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism	Jo Gash MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Ageing and the Voluntary Sector	Mark Coulton MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs	Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families, Community Services	Senator Cory Bernardi

CONTENTS

WEDNESDAY, 13 FEBRUARY

Chamber

Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples	167
Main Committee—	
Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples—Reference	177
Workplace Relations Amendment (Transition to Forward with Fairness) Bill 2008—	
First Reading	177
Second Reading	177
Skills Australia Bill 2008—	
First Reading	186
Second Reading	186
Higher Education Support Amendment (Removal of the Higher Education Workplace Relations Requirements and National Governance Protocols Requirements and Other Matters) Bill 2008—	
First Reading	189
Second Reading	189
Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2007-2008—	
First Reading	191
Second Reading	191
Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2007-2008—	
First Reading	196
Second Reading	196
Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 1) 2007-2008—	
First Reading	198
Second Reading	198
Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 2) 2007-2008—	
First Reading	198
Second Reading	198
Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Amendment Bill 2008—	
First Reading	199
Second Reading	199
Lands Acquisition Legislation Amendment Bill 2008—	
First Reading	201
Second Reading	201
Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Communications Fund) Bill 2008—	
First Reading	203
Second Reading	203
Trade Practices Amendment (Access Declarations) Bill 2008—	
First Reading	204
Second Reading	204
Offshore Petroleum Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2008—	
First Reading	205
Second Reading	205
Tax Laws Amendment (2008 Measures No. 1) Bill 2008—	
First Reading	206
Second Reading	207
Aged Care Amendment (2008 Measures No. 1) Bill 2008—	
First Reading	209
Second Reading	209
Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 1) 2007-2008	211

CONTENTS—continued

Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 2) 2007-2008—	
Second Reading	211
Questions Without Notice—	
Economy	217
Indigenous Affairs	217
Economy	219
East Timor	220
Economy	221
Skills Shortage.....	222
Rail Infrastructure.....	223
Economy	224
Motor Vehicle Industry.....	225
Workplace Relations.....	225
Indigenous Communities.....	228
Infrastructure	228
Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples.....	229
Housing Affordability.....	230
Indigenous Communities.....	232
Whaling	232
Days and Hours of Meeting.....	234
Youth	234
Days and Hours of Meeting.....	235
Rudd Government: Election Commitments	236
Registrar Of Members’ Interests	237
Documents	238
Auditor-General’s Reports—	
Reports Nos 7 to 21 of 2007-08	238
Commonwealth Ombudsman—	
Report	238
Documents	239
Matters of Public Importance—	
Indigenous Communities.....	244
Parliamentary Retiring Allowances Trust	257
Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 1) 2007-2008	258
Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 2) 2007-2008—	
Second Reading	258
Third Reading.....	266
Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 2) 2007-2008—	
Second Reading	266
Third Reading.....	266
Aged Care Amendment (2008 Measures No. 1) Bill 2008—	
Third Reading.....	270
Governor-General’s Speech—	
Address-in-Reply.....	270
Adjournment—	
North Korea.....	301
Federal Election.....	302
Federal Election.....	303
Federal Election.....	304
Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples.....	304

CONTENTS—*continued*

Australian Rugby Union.....	304
Ms Fiona Selimi: Rooty Hill High School	305
Fadden Electorate: Telecommunications	306
Notices	308

Wednesday, 13 February 2008

The SPEAKER (Hon. Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 9 am and read prayers.

**APOLOGY TO AUSTRALIA'S
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Prime Minister) (9.00 am)—I move:

That today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

We reflect on their past mistreatment.

We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations—this blemished chapter in our nation's history.

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.

We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.

For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.

A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.

A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.

A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.

Mr Speaker, there comes a time in the history of nations when their peoples must become fully reconciled to their past if they are to go forward with confidence to embrace their future. Our nation, Australia, has reached such a time. That is why the parliament is today here assembled: to deal with this unfinished business of the nation, to remove a great stain from the nation's soul and, in a true spirit of reconciliation, to open a new chapter in the history of this great land, Australia.

Last year I made a commitment to the Australian people that if we formed the next government of the Commonwealth we would in parliament say sorry to the stolen generations. Today I honour that commitment. I said we would do so early in the life of the new parliament. Again, today I honour that commitment by doing so at the commencement of this the 42nd Parliament of the Commonwealth. Because the time has come, well and truly come, for all peoples of our great country, for all citizens of our great

Commonwealth, for all Australians—those who are Indigenous and those who are not—to come together to reconcile and together build a new future for our nation.

Some have asked, ‘Why apologise?’ Let me begin to answer by telling the parliament just a little of one person’s story—an elegant, eloquent and wonderful woman in her 80s, full of life, full of funny stories, despite what has happened in her life’s journey, a woman who has travelled a long way to be with us today, a member of the stolen generation who shared some of her story with me when I called around to see her just a few days ago. Nanna Nungala Fejo, as she prefers to be called, was born in the late 1920s. She remembers her earliest childhood days living with her family and her community in a bush camp just outside Tennant Creek. She remembers the love and the warmth and the kinship of those days long ago, including traditional dancing around the camp fire at night. She loved the dancing. She remembers once getting into strife when, as a four-year-old girl, she insisted on dancing with the male tribal elders rather than just sitting and watching the men, as the girls were supposed to do.

But then, sometime around 1932, when she was about four, she remembers the coming of the welfare men. Her family had feared that day and had dug holes in the creek bank where the children could run and hide. What they had not expected was that the white welfare men did not come alone. They brought a truck, two white men and an Aboriginal stockman on horseback cracking his stockwhip. The kids were found; they ran for their mothers, screaming, but they could not get away. They were herded and piled onto the back of the truck. Tears flowing, her mum tried clinging to the sides of the truck as her children were taken away to the Bungalow in Alice, all in the name of protection.

A few years later, government policy changed. Now the children would be handed over to the missions to be cared for by the churches. But which church would care for them? The kids were simply told to line up in three lines. Nanna Fejo and her sisters stood in the middle line, her older brother and cousin on her left. Those on the left were told that they had become Catholics, those in the middle Methodists and those on the right Church of England. That is how the complex questions of post-reformation theology were resolved in the Australian outback in the 1930s. It was as crude as that. She and her sister were sent to a Methodist mission on Goulburn Island and then Croker Island. Her Catholic brother was sent to work at a cattle station and her cousin to a Catholic mission.

Nanna Fejo’s family had been broken up for a second time. She stayed at the mission until after the war, when she was allowed to leave for a prearranged job as a domestic in Darwin. She was 16. Nanna Fejo never saw her mum again. After she left the mission, her brother let her know that her mum had died years before, a broken woman fretting for the children that had literally been ripped away from her.

I asked Nanna Fejo what she would have me say today about her story. She thought for a few moments then said that what I should say today was that all mothers are important. And she added: ‘Families—keeping them together is very important. It’s a good thing that you are surrounded by love and that love is passed down the generations. That’s what gives you happiness.’ As I left, later on, Nanna Fejo took one of my staff aside, wanting to make sure that I was not too hard on the Aboriginal stockman who had hunted those kids down all those years ago. The stockman had found her again decades later, this time himself to say, ‘Sorry.’ And remarkably, extraordinarily, she had forgiven him.

Nanna Fejo's is just one story. There are thousands, tens of thousands, of them: stories of forced separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their mums and dads over the better part of a century. Some of these stories are graphically told in *Bringing them home*, the report commissioned in 1995 by Prime Minister Keating and received in 1997 by Prime Minister Howard. There is something terribly primal about these firsthand accounts. The pain is searing; it screams from the pages. The hurt, the humiliation, the degradation and the sheer brutality of the act of physically separating a mother from her children is a deep assault on our senses and on our most elemental humanity.

These stories cry out to be heard; they cry out for an apology. Instead, from the nation's parliament there has been a stony and stubborn and deafening silence for more than a decade; a view that somehow we, the parliament, should suspend our most basic instincts of what is right and what is wrong; a view that, instead, we should look for any pretext to push this great wrong to one side, to leave it languishing with the historians, the academics and the cultural warriors, as if the stolen generations are little more than an interesting sociological phenomenon. But the stolen generations are not intellectual curiosities. They are human beings; human beings who have been damaged deeply by the decisions of parliaments and governments. But, as of today, the time for denial, the time for delay, has at last come to an end.

The nation is demanding of its political leadership to take us forward. Decency, human decency, universal human decency, demands that the nation now step forward to right a historical wrong. That is what we are doing in this place today. But should there still be doubts as to why we must now act, let the parliament reflect for a moment on the following facts: that, between 1910 and

1970, between 10 and 30 per cent of Indigenous children were forcibly taken from their mothers and fathers; that, as a result, up to 50,000 children were forcibly taken from their families; that this was the product of the deliberate, calculated policies of the state as reflected in the explicit powers given to them under statute; that this policy was taken to such extremes by some in administrative authority that the forced extractions of children of so-called 'mixed lineage' were seen as part of a broader policy of dealing with 'the problem of the Aboriginal population'.

One of the most notorious examples of this approach was from the Northern Territory Protector of Natives, who stated:

Generally by the fifth and invariably by the sixth generation, all native characteristics of the Australian aborigine are eradicated. The problem of our half-castes—

to quote the Protector—

will quickly be eliminated by the complete disappearance of the black race, and the swift submergence of their progeny in the white ...

The Western Australian Protector of Natives expressed not dissimilar views, expounding them at length in Canberra in 1937 at the first national conference on Indigenous affairs that brought together the Commonwealth and state protectors of natives. These are uncomfortable things to be brought out into the light. They are not pleasant. They are profoundly disturbing. But we must acknowledge these facts if we are to deal once and for all with the argument that the policy of generic forced separation was somehow well motivated, justified by its historical context and, as a result, unworthy of any apology today.

Then we come to the argument of inter-generational responsibility, also used by some to argue against giving an apology today. But let us remember the fact that the forced removal of Aboriginal children was

happening as late as the early 1970s. The 1970s is not exactly a point in remote antiquity. There are still serving members of this parliament who were first elected to this place in the early 1970s. It is well within the adult memory span of many of us. The uncomfortable truth for us all is that the parliaments of the nation, individually and collectively, enacted statutes and delegated authority under those statutes that made the forced removal of children on racial grounds fully lawful.

There is a further reason for an apology as well: it is that reconciliation is in fact an expression of a core value of our nation—and that value is a fair go for all. There is a deep and abiding belief in the Australian community that, for the stolen generations, there was no fair go at all. There is a pretty basic Aussie belief that says it is time to put right this most outrageous of wrongs. It is for these reasons, quite apart from concerns of fundamental human decency, that the governments and parliaments of this nation must make this apology—because, put simply, the laws that our parliaments enacted made the stolen generations possible. We, the parliaments of the nation, are ultimately responsible, not those who gave effect to our laws. The problem lay with the laws themselves. As has been said of settler societies elsewhere, we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors and therefore we must also be the bearer of their burdens as well.

Therefore, for our nation, the course of action is clear, and therefore, for our people, the course of action is clear: that is, to deal now with what has become one of the darkest chapters in Australia's history. In doing so, we are doing more than contending with the facts, the evidence and the often rancorous public debate. In doing so, we are also wrestling with our own soul. This is not, as some would argue, a black-armband view of history; it is just the truth: the cold, confront-

ing, uncomfortable truth—facing it, dealing with it, moving on from it. Until we fully confront that truth, there will always be a shadow hanging over us and our future as a fully united and fully reconciled people. It is time to reconcile. It is time to recognise the injustices of the past. It is time to say sorry. It is time to move forward together.

To the stolen generations, I say the following: as Prime Minister of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the government of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the parliament of Australia, I am sorry. I offer you this apology without qualification. We apologise for the hurt, the pain and suffering that we, the parliament, have caused you by the laws that previous parliaments have enacted. We apologise for the indignity, the degradation and the humiliation these laws embodied. We offer this apology to the mothers, the fathers, the brothers, the sisters, the families and the communities whose lives were ripped apart by the actions of successive governments under successive parliaments. In making this apology, I would also like to speak personally to the members of the stolen generations and their families: to those here today, so many of you; to those listening across the nation—from Yuendumu, in the central west of the Northern Territory, to Yabara, in North Queensland, and to Pitjantjatjara in South Australia.

I know that, in offering this apology on behalf of the government and the parliament, there is nothing I can say today that can take away the pain you have suffered personally. Whatever words I speak today, I cannot undo that. Words alone are not that powerful; grief is a very personal thing. I ask those non-Indigenous Australians listening today who may not fully understand why what we are doing is so important to imagine for a moment that this had happened to you. I say to honourable members here present: imagine if this had happened to us. Imagine the crip-

pling effect. Imagine how hard it would be to forgive. My proposal is this: if the apology we extend today is accepted in the spirit of reconciliation in which it is offered, we can today resolve together that there be a new beginning for Australia. And it is to such a new beginning that I believe the nation is now calling us.

Australians are a passionate lot. We are also a very practical lot. For us, symbolism is important but, unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong. It is not sentiment that makes history; it is our actions that make history. Today's apology, however inadequate, is aimed at righting past wrongs. It is also aimed at building a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—a bridge based on a real respect rather than a thinly veiled contempt. Our challenge for the future is to now cross that bridge and, in so doing, to embrace a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—embracing, as part of that partnership, expanded Link-Up and other critical services to help the stolen generations to trace their families if at all possible and to provide dignity to their lives. But the core of this partnership for the future is the closing of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities. This new partnership on closing the gap will set concrete targets for the future: within a decade to halve the widening gap in literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes and opportunities for Indigenous Australians, within a decade to halve the appalling gap in infant mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and, within a generation, to close the equally appalling 17-year life gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous in overall life expectancy.

The truth is, a business as usual approach towards Indigenous Australians is not working. Most old approaches are not working. We need a new beginning—a new beginning which contains real measures of policy success or policy failure; a new beginning, a new partnership, on closing the gap with sufficient flexibility not to insist on a one-size-fits-all approach for each of the hundreds of remote and regional Indigenous communities across the country but instead allowing flexible, tailored, local approaches to achieve commonly agreed national objectives that lie at the core of our proposed new partnership; a new beginning that draws intelligently on the experiences of new policy settings across the nation. However, unless we as a parliament set a destination for the nation, we have no clear point to guide our policy, our programs or our purpose; we have no centralised organising principle.

Let us resolve today to begin with the little children—a fitting place to start on this day of apology for the stolen generations. Let us resolve over the next five years to have every Indigenous four-year-old in a remote Aboriginal community enrolled in and attending a proper early childhood education centre or opportunity and engaged in proper preliteracy and prenumeracy programs. Let us resolve to build new educational opportunities for these little ones, year by year, step by step, following the completion of their crucial preschool year. Let us resolve to use this systematic approach to building future educational opportunities for Indigenous children and providing proper primary and preventive health care for the same children, to beginning the task of rolling back the obscenity that we find today in infant mortality rates in remote Indigenous communities—up to four times higher than in other communities.

None of this will be easy. Most of it will be hard, very hard. But none of it is impossi-

ble, and all of it is achievable with clear goals, clear thinking and by placing an absolute premium on respect, cooperation and mutual responsibility as the guiding principles of this new partnership on closing the gap. The mood of the nation is for reconciliation now, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The mood of the nation on Indigenous policy and politics is now very simple. The nation is calling on us, the politicians, to move beyond our infantile bickering, our point-scoring and our mindlessly partisan politics and elevate this one core area of national responsibility to a rare position beyond the partisan divide. Surely this is the unfulfilled spirit of the 1967 referendum. Surely, at least from this day forward, we should give it a go.

Let me take this one step further, and take what some may see as a piece of political posturing and make a practical proposal to the opposition on this day, the first full sitting day of the new parliament. I said before the election that the nation needed a kind of war cabinet on parts of Indigenous policy, because the challenges are too great and the consequences too great to allow it all to become a political football, as it has been so often in the past. I therefore propose a joint policy commission, to be led by the Leader of the Opposition and me, with a mandate to develop and implement—to begin with—an effective housing strategy for remote communities over the next five years. It will be consistent with the government's policy framework, a new partnership for closing the gap. If this commission operates well, I then propose that it work on the further task of constitutional recognition of the first Australians, consistent with the longstanding platform commitments of my party and the pre-election position of the opposition. This would probably be desirable in any event because unless such a proposition were absolutely bipartisan it would fail at a referen-

dum. As I have said before, the time has come for new approaches to enduring problems. Working constructively together on such defined projects I believe would meet with the support of the nation. It is time for fresh ideas to fashion the nation's future.

Today the parliament has come together to right a great wrong. We have come together to deal with the past so that we might fully embrace the future. We have had sufficient audacity of faith to advance a pathway to that future, with arms extended rather than with fists still clenched. So let us seize the day. Let it not become a moment of mere sentimental reflection. Let us take it with both hands and allow this day, this day of national reconciliation, to become one of those rare moments in which we might just be able to transform the way in which the nation thinks about itself, whereby the injustice administered to the stolen generations in the name of these our parliaments causes all of us to reappraise, at the deepest level of our beliefs, the real possibility of reconciliation writ large: reconciliation across all Indigenous Australia; reconciliation across the entire history of the often bloody encounter between those who emerged from the Dreamtime a thousand generations ago and those who, like me, came across the seas only yesterday; reconciliation which opens up whole new possibilities for the future.

It is for the nation to bring the first two centuries of our settled history to a close, as we begin a new chapter. We embrace with pride, admiration and awe these great and ancient cultures we are truly blessed to have among us—cultures that provide a unique, uninterrupted human thread linking our Australian continent to the most ancient prehistory of our planet. Growing from this new respect, we see our Indigenous brothers and sisters with fresh eyes, with new eyes, and we have our minds wide open as to how we might tackle, together, the great practical

challenges that Indigenous Australia faces in the future.

Let us turn this page together, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, government and opposition, Commonwealth and state, and write this new chapter in our nation's story together. First Australians, First Fleeters and those who first took the oath of allegiance just a few weeks ago—let us grasp this opportunity to craft a new future for this great land, Australia. Mr Speaker, I commend the motion to the House.

Honourable members applauding—

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Leader of the Opposition) (9.30 am)—Mr Speaker, members of this the 42nd Parliament of Australia, visitors and all Australians, in rising to speak strongly in support of this motion I recognise the Ngunnawal, first peoples of this Canberra land.

Today our nation crosses a threshold. We formally offer an apology. We say sorry to those Aboriginal people forcibly removed from their families through the first seven decades of the 20th century. In doing so, we reach from within ourselves to our past, those whose lives connect us to it, and in deep understanding of its importance to our future. We will be at our best today and every day if we pause to place ourselves in the shoes of others, imbued with the imaginative capacity to see this issue through their eyes with decency and respect.

This chapter in our nation's history is emblematic of much of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians from the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. It is one of two cultures: one ancient, proud and celebrating its deep bond with this land for some 60,000 years; the other, no less proud, arrived here with little more than visionary hope, deeply rooted in gritty determination to build an Australian nation for not only its early settlers and Indigenous peoples

but also those who would increasingly come from all parts of the world.

Whether Australian by birth or immigration, each one of us as Australians has a duty to understand and respect what has been done in our name. In most cases we do so with great pride, but in others it is with shame. In brutally harsh conditions, from the small number of early British settlers, our non-Indigenous ancestors have given us a nation the envy of any in the world. But Aboriginal Australians made involuntary sacrifices, different but no less important, to make possible the economic and social development of our country today. None of this was easy. We cannot, from the comfort of the 21st century, begin to imagine what they overcame—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—to give us what we have and make us who we are. We do know, though, that language, disease, ignorance, good intentions, basic human prejudices and a cultural and technological chasm combined to deliver a harshness exceeded only by the land over which each sought to prevail.

And as our young nation celebrated its Federation, formality emerged in arrangements and laws that would govern the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The new nation's Constitution, though, would not allow for the counting of 'natives' or for the Commonwealth to pass laws in relation to Aborigines. Protection boards and reserves were established. Aborigines in some jurisdictions were excluded from public schools, episodic violence in race relations continued, assimilation underwrote emerging policies and churches heeded their Christian doctrine to reach out to people whom they saw in desperate need. Though disputed in motive and detail and with varying recollections of events by others, the removal of Aboriginal children began. In some cases, government policies evolved from the belief that the Aboriginal race would not sur-

vive and should be assimilated; in others, the conviction was that 'half-caste' children in particular should, for their own protection, be removed to government and church run institutions where conditions reflected the standards of the day. Others were placed with white families whose kindness motivated them to the belief that rescued children deserved a better life.

Our responsibility, every one of us, is to understand what happened here, why it happened and the impact it had on not only those who were removed but also those who did the removing and supported it. Our generation does not own these actions, nor should it feel guilt for what was done in many, but certainly not all, cases with the best of intentions. But in saying we are sorry, and deeply so, we remind ourselves that each generation lives in ignorance of the long-term consequences of its decisions and actions. Even when motivated by inherent humanity and decency to reach out to the dispossessed in extreme adversity, our actions can have unintended outcomes. As such, many decent Australians are hurt by accusations of theft in relation to their good intentions.

The stories are well documented, and I thank the Prime Minister for reminding us of Nanna Nungala Fejo's experience. I will repeat two stories. The first is from a submission given to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission inquiry, and I quote:

I was at the post office with my Mum and Auntie [and cousin]. They put us in the police ute and said they were taking us to Broome. They put the mums in there as well. But when we'd gone [about ten miles] they stopped, and threw the mothers out of the car. We jumped on our mothers' backs, crying, trying not to be left behind. But the policemen pulled us off and threw us back in the car. They pushed the mothers away and drove off, while our mothers were chasing the car, running and crying after us. We were screaming in the back of that car. When we got to Broome

they put me and my cousin in the Broome lockup. We were only ten years old. We were in the lockup for two days waiting for the boat to Perth.

In his black oral history, *The Wailing*, which I commend to every Australian, Stuart Rintoul recalls the thin pain of an Aboriginal woman from Walgett:

Something else that never left my mind, my memory, was of a family of children being taken away and this little girl, she must have been about the same age as myself, I suppose she might have been about six. But I can still see that little person on the back of the mission truck with a little rag hat on, and she went away and we never seen her any more. She was crying. Everyone was crying. Things like that never leave your memory.

It is reasonably argued that removal from squalor led to better lives: children fed, housed and educated for an adult world which they could not have imagined. However, from my life as a family doctor and knowing the impact of my own father's removal from his unmarried, teenage mother, I know that not knowing who you are is the source of deep, scarring sorrows, the real meaning of which can be known only to those who have endured it.

No-one should bring a sense of moral superiority to this debate in seeking to diminish the view that good in many cases was sought to be done. This is a complex issue. Faye Lyman's life is one of the *Many Voices* oral history at the National Library of Australia. Faye left her father when she was eight. She said this:

Personally, I don't want people to say, 'I'm sorry Faye', I just want them to understand.

It was very hurtful to leave Dad. Oh, it broke my heart. Dad said to me, 'It's hard for Daddy and the authorities won't let you stay with me in a tent on the river bank. You're a little girl and you need someone to look after you.' I remember him telling us that, and I cried. I said 'No, but Dad, you look after us.' ... But they kept telling us it wasn't the right thing.

She went on:

I don't want people to say sorry. I just want them to understand the hurt, what happened when we were initially separated, and just understand the society, what they have done ... You don't belong in either world. I can't explain it. It hurts so much.

There is no compensation fund for this—nor should there be. How can any sum of money replace a life deprived of knowing your family? Separation was then, and remains today, a painful but necessary part of public policy in the protection of children. Our restitution for this lies in our determination to address today's injustices, learning from what was done and doing everything we can to heal those who suffered. The period within which these events occurred was one that defined and shaped Australia. The governments that oversaw this and those who elected them emerged from federating the nation to a century characterised for Australia as triumph in the face of extraordinary adversities unknown to our generation.

In offering this apology, let us not in our language and actions create one injustice in our attempt to address another. Let no-one forget that they sent their sons to war, shaping our identity and place in the world. One hundred thousand Australians in two wars alone gave their lives in our name and our uniform, lying forever in distant lands, silent witnesses to the future that they have given us. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians lie alongside one another. These generations considered their responsibilities to their country and one another more important than their rights. They did not buy something until they had saved up for it, and values were far more important than value. Living in considerably more difficult times, they had dreams for our nation but little money. Theirs was a mesh of values enshrined in God, King and country and the belief in something greater than yourself. Neglectful

indifference to all that they have achieved while seeing their actions in the separations only, through the values of our comfortable, modern Australia, will be to diminish ourselves.

Today our nation pauses to reflect on this chapter of relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia. In doing so, however, given that there are so many Australians who, perhaps unusually today, are focused on Aboriginal issues, spare a thought for the real, immediate, seemingly intractable and disgraceful circumstances in which many Indigenous Australians find themselves today. As we meet and speak in this parliament, Aboriginal Australians continue to die long before the rest of us. Alcohol, welfare without responsibilities, isolation from the economic mainstream, corrupt management of resources, nepotism, political buck passing between governments with divided responsibilities, lack of home ownership, underpolicing, intolerance by authorities and neglect and abuse of children that violates all for which we stand all combine to see too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living lives of existential aimlessness.

Indigenous life expectancy is still stubbornly 17 years less than for non-Indigenous Australians. An Aboriginal baby born while we speak still has only a one in three chance of seeing the age of 65. Diabetes, kidney disease, hospitalisation of women from assault, imprisonment, overcrowding in housing, educational underperformance and unemployment remain appallingly high, despite gains in some areas over the past decade. Annual Indigenous-specific spending by the Commonwealth has reached \$3½ billion a year, plus half a billion dollars this year on the Northern Territory intervention.

The sexual abuse of Aboriginal children was found in every one of the 45 Northern

Territory communities surveyed for the *Little children are sacred* report. It was the straw that broke the camel's back, driving the Howard government's decision to intervene with a suite of dramatically radical welfare, health and policing initiatives. I cannot imagine the strength upon which she drew, but the Alice Springs Crown Prosecutor, Nanette Rogers, with great courage, revealed to the nation in 2006 the case of a four-year-old girl drowned while being raped by a teenager who had been sniffing petrol. She told us of the two children, one a baby, sexually assaulted by two men while their mothers were drinking alcohol. Another baby was stabbed by a man trying to kill her mother. So too a 10-year-old girl was gang-raped in Aurukun, the offenders going free, barely punished. A boy was raped in another community by other children. Is this not an emergency, the most disturbing part of it being its endemic nature and Australia's apparent desensitisation to it? Yet governments responsible for delivering services and security have resisted elements of a Northern Territory style intervention.

I ask the Prime Minister to report to this parliament regularly on what his government is doing to save this generation of Aboriginal Australians from these appalling conditions. I also offer on behalf of the opposition my unconditional support to participate in the commission for policy which he proposes. This is far, far more important than any of the things that would normally divide us as a nation in philosophy and politics.

Our generation has over 35 years overseen a system of welfare, alcohol delivery, administration of programs, episodic preoccupation with symbolism and, at times, even excusing the inexcusable in the name of cultural sensitivity, to create what we now see in remote Aboriginal Australia. With good intentions, perhaps like earlier generations, we have under successive governments created

lives, in many cases, of misery for which we might apologise. I certainly do. The best way we can show it is to act, and to act now. I challenge anyone who thinks Aboriginal people get a good deal to come to any of these communities and tell me you wish you had been born there.

The first Aboriginal Australian who came to this parliament was Neville Bonner. A Yagara man abandoned by his non-Aboriginal father before his birth on Ukerebagh Island in the mouth of the Tweed River, Neville was born into a life of hardship known only to some who are here today as visitors. He grew up in a hollow that had been carved by his grandfather under lantana bushes. The year before his mother's death when he was nine, she sent him to a school near Lismore. He lasted two days before the non-Aboriginal people forced his exclusion.

It was to his grandmother Ida he attributed his final success. Arguing that at 14 the boy must go to school, she had said to him: 'Neville, if you learn to read and write, express yourself well and treat people with decency and courtesy, it will take you a long way,' and it did. Through a life as a scrub clearer, a ringer, a stockman, a bridge carpenter and 11 years on Palm Island, it brought him to this parliament in 1971, as the events of this motion were nearing an end. He said in prophetic words to the Liberal Party members who selected him: 'In my experience of this world, two qualities are always in greater need—human understanding and compassion.'

When he was asked by Robin Hughes in 1992 to reflect on his life, Neville observed that the unjust hardships he had endured 'can only be changed when people of non-Aboriginal extraction are prepared to listen, to hear what Aboriginal people are saying, and then work with us to achieve those ends'. Asked to nominate his greatest

achievement, he replied: 'It is that I was there. They no longer spoke of boongs or blacks. They spoke instead of Aboriginal people.'

Today is about 'being there' as a nation and as individual Australians. It is about Neville Bonner's understanding of one another and the compassion that shaped his life in literally reaching out to those whom he considered had suffered more than him. We honour those in our past who have suffered—many of whom are here today—and all who have made sacrifices for us by the way we live our lives and shape our nation. Today we recommit to do so—as one people. We are sorry.

Honourable members applauding—

The SPEAKER—Order! Whilst it might seem redundant, to signify their support, I invite honourable members to rise in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The SPEAKER—I thank the House. I understand that it might suit the convenience of the House if we pause whilst the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition pay their respects to people in the distinguished visitors gallery.

Applause from the public gallery as the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs meet with representatives of Australia's Indigenous peoples in the distinguished visitors gallery.

The SPEAKER—Rather uniquely, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, on indulgence.

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Prime Minister) (9.54 am)—Mr Speaker, the stolen generation representatives here today have asked me to make this presentation on their behalf

to you as the Speaker of the parliament. Together with the Leader of the Opposition, I would like to make a presentation to you now.

Honourable members applauding—

The SPEAKER (9.55 am)—I gratefully receive this gift on behalf of the House. It will represent a very important point in the history of not only this chamber but our nation.

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

MAIN COMMITTEE

Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples Reference

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (9.55 am)—by leave—I move:

That the resumption of debate on the Prime Minister's motion relating to the offering of an Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples be referred to the Main Committee

Question agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 9.56 am to 11.30 am

WORKPLACE RELATIONS AMENDMENT (TRANSITION TO FORWARD WITH FAIRNESS) BILL 2008

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (11.30 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Introduction

Almost three months ago the Australian people voted for change.

They voted for a change of government.

And in doing so, they voted for a change to our workplace relations laws.

Today the government begins the process of change by introducing the Workplace Relations Amendment (Transition to Forward with Fairness) Bill 2008 into this parliament.

With this bill, the government delivers on key election commitments it made to the Australian people; commitments the Australian people endorsed in November.

I want to take one moment to describe just how clear those commitments were.

When the Prime Minister became Leader of the Labor Party and I became Deputy Leader in December 2006, we promised to abolish Australian workplace agreements.

In April last year, we published our workplace relations policy, Forward with Fairness, and confirmed that, if elected, we would abolish Australian workplace agreements.

In August we released our Forward with Fairness policy implementation plan, which reiterated Labor's commitment to abolish Australian workplace agreements while setting out the sensible transitional arrangements a Rudd Labor government would adopt for implementing this key commitment. This policy made it clear that, when Labor's workplace relations system was fully operational, there would be no AWAs and no other statutory individual employment agreements.

All last year, every member now sitting on this side of the House campaigned in electorates all over this country on our commitment to abolish Australian workplace agreements and to introduce Labor's new system.

When the Australian people read our policy documents, or heard the Prime Minister speak, including at our campaign launch, or listened to me debate the previous Minister

for Employment and Workplace Relations they were left without a doubt that central to our workplace relations policy was a commitment to rid Australia of all statutory individual employment agreements.

Labor's policy was not unknown to the Howard government and its members. Indeed, last year the Howard government misused over \$60 million of taxpayers' money campaigning against Labor on workplace relations and against this key commitment to abolish Australian workplace agreements. Every day ministers from the Howard government used to rail in this place about how foolhardy they believed Labor's policy to be.

But despite these attacks from the Howard government, Labor always maintained its belief this country should have a fairer, simpler and more balanced workplace relations system.

We believe all Australian employees are entitled to a safety net of 10 National Employment Standards. We believe employees earning less than \$100,000 are also entitled to an extra safety net provided by modern, simple awards.

We believe that, in such a system, there is no need for AWAs or any statutory individual employment agreement. The essence of such agreements is that they override the safety net. In Labor's view, a modernised safety net means there is no need for individual instruments which can override it. Rather, the only individual agreements that would be necessary are common-law contracts which build on the safety net but can never override it or take it away.

We believe that such a system will be fairer because employees will always have the safety net to rely on. And we believe it will be simpler because employers will no longer have AWAs or statutory individual employment agreements of another nature stuck forever in processing queues. And let's

remember that, as at 30 November last year, there were almost 150,000 agreements still waiting final assessment by the Workplace Authority, creating uncertainty and pressure for employers and employees.

And we believe such a system will be better for productivity and therefore better at fighting inflation.

Of course the Howard government, including the current Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition, argued furiously against Labor's system. They argued that Work Choices was wonderful, that it was fair even as the evidence of the rip-off of working families came to light. They argued Work Choices was a panacea for the economy, even as interest rates rose again and again.

But this debate had an end point. It was election day. The Australian people voted. The Australian people decided. They decided to endorse Labor's policy including our policy to abolish Australian workplace agreements.

Unbelievably, the opposition, and particularly the opposition spokesperson on workplace relations, are now trying to pretend none of this happened. You would think most politicians would have an election defeat seared into their brains, not the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. 2007? She has forgotten it.

The opposition, or at least sections of it, is trying to pretend that Labor campaigned to roll back Work Choices and to have as its workplace relations policy an earlier version of the Howard government's workplace relations laws. This charade is apparently being engaged in by the opposition, or at least sections of it, to try and justify the continuation of AWAs in the future.

But the unsolvable problem for the opposition's tactic is this: everyone can see through its little game of make-believe.

The government did not campaign on the basis we were going back to anything.

The government campaigned on the promise we would take Australia forward with fairness without Australian workplace agreements.

This bill delivers on that promise.

If the Liberal Party opposes it in this House then their actions can only be read in one way. It is a deliberate decision to deny the Australian people what they voted for. It would be a deliberate decision by the Liberal Party to act with born-to-rule arrogance.

If the opposition uses its numbers in the Senate to unduly delay or reject this bill then that would be a deliberate choice by the Liberal Party to keep Work Choices alive. That would be a deliberate decision by the Liberal Party to treat the Australian people with contempt.

And of course the track record of the Liberal Party in the workplace relations debate is to treat the Australian people with contempt. That is what they did when they introduced Work Choices without a mandate. That's what they did when defending day after day a system that ripped basic working conditions away from hardworking Australians. That is what they did when they misused tens of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money defending Work Choices. It is a truly disgraceful track record.

We all know about that disgraceful track record. The only question we are waiting for the Liberal Party to answer is whether they have learned anything from their election defeat or whether today will be another milestone in their disgraceful track record.

Part of the Liberal Party's arrogant conduct on workplace relations was its refusal to consult or work cooperatively with those who most care about workplace relations.

The approach of the Rudd Labor government is completely different.

Transition to Forward With Fairness

The government understands that, to create our simple, fair, flexible and productive workplace relations system, we must talk with employers and employees and those who will play a role in our new workplace relations system.

We intend to avoid the uncertainty and complexity the previous government created for millions of employers and employees around the country through Work Choices.

To this day there are employers who do not know whether they fall within the federal workplace relations system; there are small businesses struggling to understand the complex rules in the hundreds of pages of workplace law bequeathed by the Liberals and there are employees who do not know why they must lose so many protections and do not know where to turn to for help.

The development and content of this bill reflects the government's commitment to taking an open, measured and consultative approach to workplace relations reform to make sure the laws work for the people who use them.

In the less than three months since being sworn in, I have consulted with key stakeholders on the development and detail of this bill.

I have convened two meetings of the National Workplace Relations Consultative Council—a tripartite body which brings together peak employee and employer organisations. It brings together the likes of ACCI, the Australian Industry Group and the ACTU. It has a specialist subcommittee, the Committee On Industrial Legislation, and that committee discussed the government's proposals for the transition bill, award mod-

ernisation and the National Employment Standards.

The enthusiastic and collaborative way in which all of these organisations have come together to assist the government on the development and detail of this bill has been extremely encouraging. I congratulate all employer and union representatives for their valuable contributions towards shaping this bill.

I have also met with state and territory workplace relations ministers, through the Workplace Relations Ministers Council, on both the content of this bill and to commence discussions on, among other things, the development of a uniform workplace relations system for the private sector.

I am pleased to report that the states and territories have wholeheartedly endorsed the key principles outlined in the government's Forward with Fairness policy.

In the coming days I will also announce and chair the inaugural meetings of the government's Business Advisory Group and, with my colleague the Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, I will announce the details of the Small Business Working Group. The creation of these groups was another key part of the government's election commitments and I look forward to listening to the practical feedback from business on the government's proposed substantive workplace relations reforms.

I will be inviting members of the public to comment on the government's exposure draft of the 10 legislated National Employment Standards, which will be released tomorrow.

This open and consultative approach is in stark contrast to the approach of the previous government to workplace relations matters and it will continue as the government moves towards introducing its more substantial workplace relations reforms later this year.

Description of the Bill

As I have indicated, this bill deals with the following matters as set out in the Forward with Fairness Policy Implementation Plan:

Australian Workplace Agreements

This bill provides that, from its commencement date, no-one will be able to make a new Australian workplace agreement. AWAs that have already been made will continue until their nominal expiry date and beyond until the parties to the AWA make a decision about how best to manage their employment arrangement. AWAs made before the commencement date must be lodged within 14 days after the commencement date.

It is the intention of the Rudd Labor government to lead by example and today I announce that on and from this date there will be no new Australian workplace agreements entered into in the Australian Public Service.

Applause from the gallery—

Ms GILLARD—That is a seemingly popular announcement in Canberra!

A government member—Another one!

Ms GILLARD—Another one.

Individual Transitional Employment Agreements (ITEAs)

To provide sensible transitional arrangements for employers who currently use AWAs, the bill will create a special instrument called an individual transitional employment agreement.

ITEAs will only be available to employers who employed an employee on an AWA as at 1 December 2007. These employers may use ITEAs to employ new employees or for existing employees who were employed on AWAs.

ITEAs will give these employers time to transition to the government's new workplace relations system.

ITEAs will have a nominal expiry date of no later than 31 December 2009. On and from 1 January 2010, Labor's new National Employment Standards and modern simple awards will be in operation and there will be no need for any individual statutory employment agreements.

New No Disadvantage Test

The former government's so-called 'fairness test', which was simply not fair because it provided no proper protection for some award conditions and no protection at all for others, will not apply to future workplace agreements.

The bill will introduce a new no disadvantage test for all individual and collective workplace agreements that are made after the commencement of the legislation.

The bill will end the compliance nightmare created by the backlog of agreements that has piled up under the so-called fairness test changes.

To pass the new no disadvantage test, ITEAs must not disadvantage an employee against an applicable collective agreement or, where there is no such collective agreement, an applicable award, and the Australian Fair Pay and Conditions Standard. Collective agreements must not disadvantage employees in comparison with an applicable award and the standard.

The new no disadvantage test will also apply to variations to both new and existing agreements.

New Commencement Dates for Agreements

Currently, workplace agreements take effect from the date that they are lodged with the Workplace Authority with the result that, where agreements fail the 'fairness test', employers are confronted with complex calculations for expensive compensation payments.

Under this bill, ITEAs for existing employees and new collective agreements will only commence operation after the Workplace Authority Director has approved them on the basis that they pass the no-disadvantage test.

However, to provide certainty for employers and new employees in the transition period, ITEAs for new employees, and employer greenfields or employer and union greenfields agreements, will commence operation when lodged with the Workplace Authority Director.

Of course, any agreement lodged after the commencement of this bill will cease to operate or will never operate if it fails the no-disadvantage test. For those agreements which have commenced upon lodgement and have subsequently failed the no disadvantage test, compensation may be payable to employees.

Termination of Agreements

The previous government's Work Choices laws included one-sided provisions that allowed employers to unilaterally terminate a collective workplace agreement which had passed its nominal expiry date and return their employees to only a limited number of minimum standards.

These provisions will be repealed.

To allow them to stand would enable an employer to manipulate the benchmark against which ITEAs must pass a 'no disadvantage test'.

Under the bill, a collective agreement will only be able to be terminated where the parties agree, or by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in circumstances where termination would not be contrary to the public interest. In making its decision under this provision, the commission would be required to have regard to all the circumstances of the case, including:

- the views of each party bound by the agreement (including the employees subject to it) about whether it should be terminated; and
- the circumstances of each party bound by the agreement, including the likely effect on each party of the termination of the agreement.

When an agreement is terminated, employees will be entitled to whatever award or workplace agreement would have applied to them but for the terminated agreement.

For instance, when an AWA or ITEA is terminated, the employee will be covered by any relevant collective agreement operating in the workplace or the full award if there is no such agreement. This reverses the previous government's unfair rules that resulted in employees being stripped off their workplace agreement and reverting to only a limited number of conditions.

The scope to unilaterally terminate a Work Choices AWA which has passed its nominal expiry date will be retained. This will allow employees to terminate an expired unfair Work Choices AWA where doing so may result in their being covered by a more beneficial instrument.

AWA/ITEA Employees—Participation in Collective Bargaining

The bill will also reinforce this change by making it clear that an employee on an AWA or ITEA that has passed its nominal expiry date can approve new collective agreements and variations to collective agreements.

This addresses an anomaly under the current act which allows these employees to take part in a secret ballot for protected industrial action but then prevents them from voting on the agreement itself without first terminating their existing arrangement and therefore risking a significant loss of pay and conditions.

Workplace Relations Fact Sheet

The bill will also repeal the requirement for employers to provide a copy of the *Workplace Relations Fact Sheet* to their employees. This was a desperate attempt by the previous government to co-opt businesses into their wasteful Work Choices advertising campaign and should be stopped. This will be welcomed by business.

Pre-Work Choices Collective Agreements

The bill permits certain pre-Work Choices certified agreements to be extended and varied on application to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

The commission will grant the application only if satisfied that the parties genuinely agree and the employees covered by the agreement approve.

To take advantage of this option, the government will require parties to the agreement not to have organised or engaged in industrial action or applied for a protected action ballot in relation to proposed industrial action from tomorrow, the day after the bill has been introduced.

This will avoid the parties to these agreements having to make new workplace arrangements under a transitional framework only to make new agreements once the government's new fair and flexible workplace reforms come into effect.

The mechanism for allowing parties to pre-reform certified agreements to avoid the 'double transition' was one sought by both employer and employee representatives during one of the consultations that occurred with the Committee On Industrial Legislation. It is an example of how timely consultation on workplace relations matters can give rise to practical solutions that work for all stakeholders.

Other matters

The following additional matters were also raised during the government's consultation with the key employer and employee representative organisations through the National Workplace Relations Consultative Council and the COIL subcommittee.

The government has decided to adopt the following recommendations arising from the parties at these meetings:

- removal of the restriction on referencing other industrial instruments in agreements, which will simplify the drafting of agreements;
- requiring workplace agreements be lodged with signatures attached to protect employees and ensure the correct agreements are lodged for review and approval by the Workplace Authority;
- ensuring that most agreements will take effect from seven days from the date of the notice from the Workplace Authority Director advising an employer that the agreement has passed the no disadvantage test;
- preventing the making of unilateral undertakings when agreements fail the no disadvantage test. If agreements are to be genuine agreements, any variation should have the agreement of both parties. The government has included streamlined approval rules for variations to agreements in these circumstances;
- requiring the Workplace Authority Director to publish reasons where the Workplace Authority Director allows an agreement to pass the no disadvantage test where satisfied that, due to exceptional circumstances, it is not contrary to the public interest to do so (for example to deal with a temporary business crisis);
- requiring the Workplace Authority to consult more widely when designating

awards for the purposes of the no disadvantage test; and

- ensuring that the transition period for a number of matters, including the automatic expiry of notional agreements preserving state awards—the so-called NAPSAs—old IR agreements, removal of superannuation as an allowable award matter and the transitional registration of organisations arrangements is extended to the end of the government's transition period, 31 December 2009, to provide continuity and certainty during the transition period.

If the government had not made those arrangements, then a number of cut-off dates prescribed by Work Choices would have brought these industrial instruments to an end—most particularly would have brought to an end the Notional Agreement Preserving a State Award on which so many employees rely for their industrial protection. It also would have removed superannuation as an allowable award matter. These things, as I indicate, are the product of agreement from representatives of employees and employers working together.

Lastly, the bill will amend the Skilling Australia's Workforce Act to remove provisions which make funding to TAFE institutions conditional on offering AWAs. This amendment is consistent with the government's intention to remove similar funding restrictions for universities under the previous government's higher education workplace relations reform policy, the so-called HEWRRs policy.

Award modernisation

Another key part of the government's election commitments is the creation of new modern awards as an integral part of a fair minimum safety net for employees.

This bill provides the means for an award modernisation process to commence.

In addition to the amendments to the Workplace Relations Act to facilitate award modernisation, the explanatory memorandum to this bill contains the proposed award modernisation request I will make to the President of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, the Hon. Justice Geoffrey Giudice, upon the passage of this bill requesting the Australian Industrial Relations Commission create new modern awards during the transition period.

Modern awards will:

- protect 10 important entitlements like penalty rates and overtime;
- provide industry-specific detail on the 10 National Employment Standards;
- ensure a fair safety net for Australian employees, including outworkers;
- ensure minimum award entitlements are relevant to the Australian economy and modern work practices;
- not be overly prescriptive; and
- will allow for flexible work arrangements for employers and employees who rely on awards as well as provide an appropriate benchmark for collective agreement making.

As part of the award modernisation process the Australian Industrial Relations Commission will be required to develop an award flexibility clause for inclusion in all awards. This clause will, in combination with a simple, modern award arrangements enable employers and individual employees to make arrangements to meet their genuine individual needs so long as the employee is not disadvantaged.

It is the government's intention that employees earning above \$100,000 per annum will be free to agree to their own pay and conditions without reference to awards. This will provide greater flexibility for common law agreements which have previously been

required to comply with all award provisions, no matter how highly paid the employees.

A simple, modern award system with opportunities for individual flexibilities will remove the need for any individual statutory employment agreements and the associated complexity and bureaucracy attached to those agreements.

To enable the award modernisation process to begin, the bill will insert a new part into the Workplace Relations Act. The bill sets out the award modernisation function of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission and specifies the objectives of award modernisation and requirements for modern awards.

The bill will prohibit certain terms being included in modern awards, including terms that would require or permit conduct contravening the freedom of association provisions or which authorise organisations to enter an employer's premises.

National Employment Standards

Tomorrow I will release an exposure draft of the proposed National Employment Standards which will replace the current Australian Fair Pay and Conditions Standard when the new workplace relations system becomes fully operational in 2010. These standards include minimum entitlements such as hours of work, carer's leave, public holidays and notice of termination. Modern awards may build on these standards with industry specific detail.

From 2010, the National Employment Standards and modern awards will together form the safety net for both employment and collective bargaining.

Conclusion

This bill represents the start of the government meeting a key commitment it made to the Australian people at the last election.

This bill represents the start of the government bringing fairness and balance to Australia's workplaces. We promised it; we will deliver it.

The next step, the next commitment to be fulfilled, is the development of our substantive workplace relations laws to create a new, simple, fair and flexible workplace relations system that works for all Australians.

A workplace relations system that works for all Australians should be fair and flexible, simple and productive. It will not jeopardise employment, it will not allow for industry wide strikes or pattern bargaining and it must not place inflationary pressures on the economy. It specifically aims to drive productivity and cooperative workplace arrangements.

Our plan is based on employers and employees working out at the enterprise level what suits them the best. Under our system wage outcomes in one business, or one sector of the economy, cannot automatically flow to another. Where employers and employees can work together to drive productivity increases there will be gains in the enterprise to share.

The Australian people in voting for our policy have emphatically said yes, they want to see fairness and flexibility in their workplaces. They want to see workplace relations policy for the long term, not policy as a political football.

It is now time for members in this place to respect and represent the clear message from the Australian people. No more Work Choices, no more Australian workplace agreements, no more unfairness, complexity and confusion.

And from the Liberal Party no more born-to-rule arrogance, no more contempt for the Australian people.

With this bill the government is delivering for the Australian people and has com-

menced the process of lasting workplace relations reform. (*Time expired*)

Debate (on motion by **Dr Southcott**) adjourned.

SKILLS AUSTRALIA BILL 2008

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (12.01 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the Skills Australia Bill 2008 as one of the first pieces of legislation to be dealt with by this parliament.

This is an important piece of legislation.

It will establish Skills Australia, a statutory body that will provide the government with independent, high-quality advice to assist us in targeting government investment in training. It will give the government advice that we can use to assist businesses and workers across the country.

This legislation is being brought in front of parliament as a priority because we understand the urgent need to increase the supply of skilled workers, but also to ensure that our investment is targeted to where it is really needed and that the results of this investment are in line with what industry is demanding.

The Reserve Bank of Australia warned the Howard/Costello government that skill shortages were threatening growth and contributing to higher inflation and higher interest rates on more than 20 occasions. The coalition ignored these warnings and attempted to mask skill shortages by using phrases such as 'skills needs' or 'skills gaps'. It is perhaps

worth noting that the current Leader of the Opposition and the current Deputy Leader of the Opposition are the two education ministers who presided over this track record of failure.

The former Minister for Vocational and Further Education, Andrew Robb, admitted as much last year in an address to an industry group when he said, 'We've got a problem with skill shortage ... I mean we knew it was coming but it has arrived with a force ... And you know, it's only going to get worse.' That was the attitude of the Howard government.

Unlike the Howard government, the Rudd Labor government is committed to tackling skill shortages head on.

Skills Australia is a key plank in the government's five-point plan to fight inflation. This is a plan that addresses both the demand side and supply side pressures on inflation.

Under this plan the Australian government will firstly ensure that we take the pressure off demand by running a strong budget surplus through fiscal restraint.

Finance minister Lindsay Tanner has already announced \$643 million in savings and the government is committed to an intensive review of all government spending to put downward pressure on inflation.

Secondly, in the period ahead the Australian government will examine all options to provide real incentives to encourage private savings and has already announced new first home savers accounts that will help Australians save a deposit for their first home.

Mr Hunt interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—I note by the contributions from the opposition that it is not just the Deputy Leader of the Opposition who has forgotten 2007 and the election result.

Thirdly, we will be unfolding our plan for tackling chronic skills shortages in the economy. I will talk more about this shortly.

Fourthly, we will provide national leadership to tackle infrastructure bottlenecks through the development of Infrastructure Australia.

And, fifthly, we will provide practical ways of helping people re-enter the workforce including removing disincentives to work and helping increase workforce participation.

By exercising fiscal restraint our plan aims to do everything we can to ease the pressure on inflation. Our plan deals with the chronic investment deficits in the capacity side of the economy, particularly investment in skills and infrastructure. This skills agenda is clearly a vital part of this broad whole of government plan.

Skills Australia

Establishing Skills Australia is the first step of many this government will take as part of a comprehensive approach to overcoming the challenges our nation faces in securing a prosperous, productive future.

Skills Australia will be comprised of seven experts drawn from a range of backgrounds including economics, industry, academia and training providers. It represents an intellectual as well as a financial investment in the skills agenda.

Skills Australia will:

- analyse current and emerging skills needs in the Australian economy—both in the broader economy and across industry sectors;
- assess evidence from commissioned research and industry stakeholders to inform Australia's workforce development needs;
- widely distribute information from research and consultations with stakeholders to enable entrepreneurs, businesses and workers to have the necessary

information to inform their training and employment decisions;

- provide the government with recommendations on current and future skills needs to help inform decisions to encourage skills formation and drive ongoing reforms to the education and training sector, including on priorities for the investment of public funds; and
- establish and maintain relationships with relevant state bodies and authorities to inform its advice on current and future demand for skills and facilitate alignment of priorities for responses to skills needs.

The Skills Australia legislation establishes the operational arrangements to support the independent body, including provisions relating to conflict of interest issues, arrangements for the appointment and service of members, remuneration of its members, procedures about its conduct and arrangements for working groups to provide it with the capacity to investigate issues deeply, drawing on a wider range of stakeholders.

Skills Australia will provide the government with advice about areas of acute skills shortage.

Without wishing to pre-empt their advice, there are some clearly identified areas of skills shortages we can anticipate. For example, the mining and construction sectors are likely to be prime candidates.

The mining industry is currently experiencing the highest vacancy to employment ratio, with around 3.7 vacancies for every 100 people employed in the industry. Wages growth is strongest in the mining industry, at 5.4 per cent through the year to the September quarter 2007, compared to 4.2 per cent across all industries.

The construction industry is also experiencing labour constraints. Wages growth in

construction is at 4.8 per cent through the year to September 2007. The industry also has the highest proportion of employees with a certificate as their highest qualification, at 45.7 per cent. This means that it will benefit greatly from additional training places at diploma and above levels.

Skills Australia will play a pivotal role in boosting productivity and participation in the Australian economy by providing high-quality advice to the government. This will ensure that policies can be directed towards closing the skills gap—the gap between the demand for and supply of skilled workers.

New Training Places

Our Skilling Australia for the Future policy will increase and deepen the skills capacity of the Australian workforce and ensure demand for skills and training is matched. The Rudd Labor government's plan for our future skilled workforce will close the skills gap in the Australian economy in three key ways:

Firstly, by funding an additional 450,000 training places over the next four years.

The government will take the advice of the Reserve Bank of Australia seriously by acting with urgency to make 20,000 of these new training places available from April 2008. These initial places will be directed to those outside the workforce and will help many Australians gain employment and stimulate workforce participation rates.

Higher Level Skills

Secondly, we will ensure that most of the 450,000 places lead to a higher-level qualification, such as at the Certificate III level or above.

The new places will offer high-quality training opportunities which better suit the needs of our economy in the future. In an increasingly globalised world, we need to increase not only the number of Australians

with skills and qualifications but also the depth of skills in our workforce if we are to drive up productivity and compete internationally.

The Business Council of Australia estimates that nearly half of the qualifications needed to meet the predicted demand for skilled workers over the next decade will need to be at Certificate III level or above.

The Role of Industry

Thirdly, and most importantly, we are placing industry demand at the heart of the skills training system.

Part of the problem in increasing our national skill levels has been that training has not sufficiently matched industry's needs. Businesses have not been provided with enough assistance to enable them to diagnose, predict and tailor training to their future workforce needs.

The government will align skills development policies and training delivery with industry priorities, and position the training system to better meet the needs of individuals and industry.

New training places under the Skilling Australia for the Future policy will be allocated according to industry demand.

Training organisations must be encouraged to play their part and respond flexibly to increasingly diverse industry and individual needs. Training providers must deliver customised, relevant training that is integrated with, and supported by, workplace learning opportunities, at a time and place that suit business needs.

The Australian government's major reforms will help with better diagnosis of Australia's skills needs and ensure new training places are delivered in a way that meets the needs of industry—helping more people secure meaningful jobs, and helping drive up productivity.

Drawing on the advice of Skills Australia, strengthened industry skills councils will connect employers to the new training places. Industry skills councils will work with employers to identify their skills needs and match those needs with nationally accredited training.

Industry skills councils will also work with employment service providers to give people outside the workforce access to training which matches industry and employers' needs. Australia's training system must shift to a system that is driven by, and which responds to, the needs of business, industry and the economy.

More than one-third of the additional 450,000 training places will be allocated to people currently outside or marginally attached to the workforce to equip them with the skills they need to gain employment. The remaining places will be targeted at training people who are currently employed but who need to upgrade their skills.

Skilling Australia for the Future will also support up to 65,000 apprenticeships over the next four years.

A Cooperative Approach

The Rudd Labor government is also committed to progressing the national skills agenda through the Council of Australian Governments.

Through COAG all governments in Australia agreed to work together to increase the productive capacity of the economy, address inflationary pressures and deliver higher quality services to the community.

Building on the work of COAG, my department has begun discussions with state and territory systems to ensure close coordination between governments in planning for and funding growth in training and skills development. It is only with a long-term productivity agenda that we can hope to

achieve simultaneously high economic growth, low unemployment and low inflation.

There are many shared and real benefits to be achieved by working together. We can expect a better return on publicly funded training investment. We can also increase the capacity of enterprises to adopt high-performance work practices that increase productivity through supporting their employees to realise their potential.

The Skills Australia Bill is the first element of the Australian government's policy framework to fight inflation by addressing skill shortages. We are 'Skilling Australia for the Future'. It is a challenging plan that requires all parties to make an active contribution. It is only with all stakeholders actively engaged in the skills agenda that we can focus on our outcomes—to increase the productive capacity of the economy through a more highly-skilled workforce. The result will be an Australia where the career aspirations of individuals are recognised, nurtured and rewarded.

I commend the bill to the House.

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

HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT AMENDMENT (REMOVAL OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION WORKPLACE RELATIONS REQUIREMENTS AND NATIONAL GOVERNANCE PROTOCOLS REQUIREMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2008

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Work-

place Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (12.16 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce legislation that will be a nail in the coffin for the Howard government's extreme and unfair Work Choices workplace relations agenda and remove unwarranted, bullying government interference over our universities and other higher education providers.

This bill is about getting the heavy foot of the Liberal Party off the throat of our universities.

This bill amends the Higher Education Support Act 2003 by repealing section 33-17. This section of the act currently requires higher education providers to meet the higher education workplace relations requirements (known to most as the HEWRRs) and the national governance protocols as a condition of their Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding for student places.

Failure to meet the HEWRRs and the protocols currently results in a reduction of a provider's Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding. This bill will remove that condition.

The HEWRRS required universities to implement the Howard government's ideologically driven workplace relations agenda. The governance protocols required adherence to a one-size-fits-all model of how to run a university.

These were the worst manifestations of the distrust that the Howard-Costello government had for our universities. They thought they knew best how to run workforce management in universities and how to govern those institutions. This was another manifestation of their born to rule mentality and their contempt for their fellow Australians.

Our higher education providers were expected to run things the Howard-Costello

way—or face severe financial penalties that reduced core funding for teaching and learning. This is the legacy of the current Leader of the Opposition and the current Deputy Leader of the Opposition to our universities.

At the same time that it was ordering universities around, the previous government failed on the very matter it had direct responsibility for. It presided over a massive decline in public investment for our universities. From 1995 to 2004 while other OECD countries increased public investment in tertiary education by an average of 49 per cent, on the Howard-Costello watch public investment in Australia was cut by four per cent. Their legacy has been to leave our higher education system lagging the rest of the world.

The legislation I am introducing today will put an end to the HEWRRs and the protocols and with it the distrust that characterised the Howard government's relationship with universities.

Consistent with our commitment to abolish Australian workplace agreements, the requirement that universities offer AWAs to employees, which is one key element of the HEWRRs, will cease. Higher education providers will be subject to the same laws as all other employers. The Rudd Labor government will trust higher education providers to manage their own industrial relations within those laws. We won't be telling them what to do.

Removing the HEWRRs will also give funding certainty to the higher education sector.

It is clear that these requirements have impinged upon higher education providers' freedom to carve out distinctive missions. Furthermore they diverted energy and resources away from where they are most needed—the development and delivery of high-quality teaching and research.

While the governance protocols will be removed as a condition of funding, the government will of course encourage universities to pursue good governance practices and increase productivity and efficiency. This will be built into our more collaborative relationship with universities.

In addition to these timely changes, a number of technical adjustments have been made in this bill.

In relation to the approval of higher education providers, this bill amends the act so that the approval of a provider that no longer meets certain criteria may be revoked. For example, if the provider no longer has its central management and control in Australia, this bill enables for its approval to be withdrawn.

The bill also amends the arrangements for quality auditing of higher education providers. Currently, the only quality auditing body in this country is the Australian Universities Quality Agency. This bill amends the act to allow the Commonwealth to designate additional bodies to perform this role, such as state and territory government accreditation authorities. Further, the amendment will enable the Commonwealth to specify the higher education providers that those bodies can audit. This includes the class of provider and the state or territory where their accreditation lies.

Currently, if a body were designated to conduct audits, it would be able to audit all higher education providers, including universities. This bill will set limits on the providers that can be audited. This also is an efficiency measure. By state and territory government accreditation authorities conducting audits at the same time as they currently conduct their normal registration and approval processes, the administrative burden on private providers will be reduced.

The approach has been subject to consultation with private providers and a trial process with two state accreditation agencies, those agencies being in Queensland and Victoria. The approach has been well received.

Importantly, the bill also includes the addition of a transitional mechanism so that existing funding commitments made to providers under the Collaboration and Structural Reform Fund can be honoured now that the new Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund has been established.

This bill before the House is a clear expression of the government's strong commitment to abolishing Australian workplace agreements and reducing the constraints upon universities' autonomy. It will also further improve the operation of the act.

The Rudd Labor government's commitment is to a strong, diverse higher education sector that makes an essential contribution to our national prosperity. We look forward to rebuilding the relationship between government and higher education providers based on trust and mutual respect. I commend the bill to the House.

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

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 3) 2007-2008

Message from the Governor-General transmitting particulars of proposed expenditure and recommending appropriation announced.

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr TANNER (Melbourne—Minister for Finance and Deregulation) (12.24 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

It is with pleasure that I introduce Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2007-2008.

There are two additional estimates bills this year: Appropriation Bill (No. 3) and Appropriation Bill (No. 4). I shall introduce the latter bill shortly.

The additional estimates bills seek appropriation authority from parliament for the 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 Nos 3 and 4 this year is \$3.3 billion, or about 4.8 per cent of total annual appropriations.

I should add that in addition to appropriation bills Nos 3 and 4, I will also be introducing another two appropriation bills to meet additional expenses relating to drought and equine influenza assistance measures announced by the previous government after the last budget. The amounts to meet these additional measures would normally be included in the additional estimates bills; however, as the funding for these measures is required urgently, a second set of bills has been prepared which can be given faster passage in the parliament—the Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bills.

Before I turn to the detail of the additional appropriation being sought in Appropriation Bill (No. 3), I want to speak about the government's savings initiatives and their effect on the additional estimates appropriations. The government has commenced the hard work of identifying savings and offsets of the previous government's spending so that they may be redirected to better and more effective program priorities. Today I am delivering a modest initial instalment on the government's election promise of savings.

During the election campaign we promised to require government departments and agencies to deliver an additional two per cent efficiency dividend in the 2008-09 financial year. The first part-year instalment on that promise will be achieved this financial year, with an estimated saving in expenses against annual departmental appropriations of around \$100 million in 2007-08. These savings have served partially to offset an increase in departmental appropriations in the additional estimates. Efficiency dividend savings are estimated to increase to around \$430 million in 2008-09.

Of course, it is not only the public sector that has been called upon to find economies. The government has applied this requirement to itself and to members of parliament generally by requiring a 30 per cent reduction in ministerial and opposition staff, yielding a net saving of \$15.4 million this year.

Significant administrative efficiencies will arise this year from the transition from Australian workplace agreements to collective enterprise agreements and statutory individual contracts. The Workplace Authority will achieve a funding reduction of \$30 million in 2007-08 as a result of the simplified administration.

We are also delivering the first instalment on our promise to redirect savings in annual appropriations to superior policy outcomes including, to name but a few:

- Redirecting the savings from cancelling the previous government's Skills for the Future program work skill vouchers to fund our better plan for more vocational education and training places as part of our Skilling Australia for the Future program. A part-year saving of \$16.3 million will be achieved this year;
- Abolishing the Access Card project providing a saving this year of \$250.6 million; and

- Abolishing Australian industry productivity centres, saving \$10.2 million this year and redirect the savings to a better targeted program.

Amongst the measures announced by the previous government that we will not be proceeding with are contributions to the Rugby League Hall of Fame and the Australian Rugby Academy, producing a cash saving to the budget this year of \$35 million, while a review of the Renewable Remote Power Generation Program has identified a saving this year of \$33 million.

These savings, and many others, have served to contain the additional appropriation sought in these bills.

Turning now to Appropriation Bill (No. 3), the total appropriation being sought this year is \$2.4 billion. This proposed appropriation arises from changes in the estimates of program expenditure, due to variations in the timing of payments and forecast increases in program take-up, reclassifications and from policy decisions taken by the government since the last budget.

I now outline the major items provided for in the bill.

As a first step in attacking Australia's skills deficit the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations will be provided with \$242.1 million to enable the following programs to proceed:

- \$100 million to establish the National Secondary Schools Computer Fund, which will provide for grants of up to \$1 million for schools to assist them to provide for new or upgraded information and communications technology for secondary school students in years 9 to 12;
- \$33.3 million for the government's Skilling Australia for the Future program which will provide a total of 450,000 additional training places over four years

at a cost of \$1.3 billion. Funding in 2007-08 will deliver 20,000 vocational education and training places that are aimed at people currently outside the workforce. This program will commence in the beginning of April 2008;

- \$92.6 million to meet additional costs associated with the previous government's Skills for the Future program and to extend that program until our new program commences in April; and
- \$16.2 million to establish the Television Technical Operators College and the WesTrac National Skills Training Centre of Excellence.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations will also be provided with \$22.7 million to provide assistance to schools in declared Exceptional Circumstances areas to increase equitable access to high-quality education opportunities.

The government will provide a net increase of \$45.7 million in 2007-08 to establish the Workplace Authority, which will undertake pre-lodgement assessment of workplace agreements and provide a comprehensive information and education service about pay and conditions to help employers and employees better understand the workplace relations system.

\$15 million will be provided to establish the Office of the Workplace Ombudsman, which will perform the workplace relations compliance role formerly undertaken by the Office of Workplace Services. The additional resources will ensure timely investigations of the expanded number of claims.

Additional funding of \$60.75 million is proposed for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to reimburse it for the communications campaign to raise public awareness of the services provided by the Office of the Work-

place Ombudsman and the Workplace Authority, which concluded in October 2007.

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development and Local Government has been provided with \$2.5 million to establish Infrastructure Australia to ensure genuine rigour and accountability in infrastructure spending. Infrastructure investments will be subject to expert analysis. If a government chooses to invest in a project for political rather than economic reasons everyone will know about it. Infrastructure Australia will develop a national approach to tackling infrastructure bottlenecks.

The Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research will be provided with \$15.2 million to introduce the Enterprise Connect program, replacing the previous government's Australian Industry Productivity Centres.

Additional funding is proposed for the Department of Health and Ageing for the following:

- \$14 million to provide a package of incentives to support the take-up of Medicare Easyclaim by patients attending participating general practices and specialist practices;
- \$33.1 million to provide up-front capital grants and recurrent funding for the establishment of 31 GP Super Clinics around Australia, and to provide incentive payments to GPs and allied health providers to relocate to these clinics;
- \$11.7 million to establish a specialist training school at Greenslopes Private Hospital at the University of Queensland; and
- \$31.6 million for investing in hospitals and community health under the Better Outcomes for Hospitals and Community Health program. This includes funds for specific commitments announced during

the election such as \$10 million for the Flinders Medical Centre clinical teaching facilities upgrade.

The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts will receive the following additional amounts:

- \$50.8 million additional funding for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Structural Adjustment Package;
- an additional \$31.8 million to provide rebates to households for installing solar hot water heaters to encourage improved energy efficiency in homes;
- an additional \$50.8 million for the National Solar Schools Plan to encourage improved energy and water efficiency in schools; and
- an additional \$15.2 million to take early action on the National Plan for Water Security. This proposal will accelerate investment in water savings infrastructure and the purchase of water allocations by bringing forward spending from 2011-12.

The National Water Commission will receive an additional \$25 million to assist groundwater licence holders in New South Wales to adjust to reductions in water access entitlements.

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs will be provided with \$189.8 million to assist people with disabilities, their families and carers. This includes annual tax-free payments of \$1,000 for each child under the age of 16 with a disability for whom the carer is receiving Child Carer Allowance and \$9 million to increase the support available to people in disability business services.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship will be provided with:

- an additional \$18 million to upgrade the Border Control System. This funding

will enable enhanced electronic connectivity between the department and the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation; improved analysis and security checking of travellers to Australia; and higher quality data matching systems;

- a further \$81.6 million through the DIAC funding model for increases in the volume of DIAC's transactions, including visa applications (mainly student and skilled migrant) during 2007-08.
- The Department of Defence's appropriation is largely the result of a reclassification of appropriations and other estimates variations, including:
- \$402 million to cover an increase in depreciation expense. This increase in funding is fully offset by a reduction in the department's capital funding appropriation from Appropriation Act 2, thereby making the reclassification budget neutral;
- \$38.8 million for Stage 2 of the Enhanced Land Force Initiative; and
- \$70.6 million for additional costs incurred for Operation Astute in East Timor in 2006-07.

The balance of the amount in Appropriation Bill (No. 3) relates to estimates variations, reclassifications and other minor measures.

The appropriation bills are structured according to the Administrative Arrangement Orders announced on 3 December 2007 and 25 January 2008. Members will notice that in the case of some functions transferred between agencies, the recipient agency has been assigned the same outcome as the agency from which the activity was transferred. This ensured that valid outcomes existed against which funds could be appropriated within the additional estimates timeline and in the context of the large number of

administrative arrangement changes. Following additional estimates, agencies will be able to seek amendments to outcomes statements so that these can be more fully integrated into their agency outcome and program structure.

We have inserted a new provision in Appropriation Bill (No. 3)—section 12—to facilitate the achievement of whole-of-government outcomes relating to Indigenous employment initiatives. The new provision will provide relevant agencies with the necessary appropriation in order to spend amounts received from the Northern Territory Flexible Funding Pool Special Account. Participating agencies will be identified in an annual determination by the finance minister. The Flexible Funding Pool model was adopted to permit the reallocation of funds between participating agencies, where required, to more effectively meet employment objectives relating to the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

We have also taken the opportunity to make changes to the appropriation bills to clarify the relationship between annual appropriation acts and certain provisions in the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997, which can change amounts appropriated by, and issued under, the annual appropriation acts. The FMA Act provisions in question are sections 30, 30A, 31 and 32, which relate to re-imbursing and other amounts received by agencies, handling goods and services tax issues and changes to appropriations that flow from a change of agency functions, such as the new administrative arrangements made after the election.

The changes proposed are particularly important following commencement of the Financial Framework Legislation Amendment Act (No. 1) 2007 which altered sections 31 and 32 so that they directly change the

amounts of appropriation provided in the annual appropriation acts.

We are proposing to expand the explanatory detail provided in note 2 to section 6 of the bills and also expand the detail provided in the appropriation clause in each bill. These changes are not designed to alter the substantive law, but to make clear that the appropriation acts are subject to the relevant FMA Act provisions.

A number of other minor technical improvements have been made to the bills to ensure consistency with the drafting of other legislation.

The previous government decided to abolish the statement of savings and to remove departmental savings from Appropriation Bill (No. 3). This statement merely replicated information already provided in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook. It was also somewhat misleading, as most of the items presented were actually reallocations of funding across programs or years and did not represent reductions in agency appropriations. Consequently, I am not tabling a statement of savings document with these additional estimates bills. Also, the proposed Appropriation Bill (No. 3) does not show agencies which are not expected to spend all of their departmental outputs appropriation for 2007-08. The government has decided that detail on savings measures agreed since the 2007-08 budget will be provided in tables in the portfolio additional estimates statements.

I commend the bill to the House.

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

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 4)
2007-2008**

Message from the Governor-General transmitting particulars of proposed expendi-

ture and recommending appropriation announced.

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr TANNER (Melbourne—Minister for Finance and Deregulation) (12.39 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2007-2008 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 territories, and local government authorities; and
- non-operating purposes such as equity injections and loans.

The total additional appropriation being sought in Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2007-2008 is \$898.5 million.

The principal factors contributing to the additional requirement since the 2007-2008 budget include \$172 million in additional payments to the states, territories and local government authorities, including:

- \$63.7 million to the Department of Health and Ageing to provide:
- an amount of \$40.3 million for investing in hospitals and community health under the Better Outcomes for Hospitals and Community Health program. This program includes funds for specific commitments announced during the election, such as \$15 million for the Launceston Integrated Cancer Care Centre; and
- \$18 million for a contribution to Grafton Hospital;
- the Department of Defence will be provided \$26.8 million for payment to the

Queensland government for the relocation of Amberley State School as a result of the expansion of RAAF Amberley. This appropriation is provided through the reclassification of an existing Defence appropriation;

- a bring forward of \$20 million under the AusLink program to allow the early initiation of projects by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government; and
- an increase of \$33.0 million for the Commonwealth State and Territories Disability Agreement, to allow the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to make grants to the states for people with disabilities and their carers.

Bill No. 4 also proposes \$723 million in additional appropriation for non-operating expenses, the more significant of which I now outline.

AusAID will be provided with \$466.4 million for Australia's contribution to the International Development Association, which is the concessional lending arm of the World Bank. The amount reflects additional funding announced at MYEFO of \$211 million and a change in the accounting treatment for \$255 million previously appropriated with funding for loans in Appropriation Act (No. 1) 2007-08. The original funding provided in Appropriation Act (No. 1) under the previous accounting treatment will be returned to the budget.

An additional \$17.6 million will be provided to the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research for the Innovation Investment Fund. This amount represents the profit on the fund's investment continuing the policy that profits generated should be returned to the fund to create a self-sustaining program of investments.

Finally an additional equity injection of \$121.4 million is proposed for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to, among other things, reimburse the department for meeting workload increases flowing from an increase in case volume in 2006-07 and to provide capital funding for IT system development and upgrades for the border control system as well as additional capital funding for the Systems for People IT program.

We have also changed Appropriation Bill (No. 4) to clarify the relationship between annual appropriation acts and certain provisions in the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997, which can change amounts appropriated by, and issued under, the annual appropriation acts.

Consistent with the amendments proposed for Appropriation Bill (No. 3), the changes proposed for this bill expand the explanatory detail provided in note 2 to section 6 of the bill and also expand the detail provided in the appropriation clause. These changes are not designed to alter the substantive law, but to make clear that the appropriation acts are subject to the relevant FMA Act provisions.

A number of other minor technical improvements have been made to the bills to ensure consistency with the drafting of other legislation.

I commend the bill to the House.

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

**APPROPRIATION (DROUGHT AND
EQUINE INFLUENZA ASSISTANCE)
BILL (No. 1) 2007-2008**

Message from the Governor-General transmitting particulars of proposed expenditure and recommending appropriation announced.

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr TANNER (Melbourne—Minister for Finance and Deregulation) (12.44 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

There are two appropriation bills providing urgent funding to cover new and expanded assistance measures for the drought and the outbreak of equine influenza announced last year. The appropriations contained in these bills meet the commitments announced in the 2007-08 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook and Pre-Election Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2007 documents and agreements reached during the election. I shall introduce Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 2) shortly.

The measures provided for in Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 1) 2007-2008 include additional exceptional circumstances drought funding for farmers and farm dependent small businesses and emergency assistance to the horse industry as a result of the equine influenza outbreak.

These bills require immediate passage as the administered appropriations provided to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry have been exhausted. At the current rate of expenditure, the department will run out of appropriations by the end of February 2008.

Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 1) requests additional funding of \$506.9 million for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to meet increased expenses during the 2007-08 financial year. Of this money a total of \$251.2 million is provided to cover the

new and expanded drought relief assistance, and \$255.7 million is provided for financial aid to the horse industry as a result of the equine influenza outbreak.

The drought and equine influenza measures were announced by the previous government in September and October 2007. The equine influenza measures were extended by the government earlier this month. The measures were a response to the increasing severity of the drought and to assist those suffering financial hardship as a result of the equine influenza outbreak that occurred in August last year.

Funding for the measures was not included in the May 2007 budget as the decisions on the assistance were only announced in September and October 2007. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has been meeting all payments from its existing appropriations, but is now in urgent need of additional funding to be able to continue delivering assistance.

I commend the bill to the House.

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

APPROPRIATION (DROUGHT AND EQUINE INFLUENZA ASSISTANCE) BILL (No. 2) 2007-2008

Message from the Governor-General transmitting particulars of proposed expenditure and recommending appropriation announced.

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr TANNER (Melbourne—Minister for Finance and Deregulation) (12.47 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 2) 2007-2008 requests additional funding for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to make payments to the states, territories and local government authorities during the 2007-08 financial year in respect of drought relief assistance and to reimburse them for costs associated with the national response to the eradication of equine influenza. While states, the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory are being reimbursed for the cost of the national response to equine influenza, these costs will be recovered from the horse industry consistent with the provisions of the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement. Recovery from the horse industry will be addressed in separate legislation.

The total appropriation sought in this bill is \$545.1 million, comprising:

- \$440.1 million to support primary producers in regions that have been declared eligible for exceptional circumstances assistance;
- \$7.8 million to support small businesses with up to 100 employees that are dependent on business from farmers in regions that have been declared eligible for exceptional circumstances assistance; and
- \$97.2 million to reimburse the states, the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory for costs associated with the national response to eradicating equine influenza. Most of this funding—\$86.4 million—will be recovered from the horse industry.

This appropriation bill, and the urgency with which we are treating it, demonstrates the government's commitment to assisting those communities affected by drought and to the eradication of equine influenza.

I commend the bill to the House.

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

**COMMONWEALTH AUTHORITIES
AND COMPANIES AMENDMENT
BILL 2008**

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr TANNER (Melbourne—Minister for Finance and Deregulation) (12.50 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Amendment Bill 2008 primarily amends the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997, or the CAC Act, as it is colloquially known, to improve the governance and accountability arrangements for Commonwealth authorities and Commonwealth companies. The bill also contains a small number of consequential amendments to the Legislative Instruments Act 2003, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983, the Australian Industry Development Corporation Act 1970, the Australian National University Act 1991 and the Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991.

This bill is designed primarily to amend the CAC Act and represents the most significant set of amendments to the act since it commenced on 1 January 1998.

The CAC Act regulates Commonwealth authorities and Commonwealth companies. For Commonwealth authorities, the CAC Act contains detailed rules about reporting and accountability and also deals with matters such as banking and investments and the conduct of officers for Commonwealth authorities. For Commonwealth companies, the

CAC Act contains reporting and other requirements that apply in addition to the obligations and responsibilities imposed by the Corporations Act 2001.

The amendments in the bill are primarily intended to improve accountability and transparency arrangements for Commonwealth authorities and Commonwealth companies. The amendments in the bill also improve the alignment of the CAC Act with equivalent provisions in the Corporations Act and update the CAC Act based on experience from over 10 years of operation.

The bill seeks to improve the efficiency and transparency of notifying directors of Commonwealth authorities and wholly owned Commonwealth companies of the general policies of the Australian government that apply to a body.

Responsible ministers will still be required to consult with the directors of Commonwealth authorities and wholly owned Commonwealth companies on proposed general policies that are to apply to them. However, the new process will significantly improve transparency through the general policy orders issued by the finance minister being made available to the public through being published on the federal register of legislative instruments.

The new process also improves efficiency and reduces red tape within government by replacing a current cumbersome process that relies on multiple letters and correspondence between ministers and bodies without the notifications being readily transparent.

Another proposed amendment to the CAC Act will clarify reporting obligations for Commonwealth authorities and improve transparency around granting time extensions by applying the process contained in the Acts Interpretation Act 1901.

The CAC Act also currently includes annual reporting obligations for Common-

wealth companies based on reporting requirements contained in the Corporations Act 2001. However, as a consequence of amendments to the Corporations Act since the CAC Act commenced in 1998, there can be different annual reporting standards applied to Commonwealth companies, depending on the company's classification.

Amendments to the CAC Act will improve the accountability of Commonwealth companies by requiring annual reports to be prepared in line with the requirements for public companies under the Corporations Act.

Additionally, to ensure annual reports contain appropriate disclosure on public sector governance and risk management issues, for example, amendments in the bill will allow the finance minister to require additional information through finance minister's orders.

Since the CAC Act commenced in 1998, the Auditor-General has submitted the annual reports of subsidiary companies of Commonwealth authorities and Commonwealth companies to the minister responsible for those bodies.

The bill will make amendments to the reporting requirements of subsidiaries so that directors of the relevant Commonwealth authority or Commonwealth company are responsible for submitting annual reports to responsible ministers. This amendment better reflects the responsibilities that directors of Commonwealth authorities and Commonwealth companies have for the operations of subsidiaries.

Through proposed amendments, this bill will provide Commonwealth authorities with greater clarity about the power to purchase goods and services by the use of credit cards where they do not currently have the express power to borrow. Importantly, the bill will also introduce a related criminal penalty as-

sociated with misuse of a Commonwealth authority's credit cards.

When originally drafted the CAC Act sought, where relevant, to impose on directors and other officers of Commonwealth authorities obligations and responsibilities similar to those under the Corporations Act. Since that time, subsequent amendments to the Corporations Act have reduced the alignment in a number of areas. This bill will improve the alignment of the CAC Act with the Corporations Act in the areas of offences, penalties and terminology.

The bill will insert new offences into the CAC Act to align with similar provisions in the Corporations Act. The bill will also amend a number of penalty clauses to align them with similar provisions in the Corporations Act, including the introduction of a number of new civil penalty provisions.

Additionally, the bill strengthens the test for determining when the Commonwealth controls a company by employing terminology used in the Corporations Act for determining when a company is a subsidiary.

Finally, the last major proposal of the bill involves amending the CAC Act to clarify the level of protection of officers and public servants from statutory and other duties, as they carry out their responsibilities in relation to Commonwealth authorities.

In particular, these amendments will strengthen accountability arrangements through removing an exemption from criminal penalties contained in the CAC Act for breach of officers' duties.

Overall, the amendments in this bill provide a significant and much needed update to the CAC Act, improving transparency, accountability and governance arrangements for Commonwealth authorities and Commonwealth companies. I commend the bill to the House.

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

LANDS ACQUISITION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2008

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr TANNER (Melbourne—Minister for Finance and Deregulation) (12.56 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill makes a number of important amendments to the Lands Acquisition Act 1989. The amendments proposed in the bill update the act to enable Commonwealth mining regulations to be promulgated; to apply penalties to breaches of the act with respect to mining that are commensurate with Commonwealth criminal law policy; to make the act more efficient by giving the Minister for Finance and Deregulation the power to initiate claims, making the Minister for Finance and Deregulation responsible for an administrative function; to eliminate an inconsistency by making the Cocos (Keeling) Islands land administration exempt from the act, consistent with Christmas Island and Norfolk Island acts; to reduce the duplication of tabling of commercial, in-the-market transactions; and to repeal the redundant Lands Acquisition (Defence) Act 1968.

The amendments in relation to mining will enable the promulgation of Commonwealth mining regulations for the administration of mining on Commonwealth land. In particular, they will enable state and territory legislation to be applied in a manner consistent with Commonwealth policy. The amendments also empower the Federal Court to have jurisdiction in matters arising under such regulations. The amendments ensure the

judicial and review processes are consistent throughout the act.

The amendments provide for a penalty regime for breaches of the regulations under the act that is in line with the Commonwealth's criminal law policy. The amendments impose a maximum penalty of 50 penalty units for an individual and 250 penalty units for a body corporate for breaches of regulations made under the act.

The process of promulgating Commonwealth mining regulations will entail extensive consultation and agreement with states and territories. Enabling the Minister for Finance and Deregulation to initiate an offer of compensation to an interest holder without a claim being made promotes efficiencies and fairness in the application of the act. This will also expedite the compensation process and ease financial and administrative burdens in relation to compulsory acquisitions. The proposal will avoid delays to settlement of compensation in relation to acquisitions and provide certainty to the Commonwealth on its financial exposure.

The amendments provide that, in the absence of a claim for compensation, the Minister for Finance and Deregulation must wait 12 months from the date of acquisition before making an offer. The Minister for Finance and Deregulation will also be able to initiate an offer of compensation for losses arising from the Commonwealth's activities on the land, to be acquired prior to the acquisition regardless of whether or not the acquisition proceeds.

In relation to offers from the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, the rights of recipients of offers to review processes under the act are preserved. The amendment exempting land on the Cocos Islands from the act will correct that anomaly. Dealings in land on the Cocos Islands under the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Act 1955 have, by reason

of oversight, not been made exempt from the act. The amendment would bring the administration of land on the Cocos Islands in line with land administration on Christmas Island and Norfolk Island without the intervention of the act.

The amendment which removes the tabling of commercial acquisitions on market of an interest in land reduces duplication and administrative burdens. Accountability and transparency of commercial acquisitions is provided by AusTender, which makes public commercial acquisitions of property by the Commonwealth. AusTender has a standard of transparency and accountability equivalent to that of tabling in parliament. This amendment brings the acquisition of land in line with the Commonwealth Procurement Guidelines. This amendment accords with initiatives to reduce red tape in government administration. It creates efficiencies by reducing duplication and associated administrative costs. The amendment dealing with the substitution of the Attorney-General with the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, in connection with cancelling and amending title documents related to land held in trust, creates further efficiencies by bringing the administrative functions of the act within the responsibility of the Minister for Finance and Deregulation.

The act presently enables the Attorney-General to cancel and amend titles to land when land is held in trust and the public purpose for the land is varied. As the Minister for Finance and Deregulation has the responsibility for administering the act, having the Minister for Finance and Deregulation assume that role from the Attorney-General will streamline the process and promote greater efficiencies.

The repeal of the Lands Acquisition Defence Act 1968 eliminates redundant legislation. This legislation was created in order to

acquire public parkland in New South Wales. This acquisition has long since passed and the Lands Acquisition Defence Act 1968 can now be repealed. This amendment would update Commonwealth legislation.

I commend the bill to the House.

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

**TELECOMMUNICATIONS
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
(COMMUNICATIONS FUND)
BILL 2008**

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (1.02 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The government understands that access to high-speed broadband services is critical to Australia's future social and economic prosperity. Fibre technology is essential to deliver the modern broadband infrastructure that this country needs to boost productivity.

This is why the government has committed to investing up to \$4.7 billion to establish a new national broadband network in partnership with the private sector.

The national broadband network is a critical element of the government's national infrastructure agenda, particularly given the increasing importance of the digital online economy.

The national broadband network is expected to provide minimum speeds of 12 megabits per second to 98 per cent of homes and businesses and be rolled out over the next five years. It will be an open access

network to ensure equivalence of access for downstream service providers and will allow scope for providers to differentiate their product offerings.

The national broadband network will provide a platform for sustainable growth for our economy for many years to come.

One of the government's key election commitments was to provide funding of up to \$4.7 billion to facilitate the rollout of a national broadband network to 98 per cent of homes and businesses. The government also committed to using the \$2 billion in the Communications Fund to help fund this commitment.

The Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Communications Fund) Bill 2008 would amend Part 9C of the Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999 to enable money in the Communications Fund to be used for the purpose of funding the creation or development of a national broadband network, if required. The final decision on use of the fund will be made in the context of the government's overall fiscal strategy.

The intent of the Communications Fund is to address the telecommunications needs of regional, rural and remote Australians. The Rudd government's plan to roll out a national broadband network is fully consistent with this, but it will deliver in a much shorter time frame. The government is prepared to use the Communications Fund now to provide better broadband services to 98 per cent of Australian residential and business customers.

The previous government legislated to prevent funds being drawn below \$2 billion and to only allow expenditure of the revenue stream. This government is prepared to invest \$2 billion right now to fund this critical piece of national infrastructure. Under the previous government's approach, regional Australians would be waiting 35 long years

to reach the same level of investment in telecommunications that Labor is prepared to make right now.

In keeping with its commitment to regional Australia, the government has also extended the current Regional Telecommunications Review, chaired by Dr Bill Glasson AO, to August 2008. Amongst other things this will provide an opportunity for the review to take into account the national broadband network policy in preparing its recommendations. The government will consider funding in developing its overall response to the review report.

This bill is a significant milestone in the implementation of the Rudd government's initiative to give Australia as a whole a first-class broadband network for the future.

I commend the bill to the House.

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

TRADE PRACTICES AMENDMENT (ACCESS DECLARATIONS) BILL 2008

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (1.07 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Trade Practices Amendment (Access Declarations) Bill 2008 amends the Trade Practices Act 1974 to clarify that access declarations, and extension notices which extend the period of access declarations, are not legislative instruments for the purposes of the Legislative Instruments Act 2003.

Access declarations are made by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commis-

sion under subsection 152AL(3) of the Trade Practices Act, to identify telecommunications services that should be subject to access obligations.

A service can only be declared following a thorough inquiry process in accordance with part 25 of the Telecommunications Act 1997. The ACCC must be satisfied that the making of the declaration will promote the long-term interests of end users. Once a service has been declared, telecommunications providers wishing to make use of the service may seek access to the service from other telecommunications providers. Access obligations in part XIC of the Trade Practices Act require access providers to supply access to declared services to access seekers, and provisions in that part detail the terms and conditions on which access must be given.

In considering the long-term interests of end users, the ACCC must take into account whether declaration of the service would promote competition, any-to-any connectivity, and the efficient use of, and investment in, infrastructure. Any-to-any connectivity is the ability of each end user to communicate with all other end users.

The primary objective of the bill is to provide certainty to the telecommunications sector by clarifying that access declarations that have been made by the ACCC are not, and never have been, legislative instruments for the purposes of the Legislative Instruments Act.

Eleven access declarations are currently in force, covering key services that are fundamental to telecommunications competition and the ability of end users to communicate with all other end users. They include services such as the unconditioned local loop, local call resale, call origination and termination, wholesale line rental and trunk transmission.

On the understanding that access declarations are not legislative instruments for the purposes of the Legislative Instruments Act, the ACCC has not registered any access declarations on the Federal Register of Legislative Instruments, nor tabled them in both houses of parliament. These are requirements that the Legislative Instruments Act imposes for legislative instruments. Unregistered legislative instruments are unenforceable.

A recent Federal Court decision, *Roche Products Pty Limited v National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee*, may have implications for access declarations. As a consequence of that decision, it is possible that access declarations may be open to legal challenge on the basis that they are legislative instruments and are invalid as they have not been registered or tabled.

In the absence of these amendments, it is possible that a court could decide that all access declarations made by the ACCC up to this point are invalid due to their not having been registered and tabled in accordance with the Legislative Instruments Act. If this were to happen, this could cause serious disruption to the operation of the part XIC access regime.

In the interests of providing the telecommunications industry with certainty in relation to access to key services, this bill will remove doubt about the validity of access declarations.

The ACCC may also issue extensions of time for access declarations. The bill will also clarify for the avoidance of doubt that these extensions of time are not, and never have been, legislative instruments.

Furthermore, the bill will have the effect that revocations and variations of access declarations are not and have never been legislative instruments.

The bill contains a clause that will protect the validity of the bill in the event that it was

found to result in an acquisition of property other than on just terms and in that event, requires the Commonwealth to pay a reasonable amount of compensation. If the Commonwealth and the person do not agree on the amount of compensation, the person may institute proceedings in the Federal Court and the Federal Court will determine the amount of compensation. This provision mirrors similar provisions found elsewhere in the Trade Practices Act and in the Telecommunications Act.

While part XIC of the Trade Practices Act deals with the telecommunications-specific access regime, part IIIA of that act deals with access to services more broadly. This bill does not deal with part IIIA of the act. No inferences should be drawn about the status of access declarations made under that part of the Trade Practices Act as a result of this bill.

I commend the bill to the House.

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

**OFFSHORE PETROLEUM
AMENDMENT (MISCELLANEOUS
MEASURES) BILL 2008**

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Mr Martin Ferguson**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (1.14 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill was introduced during the last sitting of parliament and was passed by the Senate, but not by the House prior to parliament being prorogued. Given the important but technical nature of the amendments, I am now pleased to reintroduce it into parliament.

Members would be aware that the Offshore Petroleum Act 2006 received royal assent on 29 March 2006. The Offshore Petroleum Act was a rewrite of the Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act 1967, which has been the primary legislation for the administration of Australia's offshore petroleum resources for 40 years. The Offshore Petroleum Act is a more user-friendly enactment that will reduce compliance costs for governments and the industry.

This amendment bill has three elements: firstly, to clarify provisions to ensure they operate the way that was intended, to make some technical corrections and a minor policy change; secondly, a policy change repealing section 327 which gives the minister certain emergency powers in the Bass Strait; and, finally, to convert geodetic data references of the area descriptions in the act from Australian Geodetic Datum to the current Geodetic Datum of Australia.

I would now like to take members through some of the key measures contained in the bill.

The bill ensures that the duration of certain production licences remains unchanged. While it was the intention that production licences due for their first renewal be renewed for 21 years, the effect of amendments made in 1998 to the Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act is that licensees on their first renewal are entitled to licences of an indefinite duration. This error has been corrected in the Offshore Petroleum Act. These amendments ensure that the licensees who renewed their production licences for the first time since 1998 but before the Offshore Petroleum Act comes into force will have the indefinite term licences they are entitled to.

The bill also clarifies the definition of 'coastal waters'. The Offshore Constitutional Settlement provides that the states and the Northern Territory have control over the

'coastal waters' adjacent to their land territory. These coastal waters are three nautical miles from a 'baseline'; this is essentially the low water mark of the coast. These amendments ensure that the baseline that the 'coastal waters' are measured from is the correct three nautical mile baseline.

The bill also proposes a minor policy change and repeals section 327 which allows the minister to exercise his emergency powers in the Area to be Avoided, offshore Victoria in the Gippsland Basin. The minister has never exercised these powers. The section is proposed to be repealed because a more comprehensive and broader security regime has been implemented under the Maritime Transport and Offshore Facilities Security Act 2003.

The amendments to the datum are part of the government's Australia Spatial Data Infrastructure Program. Amendments made to the Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act in 2001 paved the way for the move to the Geocentric Data of Australia, known as GDA94. GDA94 is essentially a response to increased use of the Global Positioning System for surveying, navigation and similar purposes. It is important to note that there will be no shift in the position in any petroleum title area as a result of the changes.

The bill incorporates the conversion of all of the points describing the 'offshore areas' in schedule 1 and the 'area to be avoided' in schedule 2.

I commend the bill to the House.

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

**TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (2008
MEASURES No. 1) BILL 2008**

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs, and Assistant Treasurer) (1.19 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill makes a number of improvements to Australia's tax and superannuation laws.

Firstly, this government is honouring its election commitment to remove tax deductibility for donations made to political parties, candidates and members. This commitment was made as part of 'Labor's \$3 Billion Savings Plan', which was announced by then shadow minister for finance on 2 March 2007.

Currently deductions are allowed for donations to political parties, members of parliament and candidates, including Independents, up to a maximum of \$1,500.

Donations and membership fees used to be deductible up to a lower \$100 threshold prior to 2006 when the former government implemented an increase up to the current \$1,500 limit and expanded the deduction to donations to Independent candidates and members and to donations by business.

To ensure that there is no loophole for business to access a deduction for political donations, these amendments also remove general deductions for business taxpayers for contributions and gifts to political parties, members and candidates.

The previous government's move—which was opposed by this government—came at a cost of \$10 million per annum to Australian taxpayers, which will now be saved by the adoption of this measure. This measure forms part of the government's commitment to overall efficiency in government operations.

Secondly, superannuation lump sums paid to persons with a terminal medical condition will now be tax free. This change assists in

relieving financial stress which terminally ill persons and their families may be suffering due to their situation. The amendments have effect for payments made on or after 1 July 2007.

Under the existing law, the taxation treatment of a lump sum paid from a superannuation fund depends on the age of the person receiving it and whether or not the benefit has previously been taxed in the fund. A lump sum paid from a taxed fund to a person below the age of 55 is taxed at a maximum rate of 21.5 per cent (including the Medicare levy).

Under the proposed change, a superannuation lump sum paid to a person who has a terminal medical condition will be tax free. The details of what constitutes a 'terminal medical condition' will be prescribed in regulations which will be made following the passage of this bill.

I note that the previous government announced on 11 September 2007 that it would amend the tax law, with effect from 12 September 2007, so that superannuation lump sums paid from that date to individuals with a terminal illness would be tax free. That measure was supported by Labor in opposition and we are implementing it now in government. This bill, however, ensures that such superannuation lump sums will be tax free earlier, from 1 July 2007. This will ensure that more people with terminal illnesses will be able to withdraw superannuation tax free.

I would like to place on record my thanks to and recognition of the member for Grayndler, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, for bringing this to the attention of the previous government and for campaigning on the matter on behalf of one of his constituents. As a result, this legislation is being implemented today.

Schedule 3, which like schedules 5 and 6, was introduced by the former government in Tax Laws Amendment (2007 Measures No. 6) Bill 2007, provides a concession for the costs of establishing a carbon sink forest. This measure will encourage the establishment of carbon sink forests and, in turn, make an important contribution to carbon sequestration and deliver natural resource management benefits. Establishment costs will be immediately deductible for trees in established carbon sink forests in the 2007-08 to 2011-12 fiscal years inclusive. After this initial period, establishment costs will be deductible over 14 years and 105 days at a rate of seven per cent per annum.

To be eligible for the deduction, the taxpayer must be carrying on a business and the carbon sink forest must meet environmental and natural resource management guidelines.

Separately to this bill, it is important to highlight that the government is developing a national standard for robust and transparent carbon offsets. The standard will ensure consumer confidence in the carbon offset market and include minimum standards and appropriate verification protocols.

Unlike the opposition the government takes the issue of climate change seriously. I am particularly proud to be a part of a government that signed the Kyoto protocol as one of the first actions of the new government.

The measure contained in this bill is a modest measure. It is a small step in the issue of climate change. It is, nevertheless, an important one.

Schedule 4 extends the beneficiary tax offset to the Equine Workers Hardship Wage Supplement payment.

This payment is made fortnightly to assist individuals who can demonstrate loss of their primary source of income, which is earned in the commercial horse racing industry, as a

direct result of the equine influenza outbreak and its associated quarantine and movement restrictions. The amount of the payment varies depending on the applicant's circumstances and may be equivalent to the single rate, couple rate or single with dependent child rate of the Newstart allowance.

Extending the beneficiary tax offset to the Equine Workers Hardship Wage Supplement payment will ensure consistent taxation treatment with the Newstart allowance, and applies to payments of the Equine Workers Hardship Wage Supplement payment received in the 2007-08 income year.

A number of workers and businesses in the horse racing industry have suffered financially as a result of the equine influenza outbreak of last year. Workers involved in commercial horse dependent industries, who have lost their job or most of their income, and sole traders whose incomes have effectively ceased, such as transport operators and riding coaches, have been eligible to receive the equivalent of the Newstart allowance. This will ensure that no tax is payable on the payment if the only income received by the recipient is the payment.

Schedule 5 provides tax free status to grants under the Tobacco Growers Adjustment Assistance Program 2006, to tobacco growers who undertake to exit all agricultural enterprises for at least five years. The grants are being paid following the loss of a market in Australia for domestically grown tobacco. This measure assists tobacco growers to adjust to the fundamental change in their market and to develop alternative businesses.

Tobacco growers can receive up to \$150,000 under the Tobacco Growers Adjustment Assistance Program to assist them to exit the tobacco industry and move into alternative business activities. In 2006 legal tobacco production ceased in Australia. The

last state in which tobacco production ceased was Victoria. Licences to produce tobacco can only be issued by the Australian Tax Office where a grower has formal arrangements to sell tobacco to manufacturers and there are currently no such licences on issue.

Ensuring these payments are tax free will ensure that tobacco growers receive the full benefit of the grants to help them move into other industries.

Schedule 6 makes minor technical amendments to the early withdrawal provisions to the Farm Management Deposits scheme. The changes will align the tax law with the current practice for declaring either all primary producers in a geographical area or specified primary producers within a geographical area, to be in exceptional circumstances.

This amendment will improve the farm management deposit scheme by ensuring that all primary producers, who are eligible for early withdrawal due to exceptional circumstances, will retain the tax benefits.

It is particularly important to assist farmers where we can who are suffering from the drought.

Full details of the measures in this bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum. I commend the bill to the House.

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

AGED CARE AMENDMENT (2008 MEASURES No. 1) BILL 2008

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Mrs Elliot**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond—Minister for Ageing) (1.28 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am very pleased today to introduce the Aged Care Amendment (2008 Measures No. 1) Bill 2008.

It is an honour and a privilege to introduce my first legislation as Minister for Ageing.

It is also an honour and a privilege to represent my constituents as the member for Richmond.

Richmond has one of the highest proportions of older people in Australia.

In this region, about 20 per cent of the population is aged over 65 years. This is compared with the national average of about 13 per cent.

Richmond now reflects the national future demographics of our country.

In 40 years it is predicted that 20 per cent of the Australian population will be aged over 65 years.

The ageing of our population represents an opportunity to define and rise to the opportunities and challenges that an ageing population provides.

Australia's population is changing and, as the number of older people increases, so does the need to support them and their aspirations.

We must also embrace the contribution older Australians have made and continue to make to our society.

I believe our seniors built this nation through their hard work and commitment over the decades.

The federal government is building a modern Australia to meet the challenges of the 21st century. One of those major challenges is the ageing of the population.

There are 1.9 million Australians aged 70 years and over, who make up 9.3 per cent of the total population.

This number will double in the next 20 years as the 'baby boomers' reach old age.

Life expectancy for Australians is amongst the highest in the world.

For those born in 2005, it is 83.8 years for women and 78.7 years for men.

About four out of every 10 people aged 70 years and over are currently using aged-care services—one in 10 of those are in nursing homes.

Today, the average age of entry to nursing homes is 82 years.

The health and wellbeing of older Australians is of paramount concern to us all.

One of my key concerns as Minister for Ageing is that people who need aged care receive quality care and that care recipients and their families are treated with dignity and respect.

As at 30 June 2007, there were 2,873 nursing homes operated by 1,227 approved providers, providing a total of 167,070 aged-care beds.

Total Commonwealth funding for nursing homes will be \$6.2 billion in 2007-08.

The population changes require a better system to finance aged care in Australia.

The 2007 federal budget provided for increases to government accommodation subsidies and resident accommodation fees for people newly entering nursing homes on or after 20 March 2008.

In order to implement these changes, the Aged Care Act 1997 must be amended. The Aged Care Amendment (2008 Measures No. 1) Bill 2008 makes these necessary changes.

In summary, the bill makes amendments to the Aged Care Act to simplify, and make fairer, the fees and charges paid by residents.

It also makes amendments to the accommodation supplements paid by the government for residents who cannot fully meet their own accommodation costs.

The bill allows for the phasing in of higher levels of government accommodation subsidies to ensure sufficient revenue to aged-care providers to support their continued investment in high-level care.

The new arrangements will combine, and better target, the current 'concessional resident supplement' and 'pensioner supplement' into a single asset-tested accommodation supplement.

The maximum level of the new accommodation supplement will also be increased.

Self-funded retiree residents with few assets will become eligible for accommodation assistance from the Australian government for the first time.

While those who can afford it will be asked to contribute more towards their accommodation, the level of government payments will increase for those who cannot meet the costs themselves.

The bill also addresses existing inequities in relation to income tested fees. Currently, self-funded retirees pay higher income-tested fees, because nearly all of their income is counted under the income test.

However, pension income is currently not counted under the income test. This disadvantages self-funded retirees compared to part-pensioners of similar means.

The bill removes current anomalies in the treatment of self-funded retirees by creating a new income test that treats all people in the same way and all income the same, irrespective of whether it is a pension or private income.

It is important to note three important safeguards that will ensure that residents are protected and that the changes do not adversely affect existing residents.

First, a resident's accommodation charge will continue to be determined based on as-

sessable assets at the time of entry to care and remain fixed.

In addition, a resident who has paid an accommodation charge and transfers within 28 days to another facility where they are liable to pay a charge will have that charge capped at the original level.

Second, the government will continue to place a cap on accommodation charges.

Third, residents with unrealisable assets will continue to be able to apply for hardship assistance if they cannot afford to pay their charges.

In addition to the changes relating to fees and charges, the bill also makes technical amendments to improve consistency and clarity, address unintended consequences of the operation of the legislation and streamline the administration of the legislation.

Subject to the passage of the bill through parliament, it is proposed that the new arrangements will take effect from 20 March 2008.

Medicare Australia, Centrelink and the Department of Veterans' Affairs have developed changes to their systems to support the implementation of these measures.

In addition to the amendments required to the act, further detail will be outlined in amendments to the Aged Care Principles as well as in other delegated legislation.

In order to ensure the smooth implementation of these changes, my department will continue to work closely with aged-care providers along with care recipients and their families.

Among other things, the department will be issuing aged-care recipients and their families and approved providers with detailed information about the changes and their impacts.

The Aged Care Information Hotline will also continue to be available for people to

contact the department directly with any queries or concerns.

I will also be working with and listening closely to the views of residents of nursing homes and approved providers.

I look forward to the coming months and years as we work together to provide fair, well-financed, sustainable and, most importantly, quality aged care for older Australians.

This bill is an important step towards achieving this goal.

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

**APPROPRIATION (DROUGHT AND EQUINE INFLUENZA ASSISTANCE)
BILL (No. 1) 2007-2008**

Cognate bill:

**APPROPRIATION (DROUGHT AND EQUINE INFLUENZA ASSISTANCE)
BILL (No. 2) 2007-2008**

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (1.36 pm)—The Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 1) 2007-2008 and the Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 2) 2007-2008 are being brought to the House, and it is the wish of the government—and that wish is supported by the opposition—that they should pass smoothly and quickly. As most of the measures were either announced by the previous government or an extension of the previous government, naturally we support them.

We have, as a nation, faced a very serious drought. It is not over. In my own electorate at the present time, there are people battling floodwaters and there are a lot of other parts of Queensland as well where the floods are quite severe. Ironically, some of the areas

that are now flooded are still declared for exceptional drought. That is a normal part of the process, because the exceptional circumstances arrangements have always intended that there should be a recovery period. But the flooding may actually make the recovery even harder because, in some cases, crops or livestock that had been built up following the drought have now been lost. So this is really for those people a double tragedy. In other places, the season has turned dramatically for the good and we warmly welcome those improvements. But there will need to be an ongoing commitment to those who have been affected by drought. Vision of the floods should not wipe from our memories the fact that there are still people who have not had any opportunity to recover for as many as six or seven years of consecutive drought. So there will need to be ongoing support for these people.

The measures proposed today would fund announcements that were made towards the end of last year as various areas moved into a stage where they needed to be declared or to have their declarations extended, so the funding needs to be provided. In addition to that, we need to look constructively at how we should address those issues in the future. I would like to make a couple of comments about some of the government's proposals in that regard—some of which, I have to say, cause me some concern.

The government have announced a review of exceptional circumstances assistance. I do not criticise them for that because, at the end of a long program, it is appropriate that we look at whether we should do things differently in the future. There have been a number of such reviews in the past. The National Rural Advisory Council was set up to do that sort of thing, and it is quite a good vehicle to undertake those sorts of reviews. It has been very close to the EC system because of its

role in the declarations and, therefore, it can play a constructive role.

Farmers, though, are naturally concerned about what threats might be associated with this review. I appeal to the government to undertake the review with goodwill and not to settle old scores—not to remember the traditional warfare between those who live in the country and those who live in the city but to look at this constructively. I appeal to the government to talk also to the farmers—talk not just to the university academics whose salaries are paid in droughts or in floods but to the people who are actually affected. Those who pontificate from professorial chairs do not have, very often, a real understanding of the practical implications of the sorts of things they advocate. And to suggest that people should prepare, and that, if they did, the problems would therefore go away, is superficially attractive but does not understand many of the issues which are of concern.

The problem that the Labor government will face in dealing with these issues is that Labor has form on drought assistance. The federal government was forced to step in and provide exceptional circumstances assistance in enormous quantities during this serious drought because, essentially, the states had all walked away from their responsibilities. In years gone by, the states provided all or nearly all of the drought assistance. As time moved on, the Commonwealth started to provide a bit of assistance but, in this particular drought—the worst in our history—the states have all largely walked away from their responsibilities. And, unless the figures have changed in the last few weeks, the Commonwealth is now meeting well over 95 per cent of the total cost of drought assistance. It used to be the other way round, and then there was a concept that perhaps it should be fifty-fifty, but the Commonwealth has been increasingly obliged to take this up

because the Labor states have simply walked away from their responsibilities. Now we have a Labor government at the federal level and you can understand, minister at the table, Minister Burke, that farmers are anxious to ensure that this federal Labor government does not behave the way its state colleagues have in the past, because from time to time there will be a need for drought assistance in the future. None of us want it to be ongoing and permanent; clearly that is not a way that it will work.

Some are saying—and the government says this quite a bit—that, because of climate change, droughts may be more severe in the future. I guess a judgement about that is some generations away. There are a number of theories. If the rainfall events become more severe though less frequent there are ways of harvesting those rainfall benefits which would help us ensure we make our way through the drought. We should not ignore those possibilities, particularly—and I guess it has never been more evident than it is today—with much of Northern Australia covered by floodwaters, and droughts in other places. Why aren't we harnessing some of those northern waters so that they can be effectively used to foster new agricultural industries in the north or, alternatively, to make sure that we are able to support the agriculture in those areas?

If I may add an aside on these issues: I note that airlines and quite a number of organisations now are talking about encouraging people to leave no carbon footprint. So you pay a couple of extra dollars on your fare and the airline promises to plant some trees. If they plant those trees in all the best agricultural areas of Australia, we may have a nice cool planet but we will have no food to eat. I think that we need to look very carefully at the effectiveness of some of those programs. They need to be more than some kind of feelgood stunt. We need to make sure

that we are not delivering perverse impacts as a result of those sorts of programs. And it may be that the north is a place where some of these plantations could effectively be provided. There is lots of productive land in northern Australia which is currently overrun by woody weeds. Why not get rid of the woody weeds and use that land productively and harness some of the water that is in that area for useful purposes?

So you should not assume that agriculture is doomed or we should live without food just because it is going to be dry from time to time in the future, particularly if we have aggressive climatic events. We need to harness those for the future. I am not one of those doom and gloom pessimists who believes we cannot find the way through this. I think it can be managed. In the 1960s we were told that the world was going to run out of food. That was the popular academic view at the time. But then the green revolution came along and that has reduced poverty and starvation around the world to a degree nobody could have envisaged. Now we have genetic modification, which presents an enormous opportunity to make a quantum leap forward again. I think, therefore, with careful management, we can look through these sorts of issues.

Whilst I welcome the fact that the government have announced today that they will provide funding for EC declarations, I was concerned by the range of budget cuts announced last week by the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. About three-quarters of those cuts are in rural and regional areas. Three-quarters of those cuts are to significant programs, including significant cuts to drought assistance and support for re-establishment. Regional Australia will be affected and I am concerned about the impact of those cuts—around \$115 million altogether. I would welcome an assurance from the minister that the cuts will not affect pay-

ments to farmers. I am pleased Minister Burke is at the table. I invite him to give an assurance to farmers that the cuts that have been announced will not mean farmers will not get the payments to which they are entitled. That assurance needs to be given.

Even accepting that this is money provided for particular declarations where there was a lower than expected uptake—and I know that that happens—there are real cuts to drought assistance measures included in the announcements last week. For instance, the \$10 million that was to be provided for research and development has been axed. That breaks an election promise. The Labor Party said that there would be extra money in fact for research and development and that there would be no cuts to R&D. Yet, a month or two after the election, a clear, unequivocal election promise has been broken. The finance minister suggested that the \$10 million could go because the government was going to provide \$15 million for research under climate change. That money itself was stolen from programs under the AAA package. Labor are axing a range of core programs that support farmers so that they can fund research and other measures in relation to climate change. For instance, the government are axing the FarmBis program. That is quite an extraordinary measure for a government that claim they are about addressing the skills shortage. If they are about addressing the skills shortage, why are they axing the program to upskill farmers?

I know the New South Wales Labor government have not been supporting FarmBis for some time. The logic and reason for that I cannot understand. This program has worked well and there is a lot of very good evidence that it has actually delivered improved management and improved systems in the agricultural sector. But the government have decided to axe it. I think that is inconsistent with their professed advocacy of skills de-

velopment. Whilst I am talking about that, I note that they have also, quite incredibly, axed the \$47 million program for incentives for apprenticeships in agriculture and in horticulture. Again, this is absolutely contrary to their rhetoric about wanting a skilled workforce. These key programs to train the rural sector are to be axed and there is nothing to replace them.

They are also getting rid of the program to help industries reinvigorate themselves and develop new systems and approaches. Also going are the food industry grants. These have been enormously successful in developing new food products, value adding and developing nutraceuticals and the like—new projects to help provide value adding to the Australian rural sector. But that program is to be axed. This cut in funding for research and development is real and it is a broken election promise.

The government has also decided to axe \$6.4 million of funding for communication programs that tell farmers about the drought assistance to which they are entitled. In theory, the government may well keep the measures in place. But in practice it is not going to tell anyone about them so the farmers do not know how to apply for them. There are some terrific programs, such as the drought buses that have been touring regions to let people know about what is actually happening, and it would be a tragedy if those sorts of programs were axed. They have provided real communication to people in very distressed circumstances and to people who do not have access to the communications systems that might be available in the cities and other places. You do need to go the extra mile to make sure that those who are entitled to the benefits actually know about them. I am very disappointed to find that those cuts are occurring.

I also make the observation while the minister is at the table that the only department to suffer cuts in its administered appropriation as a result of these measures will be the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. His department has been singled out for cuts in its administered funds that no other department has been asked to bear.

Mr Burke interjecting—

Mr TRUSS—You have had a cut in your administered funds. Other departments have had cuts in programs but none of them have had their administered funds cut back. Presumably you will still have to meet your share of the increased efficiency dividends. That will be a real challenge for the department. Again, I hope that it is not a demonstration of an unhealthy attitude in Treasury and Finance towards the activities of your department, Minister. Having been a minister in that portfolio in the past, I guess I have had some personal experience. I suspect that you may go through some of the same sorts of issues.

Drought is still an issue. I hope it disappears for the whole of the nation quickly. We do need to have a constructive look at future drought policy. That needs to be undertaken in good faith and with an expression of support by the government. The people of Australia will stand behind their fellow Australians in times of difficulty. We will try and find ways through and ways to manage things better in the future. But we have to actually believe in agriculture and believe it is important for Australia to produce food for our own population and to sell to others around the world, and that agriculture remains a priority industry. It must not become a backwater where no money is spent on training, where the apprenticeship and horticulture programs do not dare move and where research and development, which is

clearly so important for the future, is torn away.

I want to say a little more about the range of cuts that the finance minister has made to industries, but I will leave that for a later time. I want to talk a little also—

Mr Burke—Which question do I get?

Mr TRUSS—We have some better ones than that. I also want to talk a little bit about the second part of this bill—that is, the equine influenza assistance. In general, my comments in relation to the program to eliminate equine influenza will be complimentary because I think we have done quite well as governments and as a community to try and address these issues. It now seems very likely, assuming there are no further outbreaks, that the elimination—which many people thought would not be possible at all—will happen well ahead of the best possible estimates. That is commendable. We are not quite through it yet; there is still potential for further outbreaks, but there has been good progress. That is important because a lot of people have been hurt very much by this outbreak. It is an example of how disease can cause problems in a community when it occurs. As to why it occurred, that is the subject of an inquiry. I think we all need to look very closely at what the circumstances were, what the facts are and then whether there are things that can be done to avoid a recurrence in the future.

There was early attention on the horseracing industry. They adopted a high profile, they were in the media, so most of the resources were initially put into protecting the horseracing industry. But there were many others who were adversely affected, including the recreational riders, the produce stores and the farriers. Many shows and pony clubs simply could not proceed with events that they wanted to hold. That has had real financial impact. In my own area, even though

there were no cases of equine influenza, the area was simply closed down and a major training facility and events stadium has been unable to operate for many months. That has had a huge impact on produce stores and others.

A government assistance program was put in place, and that has been helpful, although it has been difficult for people to qualify for it. The state authorities that administer it have adopted a pretty heavy hand in relation to some of these issues and many people that are clearly deserving have simply been unable to qualify. So, whilst I welcome the extension of the assistance on a timed basis, I think we also need to look at some of the cases that have been excluded from the assistance as to whether there can be some further support.

I will also comment briefly on the way in which this outbreak was addressed. There was a higher level of cooperation between the states, the industry and the federal government than has normally occurred. It is true that the New South Wales state government were very slow to come on board, but eventually they did. The legislation before the House makes it clear that it is the industry itself that is going to have to bear much of this cost. From memory, the minister said 85 per cent of the cost is going to come from the industry by way of some future levy program.

This response contrasts quite dramatically with the way in which the states reacted to outbreaks such as citrus canker. The states were incredibly slow to come on board. Many have resisted it all the way through and refused to provide any kind of assistance whatsoever. Even after it was agreed that there should be some assistance provided, Queensland never came to the party with its share of the compensation package. That is

an extremely disappointing attitude from the Queensland state Labor government.

Queensland also has form in relation to fire ants. The responsible minister at the time, Henry Palaszczuk, simply did not tell the truth to the other states or the federal government about the cost of the fire ant eradication program and the capacity for it to succeed. I wonder whether, if the ministers and the officials at the time had known that program was going to cost in excess of \$1 billion, it would have even begun, because the program is not there yet, and we still do not know whether it is going to succeed. There was an incredible lack of cooperation between the state authorities, the industry and the community. To get all the states on board in one of these eradication programs is almost impossible. In the case of black sigatoka, none of the states would come on board and the industry ended up doing it themselves. The scientists said it could not be done. The advice given to all of the people making the decisions was that this was a forlorn and wasted exercise, and in reality the industry did it themselves. It is an incredible compliment to the banana industry that they had faith where the experts did not and they proved the experts wrong.

I think it is essential, if these programs are to be effective, for there to be a higher level of cooperation, for the industry to be engaged and for there to be an acceptance that the community wants these sorts of things to happen. Our pest- and disease-free status is precious and it is something that we need to maintain and preserve even though the costs are high. We may eliminate equine influenza, but that does not mean it will not come back again sometime. Like all viruses it can travel, and we could have another problem. This case, like those of black sigatoka and the papaya fruit fly, is an extraordinary example of Australia's quarantine measures working well and, when there has been a breakdown,

the secondary levels achieving the objective. What was clearly absent in many instances in the past was the willingness of the state authorities, who have the primary responsibility—they are the only governments that have a power of entry in relation to quarantine issues, so they have a key role to play—to take up the cudgels. They have been unwilling to bear their load. I hope that the success of the equine influenza eradication program will encourage them to do better in the future.

The opposition supports the legislation. As I mentioned earlier, these are essentially funding measures. For that reason they are clearly extra meritorious, but they will do something to help ease the burden of drought in some affected areas and to ensure that there is an effective funding regime in place to continue our assault on equine influenza with the objective of achieving a satisfactory outcome.

Drought assistance is particularly important in those areas that are enduring the effects of drought. As I said when fewer members were in the House, there are a significant number of areas where drought is still a problem, even though through parts of my electorate and other parts of Queensland, and especially through some parts of New South Wales, flooding is currently an issue. We need to not forget that there are some people who have been without significant rainfall for four, five, six or seven years, and for them the pain and hardship are real. We as Australians need to be with them in their time of difficulty and assure them of our continuing support. That is the objective of this legislation and similar legislation that has provided drought assistance previously. I commend these bills to the House.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 97. The debate may be re-

sumed at a later hour and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy

Dr NELSON (2.00 pm)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Given that the Prime Minister led the Australian people to believe that under a Labor government a lid would be put on the price of groceries and petrol, what is the Prime Minister's plan to lower grocery and petrol prices?

Mr RUDD—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The undertakings which we made as the alternative government are as follows: to establish for the first time an independent inquiry into grocery prices—the terms of reference of that inquiry have been set—and, in the case of petrol, to establish a petrol price commissioner. I note for the record that in the period of the previous government, which had more than 11 years to act on both these matters, they did nothing and nothing. I would strongly suggest that the Leader of the Opposition reflects on the performance of his government in relation to these matters before reflecting on what might be achieved through both of the measures which we promised in opposition and have delivered on.

Indigenous Affairs

Ms JACKSON (2.01 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister inform the House how the government is seeking to bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for her question. Here in this parliament today we have had an opportunity to recognise the stolen generations and to deliver an apology on behalf of the parliament. As I indicated—and I believe the Leader of the

Opposition did as well—this, however, is but a first step. The second step is much harder, much more difficult, and it goes to the question of what we now do in closing the gap, bridging the gap, between Indigenous Australia and non-Indigenous Australia. We need to make real progress in each of these areas, whether it is education, whether it is health outcomes or whether it is overall life expectancy. The commitment we have in each of these areas in closing the gap is clear-cut.

As I argued earlier today, unless we have clear-cut targets in each of these areas, we will not meet them. There will be no central organising principle for our policies. So, when it comes to life expectancy for Aboriginal people, we should set ourselves a target of, within a generation, reducing that atrocious gap of 17 years which now exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. On top of that, we should also have as our objective halving the current attainments when it comes to literacy and numeracy against the current level of nonattainment on the part of young Aboriginal children out there in the schools and communities and, in some cases, not attending schools as well. The appalling statistic when it comes to infant mortality for Indigenous children under the age of five is, again, to halve that within a 10-year period.

These are policy objectives. The hard bit now is implementing programs on the ground which will give effect to them. What I suggested earlier today was to let us take just one of those areas, which is how we deal with young children. The objective that we have set for ourselves by way of policy is to make sure that every Indigenous child at four years of age in the next five years is properly accommodated in early childhood education. We must make that the first step forward in ensuring that little ones are put on the path to better educational attainment and that, subsequent to that, with each of those young

children, little children out there in remote communities, we then provide each step along the way the next year of educational opportunity for them, and then further to provide through that a platform for the delivery of effective primary healthcare programs for those young children. If we are serious about the policy objectives that we have set, we must begin with little children, and that is the resolve of the government which I have the privilege of leading in this place.

The final point that I would mention in response to the honourable member's question is this: as I indicated in my remarks earlier today, I look forward to the possibility of establishing a joint policy commission with the opposition on this. This is something new in the public administration of Australia. We have never done this before. The object here is to take this one area of the public policy debate of Australia and just see what we can do to transcend the partisan divide. What I would like to do before the end of this week is to sit down with the Leader of the Opposition to work out how such a commission might work involving him and me as its joint chairs, with this core term of reference: to develop a housing strategy which will deal with the housing needs of Indigenous communities in remote areas across Australia. If we prevail on that, let us add to it a further item, a further term of reference—that is, to work on the overall project of effecting constitutional recognition of Aboriginal people. If we can get that right between us in this parliament, we would have made a strong step forward not only when it comes to the interests and wellbeing of Indigenous people in Australia but also in doing something new in how we go about the public administration of the Commonwealth in areas which should transcend the partisan divide.

Economy

Dr NELSON (2.05 pm)—Yes, we are happy to help. My question is again to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to page 56 of the Reserve Bank's recent statement on monetary policy which warns of 'the risk of generating an upward drift in inflation expectations which could feed into wage and price setting behaviour'. Given the Reserve Bank's view that expectations can in themselves drive inflation, why are he and his Treasurer going around and talking up inflation?

Mr RUDD—In response to the honourable member's question, I would have thought all of us in this place would know that public economic enemy No. 1 across Australia right now is inflation. I would have thought that the common resolve of the parliament, and all people responsibly contributing to public policy in this parliament, would be to do what we all can in the fight against inflation. Let us deal with some facts first. As of the December quarter last year, the underlying inflation rate delivered by the then data tells us that inflation as of when this government took office was running at its highest annualised rate in 16 years. That is a fact from the ABS, not a piece of politics from the Australian Labor Party or this government. That is a fact from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, however uncomfortable members opposite may find it. That is the first point.

The second is that, if you reflect on the further facts contained in the Reserve Bank of Australia monetary policy bulletin released only a few days ago and the inflation projections contained in that document going out not just to 2008 but to the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010, they are projecting an inflation number in excess of the three per cent band. This is the inflation reality we inherited from the previous government. It is

a fact contained in the data produced by the ABS. It is a fact reflected in the forward projections independently by the Reserve Bank of Australia.

The government of Australia has been in office for 72 days. If you look at the Reserve Bank warnings to the government which preceded us, going back for more than two to three years, there were 20 warnings on capacity constraints in the economy and each of those warning was ignored by the government which preceded us. The government which I lead has embarked upon a course of action to deal with, first and foremost, skills constraints in the economy. Second, we will deal with infrastructure bottlenecks—critical, ignored for a long period of time as far as the national government is concerned. And third, and also critical, when it comes to proper, prudent conservative management of the public finances of the Commonwealth, we have set ourselves early a budget surplus target of 1.5 per cent of GDP at least to be delivered in the upcoming budget. This is responsible in terms of the proper management of public finance, responsible when it comes to public savings, responsible in terms of our five-point plan against inflation dealing with the encouragement of private savings and responsible also on the supply side of the economy—skills, infrastructure and workforce participation—where, regrettably after 11½ long years of the coalition in office, there is so little to show for it.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister referred to 20 warnings by the RBA to the previous government about inflation. I ask him to table those warnings.

The SPEAKER—I do not think the Prime Minister was referring directly to those, and that is the only time that he would have to table them. He made mention of them.

Mr Schultz interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Hume has made more than a 90-second statement already, even though it is only question time, and he should be very careful making remarks about the Speaker like he did. I will ignore it and not ask him to withdraw, but he is well and truly warned.

East Timor

Mr BEVIS (2.09 pm)—Mr Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your elevation to the high office of Speaker, which I am sure you will undertake with great dignity.

The SPEAKER—Whilst I have taken the member for Hume to task, the member for Brisbane does not actually earn brownie points for that.

Mr BEVIS—I should say it was my intention, as this is the first occasion on which I have risen, to pass on that compliment to you—

The SPEAKER—Thank you.

Mr BEVIS—notwithstanding the other comments. My question without notice is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister provide the House with an update on the situation in East Timor and the government's response?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question. The situation in East Timor today, as we are advised, is stable but tense. Our security forces and diplomatic personnel are keeping the government informed of developments but, as we know from previous experience, while things may be calm now there is no way of predicting firmly how they may unfold in the days ahead.

As we know, on 11 February there were assassination attempts on both the President and the Prime Minister of East Timor. This government has utterly condemned those

actions and, in doing so, has been supported appropriately by the opposition. On 11 February I spoke on two occasions with the East Timorese Prime Minister, Xanana Gusmao, and he made two requests of the government in relation to both military assets and police resources. As a consequence of that, the National Security Committee of Cabinet agreed to both those requests.

On 12 February the troops which were to form part of the additional deployment to East Timor were dispatched, and they arrived in Dili yesterday at company strength. Today the AFP deployment will be increased by something in the order of 50 additional AFP personnel. Taking these two additional deployments together, it will mean the total Australian troop strength in East Timor will stand at something like 1,000 and the AFP component something like 100. On top of that, because of the additional logistical requirements of our force in being on the ground in East Timor, the decision has also been taken, in consultation with the government of East Timor, to have HMAS *Perth* lie offshore to provide any assistance as may be required.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs travelled to Darwin yesterday and, as I understand it, met with his East Timorese counterpart. We are still deeply concerned in this place about the health, condition and struggle which the President of East Timor, Jose Ramos Horta, is currently engaged in following the assassination attempt on him on 11 February. All medical resources which can be deployed to assist him since that event occurred have been deployed. Our thoughts and our prayers go with him in his fight for recovery. It is a tough fight, and he is a friend of so many people in this parliament on both sides that we wish him and his family well.

I conclude in response to the honourable member's question by saying that those in

East Timor should be aware of one central fact: the government of Australia remains resolutely committed to use all powers within its possession to reinforce that democratically elected government and will not restrain itself in the future in providing further assistance to the government of East Timor should those requests be forthcoming and reasonable.

Economy

Mr TURNBULL (2.13 pm)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. I refer to the Reserve Bank's regular and frequent observation that the deregulation of Australia's labour market has moderated inflationary pressures compared to previous periods of high economic growth. Given the Prime Minister's so-called five-point plan to fight inflation fails even to mention labour market reform, let alone its implications for inflation, will the Treasurer guarantee that the government's plans to reregulate the labour market will not put upward pressure on inflation and on interest rates?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Wentworth for his question. I think the first thing to be said is that Australian working families deserve a fair and balanced industrial relations system, and they will get one from the Rudd government. They will get a fair and balanced industrial relations system. Those on the other side are pretty famous for making all sorts of ridiculous statements about industrial relations systems, interest rates and wages. All through last year the member for North Sydney, for example, was making claims that Work Choices would produce higher wages. Now those in the opposition are trying to claim that somehow the abolition of Work Choices will produce higher wages. This is simply voodoo economics. They do not know whether they are Arthur or whether they are Martha when it comes to industrial relations. Half of the opposition

frontbench want to support our abolition of Work Choices and half of them want to oppose it.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is about relevance.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for North Sydney has the call.

Mr Hockey—The Treasurer was asked about the Reserve Bank's warnings, and we know that the Reserve Bank has given him private warnings as well. We would ask him to come back to the question.

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will answer the question in a relevant manner about the warnings of the Reserve Bank about deregulating the labour market.

Mr SWAN—I do take statements from the Reserve Bank very seriously. I take them very seriously when they talk about inflationary pressures in the Australian economy. I take them very seriously. But the facts are these: following the introduction of Work Choices the Australian people had six interest rate rises. There have been seven interest rate rises driven by inflation in the Australian economy in the last three years—seven interest rate rises driven by elevated inflation. Why is the Reserve Bank important here? Because its job is to target inflation. That is what its job is: to target inflation.

Dr Nelson—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order about relevance. It is a very simple question: will you guarantee that your changes to workplace relations will not have an inflationary impact on the Australian economy?

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will answer the question.

Mr SWAN—I am here to talk about our industrial relations package, our repeal of Work Choices. Our industrial relations re-

forms will improve the functioning of the labour market.

Mr Hockey—Answer the question!

The SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member for North Sydney is not assisting.

Mr SWAN—We will invest in skills. We will attend to labour productivity. That is what we will be doing. Our industrial relations system—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I simply say to the members on my left: no matter how much they feel provoked, there is no need for them to not sit in silence and listen to the response by the Treasurer.

Mr SWAN—We do take the issue of inflation very seriously. It erodes living conditions. It attacks wages. It really is a threat to the sustained growth of the Australian economy. Our industrial relations system will guard against wage inflation because it will be underpinned by workplace-level enterprise bargaining. That is what it will be underpinned by, meaning changes in wages must be linked to productivity. That is what our system will do. And it will provide flexibility at the individual level. This government will put in place a fair and balanced industrial relations system. Along with our investment in skills, we will do everything we can to lift productivity in this economy. Nothing is more important in the fight against inflation than improving our productivity performance, and all of our package is aimed at doing that.

Mr Turnbull—I ask the Treasurer to table the paper from which he was reading.

The SPEAKER—Was the Treasurer making reference to documents? Are they confidential documents? Were the documents that the Treasurer was referring to confidential? Come to the dispatch box and explain. Were they confidential?

Mr SWAN—Yes, they are.

Skills Shortage

Mr GEORGANAS (2.19 pm)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister. How seriously does the government take the skills crisis and the inflation challenge, and what is the government doing to manage the economy and reduce inflation?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Hindmarsh for his question. I note the interest of members in the House in the question of fighting inflation. As members in the House would be aware, one of the key problems in fighting inflation is the skills crisis. We of course know that wage pressures are most acute in those segments of the economy where skills shortages are most acute. Consequently, if we are to fight inflation, we need to fight inflation by ensuring that we are investing in skills development, particularly in those sectors which are facing acute shortages.

Given the interest of the current opposition in the question of inflation, they may try to explain to the Australian community at some point why it is that we are facing such critical skills shortages in the economy after 11 years of their government. The current Leader of the Opposition and the current Deputy Leader of the Opposition, as the last two education ministers of this country, may choose to explain their personal complicity in creating these skills shortages which are putting upwards pressure on inflation. It would be a very interesting explanation to hear, given their interest in inflationary pressures. Of course, we know that these skills shortages were unaddressed by the former government, unaddressed by the current Leader of the Opposition and unaddressed by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. They have come to the Rudd Labor government to be addressed—and be addressed they will.

Today it was my pleasure to introduce into the House a bill to create our new leadership body, Skills Australia. Skills Australia will be fighting the inflation challenge by ensuring that we have additional training places available to get people skilled up in the areas of the economy where we need them most. Skills Australia will guide the allocation of the Rudd Labor government's 450,000 additional training places over the next four years. So serious is the Rudd Labor government about fighting the inflation challenge and ensuring that we are addressing the skills crisis left to us as a legacy by the former Howard government, the current Leader of the Opposition and the current Deputy Leader of the Opposition that 20,000 of these places will be made available in April.

This is part of the Rudd Labor government's five-point plan to address inflation. Of course, the other components—setting a fiscal target for the surplus of 1.5 per cent of GDP, increasing incentives for private savings, taking an active role to address infrastructure bottlenecks and looking at ways to lift workforce participation—are the things that the Rudd Labor government needs to do to fight inflation. There is no greater challenge than the skills challenge. It has been left to us as a legacy and, yes, we are going to fix it, and we started today.

Rail Infrastructure

Mr TRUSS (2.23 pm)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. I refer to the government's proposal—referred to again a few minutes ago by the Prime Minister—to reduce inflation by overcoming infrastructure bottlenecks. Can the Treasurer explain why \$65 million in funding to maintain and upgrade working rail lines, particularly in New South Wales and Victoria, to reduce bottlenecks has been delayed for two years under the recently announced Rudd government's spending cuts?

Mr Swan—Mr Speaker, this is a question better referred to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

Mr ALBANESE—I am pleased to receive a question on this issue. The government did not cancel the \$65 million in works. As stated before the election, we will spend \$15 million for the Australian Rail Track Corporation to do a detailed study. Work done so far has identified a preferred far-western subcorridor. Our study will finalise the alignment within the corridor, identify planning and environmental issues and look at cost and demand for the line.

The previous government had brought forward money to do work on the existing track at the same time as the study was being done. That is putting the cart before the horse. You need to know where the line is going before you fund the building of the line. The government is not alone in thinking that this is appropriate. Everalld Compton, Director of the Australian Inland Rail Expressway, said on ABC Radio New England just this week:

I am not shedding a single tear over the deferment of this \$65 million because we never ever asked for it in the first place and I approve of what the government is doing to defer expenditure that is not needed while we tackle the inflation situation in Australia.

So I say to the Leader of the National Party, who is profligate with taxpayers' funds—of course, we know about the National Party and the way that they abused taxpayer funds through programs such as the 'regional rorts program'—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! I say to the minister that giving an answer to advance matters that truly are, by way and nature, of debate does not assist the way in which we carry out our business at question time.

Mr ALBANESE—In his support for the government's position, Everald Compton went on to say, 'The inland railway is alive and well.' The fact is that the government has instituted a study for an inland railway, something that in the first 12 years of the Howard government they did not get around to doing. They did not do anything to build the railway; they did not do anything to plan the railway. Our position recognises commonsense: that you need to have the study, get the planning right, get the details right and then assess the project properly and be prudent with taxpayers' funds—not make, in the lead-up to an election when you know you are about to go out the backdoor, irresponsible promises to fund projects before you have funded the study to show where the projects will be built.

Economy

Mr DANBY (2.27 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Can the Treasurer update the House on the state of the Australian economy and any challenges to our future national prosperity?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for his question. The government is fundamentally optimistic about the future of the Australian economy. We do recognise that unemployment is low. We do recognise that we are in our 17th year of continuous economic growth. As I move around Australia talking to people in the board rooms, talking to people in the lunch rooms, talking to CEOs, talking to regulators or talking to working families, two things are very clear to me: No. 1 is that there is an increasingly uncertain global outlook—and we are certainly not immune from the fallout of that uncertain global outlook; and No. 2 is that we face an extended level of inflation. We face, for a period to come, high inflation. That is what the Reserve Bank's statement on monetary policy earlier in the week was all about.

The fact is that inflation will be elevated above the Reserve Bank's target band for at least another two years. We had the December quarter figures from the bureau back in January, figures which put the level of underlying inflation at a 16-year high. So there is no doubt that, in addition to the problems internationally, which will produce a slow down internationally and will have a flow-on effect to this country, we have an elevated level of domestic inflation, which is at a 16-year high, and the Reserve Bank is now saying that it will be above the target band for at least another two years.

That is a very sobering assessment of the Australian economy because it points to a number of things. It points to the fact that, as a nation, we have to do something to bring inflation down if we want to avoid further interest rate rises. There were 10 interest rate rises on the trot under the previous government—11 in total. This country has faced seven interest rate rises in the last three years. Those interest rate rises have been derived principally from an elevated level of inflation, which has been caused by a number of factors. The first factor is the one that the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government talked about before—capacity constraints in this economy, particularly infrastructure capacity constraints and infrastructure bottlenecks. It is true that over a three-year period the previous government received 20 warnings about the impact of capacity constraints relating to infrastructure bottlenecks. The elevated level of inflation was caused not just by what is going on in infrastructure but also by the inattention of the former government and its complacent approach to skills formation—the complacent approach of the opposition to skills formation over a prolonged period of time. Lastly, it was caused by reckless spending by the previous government over a period of

time. All of that has produced an elevated level of inflation which must be dealt with. This is why the Rudd government began work on day 1—on 25 November last year—to tackle this inflation problem. We began work on day 1.

Members opposite behave as if somehow inflation magically just appeared on Monday morning, at 9 o'clock, on 26 November last year. Well, it didn't! Inflation has been rising for a long period of time because of the inattention and complacency of the previous government to capacity constraints in the economy—to skills, to infrastructure—and also because they engaged in reckless spending. This document from the Reserve Bank shows conclusively that the complacency of the previous government has led to the inflation threat that this government now must deal with. And deal with it we will. This is why the Prime Minister announced his five-point plan in Perth a couple of weeks ago. It is very important that we as a nation come together and deal with this inflationary threat. We on this side of the House have accepted responsibility for fixing it. I just wish those on the other side of the House would accept some responsibility for creating it.

Motor Vehicle Industry

Ms JULIE BISHOP (2.33 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer confirm that, in a start to the Labor 'jobs for the boys' season, the government has decided to appoint former Victorian Labor Premier Steve Bracks to chair a major review of Australia's car industry? Can the Treasurer explain why he has ignored Treasury advice to ask the independent Productivity Commission to conduct this review? Can the Treasurer confirm that Mr Bracks will be paid a salary of \$10,000 a week?

Mr SWAN—I certainly cannot confirm any of those things at all.

Workplace Relations

Ms BIRD (2.34 pm)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister. How is the government providing certainty to employees and employers in implementing workplace relations policies? Are there any threats to this provision of certainty?

The SPEAKER—Order! Without wishing to embarrass the member for Cunningham, I do not think that the device that has been used traditionally, which formed the latter part of that question, is very helpful in the ongoing conduct of question time. I will allow it on this occasion, but those who might have guided the member for Cunningham might perhaps think twice about it.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for your guidance on those sorts of matters. It is my great pleasure to say today that I introduced into this parliament legislation to begin transitioning Australian workplaces to a fair and balanced industrial relations system. For the edification of the shadow Treasurer, it will be a decentralised system built on enterprise-level cooperation and on rewarding productivity in workplaces. It will be impossible under Labor's system for a wage outcome in one enterprise to flow through automatically to wage outcomes in other enterprises. The system will give Australians a safety net on which they can rely and, when Labor's system is in full operation, there will be no individual statutory employment agreements, no Australian workplace agreements, that can override the safety net and strip away aspects of the safety net.

I say to the shadow Treasurer, who says he is concerned about the inflation challenge: if he looks at the statistics to see who in our workforce has had the greatest uptake of AWAs, the most AWAs imposed on them, it is workers in the retail sector and in the hospitality sector. If the shadow Treasurer wants

to advance to the Australian people that the way to fight inflation is to take away a safety net for low-wage, predominantly young workers in those industries—with some of the horror stories that we have heard about 17-year-olds, 18-year-olds and 19-year-olds having basic conditions like redundancy pay ripped off them, and they can still be ripped off people today—he can put that case. But we will be saying that the inflation challenge in the labour market is a product of the skills shortage.

When I introduced the legislation today in the House, I did three things that the Howard government did not do in the last parliament. First, I brought a piece of workplace relations legislation to the parliament that has the mandate of the Australian people—

Applause from the gallery—

The SPEAKER—Order! The gallery will remain silent.

Ms GILLARD—The Howard government did not take Work Choices to the Australian people, because they knew it would be rejected. They snuck it in after the last election; they did not bring a piece of legislation to this parliament with the mandate of the Australian people.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. Is it now going to be your policy that the parliamentary chamber is going to be something like a football field and we are going to have cheer squads? We could bring some in, and maybe we should have some with flags. This roaring, chanting and clapping is not part of the processes of this place.

The SPEAKER—To the extent that the member for O'Connor is correct in his final statement, there have been certain events today where there has been interaction from the gallery. In the context of the matters before us, I think that was appropriate. But I remind everybody that, in the upholding of the dignity of this chamber, outbursts from

the gallery should be minimised, and if they continue they will lead to people being invited to leave the gallery.

Ms GILLARD—I am sure we will all live in fear of the dimension of the member for O'Connor's cheer squad when it turns up.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, on the point of order, I will pick some better looking ones than they have!

The SPEAKER—The honourable member for O'Connor has had his one bit of leniency from me. If he abuses points of order in that way, no matter how much they might get some people's mirth up, I will deal with him.

Ms GILLARD—Back to workplace relations. The second thing that happened today when I introduced that piece of workplace relations legislation was that I brought a bill to this parliament that was a product of genuine consultation. That is not something that the Howard government did in the last parliament. It did not believe in consulting with those who have expertise on industrial relations. Specifically, the bill went to the National Workplace Relations Consultative Council and its subcommittee, the committee on industrial legislation. With those experts from employer and employee organisations sitting around a table, the bill was improved. That is the benefit of consultation. The consultation continued with state workplace relations ministers. Of course, the former Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations never sat around a table with his ministerial colleagues—not once. This bill was the subject of discussion at the Workplace Relations Ministerial Council, and the council fulsomely endorsed the Rudd Labor government's policy directions and our intention to go forward with fairness.

The third thing we did today was something else the Howard government would never have believed in doing. The Rudd Labor government led by example positively in

the area of workplace relations when we announced that, from today, the government will not make new Australian workplace agreements in the Australian Public Service. We are leading by example to achieve a workplace relations system in which such agreements will be gone.

There appears to be some delusion going on in sections of the opposition benches. There appear to be people who have forgotten the year 2007. I know that for some of them it is a set of painful memories—

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. Following your earlier advice to the Deputy Prime Minister, we have extended quite a deal of leniency. But as I recall, the Deputy Prime Minister was not asked for alternative views, and I ask you to bring her back to the question.

The SPEAKER—I technically did not rule it out of order. I advised that I think that, on reflection, some of those open-ended additions to questions should be avoided. I am trying to flag areas where I might be more interventionist than in the past. I appreciate that that is not the ruling to this point of order the member is looking for, but that is my intention.

Ms GILLARD—And I appreciate that the opposition does not like to be reminded of 2007. But the delusion that is happening on the opposition benches is that somehow the workplace relations debate in 2007 was not about Work Choices and not about the abolition of Australian workplace agreements and the eradication of all individual statutory employment agreements from Australia's workplace relations system. That was the government's policy which was put to the people in our policy documents, and the bill today implements it.

I was asked about certainty for employers and employees as we move forward on industrial relations with our bill. Our bill came

to the parliament today. The last time this parliament dealt with a piece of industrial relations legislation, we dealt with the then government's so-called fairness test. I remind the House that the so-called fairness test was processed within four sitting weeks, inclusive of a Senate inquiry. The then government, the now opposition, believed that four sitting weeks was an appropriate length of time, inclusive of a Senate inquiry, for parliamentary scrutiny of a piece of industrial relations legislation. That was in circumstances where they had announced their policy intentions in early May and the bill came to the parliament in late May.

We announced our policy intentions in April and provided implementation details of our policy in August. If four weeks was good enough for the processing of the so-called fairness test, inclusive of a Senate inquiry, then it is good enough for the processing of Labor's legislation. The members opposite, including most particularly the Manager of Opposition Business in the House, must agree that that is an appropriate time, because that is the time he provided when he was Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. We therefore look to the opposition to facilitate passage of this legislation, inclusive of any Senate inquiry, before Easter.

I say to every member of the House that, if Labor's legislation is unduly delayed beyond that point, it is not the Labor Party that they on the opposition benches are frustrating; it is the will of the Australian people who voted for this when they voted at the last election. If there is any worker who is offered an Australian workplace agreement and has to take it in that time, who gets a take it or leave it AWA put in front of them that rips off a basic condition like redundancy pay, if the opposition has manipulated it to extend the time of Work Choices, that

Australian will know exactly who ripped those conditions off them.

Indigenous Communities

Mr ABBOTT (2.46 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. In light of the Prime Minister's commendable commitment this morning to set concrete targets for improved outcomes for Aboriginal people, will the Prime Minister commit to achieving 95 per cent school attendance and 95 per cent work program attendance in remote Northern Territory townships and to regularly publish actual attendance rates?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question because it goes to the question of how we monitor and implement effectively the arrangements we supported on a bipartisan basis in this place last year concerning the Northern Territory intervention. We will continue with that implementation. We will, as we undertook to do prior to the election, monitor the effectiveness of that implementation at the 12-month point. We anticipate that review to occur some time around the end of the third quarter of this year. That will cover all the measures which were imposed at that time and review the effectiveness of the various education, health and policing programs which form part of the intervention.

More broadly on the question of how we deal effectively with Indigenous communities and education outcomes, we on this side of the House—as I hope we all concluded from this morning's deliberations—welcome any positive suggestions from anyone in the community about how we can achieve better education outcomes for Indigenous children. As I said quite frankly, about both the government that the honourable member himself was part of and other previous governments, state and federal, none of us—I repeat, none of us—have got this right. It is time to put it

beyond the partisan divide and to try to get it right.

In the middle of April we will convene here an Australian 2020 summit. I have invited the Leader of the Opposition to attend that, and I look forward to his participation. One of the working groups within that summit will canvass very widely and very broadly all innovative proposals from across the Australian community on how to achieve better education and health outcomes in Indigenous communities. If, as consequence of that summit or in response to the monitoring and evaluation of the intervention in the Northern Territory, we come up with new approaches for the future, we will pursue them.

As for the intervention itself and any reservations we had about it, we articulated our reservations prior to the election and, since the election, we have implemented changes, and they refer to the CDEP and permits in particular. The rest of that intervention is on track. We will monitor its effectiveness and then determine an appropriate course of action for the Northern Territory and the rest of Indigenous Australia in the future. So many people are depending on us all to get it right.

Infrastructure

Ms KING (2.49 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. Can the minister please outline the government's commitment to infrastructure? How will this boost productivity and take the pressure off inflation?

The SPEAKER—The minister for infrastructure and a whole host of other things has the call.

Mr ALBANESE—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I do indeed have big task, and I thank the Prime Minister for the appointment. I thank the member for Ballarat for her question. A central part of the Prime Minis-

ter's five-point plan to fight inflation and boost productivity is the creation of Infrastructure Australia. We must take a nationally coordinated approach to tackling infrastructure bottlenecks, which are causing inflationary pressure. Infrastructure Australia will develop a strategic blueprint for our nation's infrastructure and will drive investment where it is needed most.

Bottlenecks and urban congestion slow down our economy and create inflationary pressures—something the Reserve Bank has warned about on 20 separate occasions. Australia's bandwidth lags at 25th amongst all developed economies. Too many working families are spending more time stuck in their cars on clogged freeways than they are able to spend with their children. In the areas of water, energy and land transport alone, CEDA has estimated that we have a \$25 billion backlog. Infrastructure shortfalls are costing us 0.8 per cent of GDP, or some \$8 billion.

So it is not surprising that key industry groups, such as the Business Council of Australia, the Australian Industry Group, CEDA, Engineers Australia and Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, have over a number of years called for the creation of a body that would coordinate and drive infrastructure provision from the national level. Infrastructure Australia will do just that. The government committed to creating a federal infrastructure department, and we have done that. The government committed to appointing a federal infrastructure minister, and on 3 December we did that. The government committed to creating Infrastructure Australia within the first 100 days of the election of a Rudd Labor government, and we have done that too.

On 20 December, the Prime Minister and other senior ministers sat down with their state and territory counterparts at COAG and

decided to end the blame game when it came to infrastructure provision. They established the COAG infrastructure working group, which I chaired at its first meeting on 23 January, to collectively get together, to get results and end the blame game. On 21 January, cabinet agreed to the structure and functions of Infrastructure Australia. Next week I will introduce into the House the Infrastructure Australia Bill and I call upon the opposition to support that legislation. Infrastructure Australia will not just draw upon expertise from the three levels of government; most significantly, it will involve the private sector front and centre. Five of the members of that advisory council will come from the private sector, including the chair.

Infrastructure Australia will conduct a comprehensive audit of our infrastructure capacity as we have now and our future needs. It will deliver an infrastructure priority list so that we can create a pipeline of projects. Critically, Infrastructure Australia will develop guidelines and principles for the assessment of public-private partnerships that are nationally consistent. It will provide advice about removing barriers and disincentives to investment in infrastructure and about policy and regulatory reforms so that our infrastructure networks are used efficiently. It will streamline planning and approval processes across Commonwealth and state jurisdictions. It will standardise tender documents and contracts to promote best practice procurement and to expedite decision making. Infrastructure Australia is an important economic reform that has been applauded by the business community because it will be able to drive investment in nationally significant infrastructure.

Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples

Mr HOCKEY (2.54 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister confirm reports that his press secretary,

Mr Lachlan Harris, and his assistant press secretary, Mr Tim Gleason, were part of a protest against the Leader of the Opposition's apology to the stolen generations this morning?

Mr RUDD—In response to the honourable member's question, I was advised a couple of hours ago that a couple of members of my staff—I think the ones that he referred to—were in the Great Hall at the time of the Leader of the Opposition's address. I am further informed that, at the time when a large part of the rest of the gathered throng in the Great Hall turned their backs at a particular point of the Leader of the Opposition's speech, the two members of my staff in question did so as well.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order!

Mr RUDD—I am further informed of these matters by my chief of staff, who has spoken to the two individuals concerned—

Mrs Mirabella interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Indi!

Mr RUDD—My chief of staff has advised me that these two individuals, at his decision, have been counselled. I understand further that the two individuals, if they have not done so already, will be corresponding with the Leader of the Opposition to extend an appropriate apology.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Members on my right are denying their colleague the call.

Housing Affordability

Ms VAMVAKINO (2.56 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Housing and the Status of Women. Will the minister inform the House of what the government is doing to improve housing affordability?

Ms PLIBERSEK—Mr Speaker, may I add my congratulations to those of others on your elevation to the speakership. I want to thank the member for Calwell for her question. This question has enormous significance in her electorate, where mortgage stress has increased by 82 per cent between 2001 and 2006 and where almost half of households are in rental stress. Indeed, Calwell has the highest rate of rental stress of any electorate in Victoria. Of course, it is not the Lone Ranger in terms of nonaffordability. Under the previous government we saw rent stress go up, we saw mortgage stress go up, we saw homelessness go up, we saw home repossessions go up, we saw housing affordability go down and we saw first home-ownership go down.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The minister was asked by a member of her own side to explain to the House—and I am delighted to hear it—how they are going to fix the problem, not tell us what the problem is. Would you please proceed to answer your own member's question?

The SPEAKER—The minister knows that she is required to be relevant to the question on housing affordability.

Ms PLIBERSEK—I think it is important to understand the very difficult context that we are working in.

Mr Tuckey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The honourable member for O'Connor is warned!

Ms PLIBERSEK—In 1996 the average home cost four times the average annual wage; in 2007 the average home cost seven years worth of the average annual wage. Housing affordability is at its worst point in Australian history. Indeed, Australians now spend about \$30 out of every \$100 on their mortgage repayments.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. The member is sticking to her script. She was asked by her own side to tell us how they are going to fix the problem.

The SPEAKER—The honourable member has overstepped the mark. He will absent himself from the chamber for one hour under standing order 94(a).

The member for O'Connor then left the chamber.

Ms PLIBERSEK—This is a problem that the previous government were in denial about for a decade; they still do not admit that housing affordability is a problem in this country. I am painting a picture for them to explain that housing affordability is at its worst ever. Today, home buyers spend \$30 out of every \$100 they earn repaying their mortgage. In 1996 it was less than \$18 out of every \$100.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms PLIBERSEK—It is interesting that the opposition should ask how we are going to fix this, because in the 10 years of their government there was not a housing minister nor a housing policy. They have got a shadow housing minister now, and I welcome her to the position. Indeed, it is a very important position. I hope that she will be able to convince her colleagues that this is an issue for this country.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will resume her seat. I have a great deal of patience, and question time can go on for as long as it likes, but responses will be heard in silence.

Ms PLIBERSEK—It is harder to find a place to rent and it is more expensive when you do find a place. Many young Australians have given up on their dream of home ownership. Before the last election, the Labor

Party came up with a number of very important policies to address these issues. Indeed, at its first meeting, the Council of Australian Governments made it a priority for the states and the Commonwealth to work together, and we are, right now, implementing those election policies. The National Rental Affordability Scheme includes a payment from the Commonwealth and a payment from the states to draw in private sector investment. There will be 50,000 new, affordable private rental properties.

Mr Hunt interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Flinders!

Ms PLIBERSEK—Our Housing Affordability Fund is a \$½ billion program that will address some of the high infrastructure charges that we see around the country and some of the planning delays that we have.

Mr Anthony Smith interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Casey will cease interjecting!

Ms PLIBERSEK—Our policy is to release excess Commonwealth land. The states have been writing to the Commonwealth about some of these parcels of Commonwealth land for years, asking, 'Please can we buy this land?' They have not even had the courtesy of a reply from the previous government. We also have our National Housing Supply Research Council, our \$150 million policy to build more homes for the homeless and our First Home Saver Accounts.

The Treasurer and I last week released our discussion paper on the First Home Saver Accounts. These new accounts will help hundreds of thousands of young Australians to save a deposit for their first home. We know how important savings are. The previous government obviously had no interest in increasing national savings. We know how important it is to save a deposit for the first

home. The total proportion borrowed to buy the home will lessen, mortgage repayments will lessen and mortgage insurance will lessen. First Home Saver Accounts will see the government invest \$850 million over their first four years of operation to help first home buyers save a bigger deposit for their first home. I understand better than anyone that housing affordability is a complex problem. There is no silver bullet solution.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms PLIBERSEK—I said it a hundred times before the election. We announced before the election and we have delivered on our housing affordability plans for this nation. As the first housing minister in a decade, I am pleased to say that with these policies in operation we will begin to make a dent on housing affordability for first home buyers, for renters and for people who rely on community and public housing.

Indigenous Communities

Mr ABBOTT (3.03 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Is the minister aware of the view of the former ALP National President Warren Mundine that the permit system for remote Northern Territory townships should be scrapped? I ask further: why is the government at odds with the most senior Aboriginal in the Labor Party on this very important issue, which is at the heart of the intervention that the government claims to support?

Ms MACKLIN—I thank the honourable member for his question on a very, very important subject, particularly as it has to do with economic development and the participation of Indigenous Australians in the economic boom that is taking place in many parts of Australia that neighbour Indigenous communities.

Mr Haase—How about the permits for kids?

Ms MACKLIN—This is an important issue—and I will come to the permits issue, which is a critical matter that the government has a commitment to. I might just remind the honourable member that at the time of the election on 24 November the permit system was still in place. The permit system has remained in place for the last 11 years. I think that fact needs to be remembered before we go any further.

On the issue of economic development, as I said, this government is strongly committed to making sure that Indigenous Australians are able to participate as much as possible in the economic boom that is taking place. The Minister for Resources and Energy and I just recently went to the Pilbara to make sure that we were able to understand, as quickly as possible in our new portfolios, how we could assist the mining industry to deliver on the commitments that they have to Indigenous Australians to make sure that Indigenous Australians can get the jobs that are available in many of these mining communities. We are determined to work with the mining industry, the forestry industry, the tourism industry and all of the industries that are now recognising that many Indigenous people want to be part of this economic boom. We will certainly do everything we can to make those opportunities come alive.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, on a point of order about relevance: the minister was asked about the permit system and talked about her travels across Northern Australia.

The SPEAKER—The minister has resumed her seat and completed her response.

Whaling

Ms GEORGE (3.06 pm)—Mr Speaker, I extend my personal congratulations to add to the others that have been extended in this question time. I think yours was a well-deserved elevation to the position of Speaker of the House. My question is to the Minister

for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. Can the minister inform the House of actions taken by the government in response to commercial whaling activities in the Southern Ocean?

Mr Hunt—How long did it take the *Oceanic Viking* to get down there?

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Flinders is on very thin ice.

Mr GARRETT—I thank the member for Throsby for that question. I know that she has a keen interest in the government's commitment to ending commercial whaling in the Southern Ocean, as do the majority of Australians. I want to assure the House that the Australian government is resolutely opposed to commercial whaling in whatever guise, even under the guise of science. The government has an increased range of measures that it has identified and undertaken. They include a serious and careful assessment of international legal options, a reinvigorated approach to the International Whaling Commission and, importantly and critically, in an unprecedented act, close, first time monitoring of the Japanese whaling fleet in the Southern Ocean.

We respect the important, long-term cultural and trade ties that we have with Japan, but we do want to say clearly that that relationship is strong enough to withstand disagreement around this particular specific issue. On 21 December we led a demarche—a strong diplomatic protest—to the Japanese. It was the largest of its kind, involving some 30 or more nations, including the European Commission. I have written to Japan's minister for agriculture, forestry and fisheries to voice my concerns. My colleagues the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Trade have also represented Australia's views at the highest levels and, at the same time, we are bringing proposals to modernise the International Whaling Commission. I

have also asked my department to commission a report on the global conservation status of whales and dolphins and, importantly, the economic benefits of living cetaceans—including whale watching, which is an important industry here in Australia, and people on the coast will, I think, know that.

The Australian government's action, for the first time, to directly monitor the Antarctic whaling fleet using Australia's Customs ship, the *Oceanic Viking*, enables us to collect information which could be used in the event of possible legal action in the future. These are the commitments that we took to the last election and they are commitments that we are delivering on. Notwithstanding the fact that there is strong Australian support for clear action against commercial whaling, I cannot help noticing that the member for Flinders has been out and about saying that the government is not serious about this issue. He has been talking about ghost ships and ghost planes and delays in monitoring the fleet. Let us be very clear about it: there has been a delay in monitoring the Japanese whaling fleets in waters to our south. It has been an 11 year delay and it is a delay that was underway with this government.

The member for Flinders was at it again last night talking about patterns of deception. I want to make it perfectly clear to the member that the prime purpose of Australia's activities in the Southern Ocean is to ensure that we have the necessary and relevant information to consider the possibility of future legal actions, something which the previous government, of which he was a member, never had the confidence to take on board.

Can I say lastly to the House and to the people of Australia that this is a difficult issue, but it is not business as usual for the Rudd Labor government. This government is

taking on the difficult issues. They are not going to go away, and our resolute opposition to commercial whaling in any guise means that we will continue to pursue this issue in a way which will bring confidence to the Australian people that we are serious about this matter.

Mr Hunt—Mr Speaker, I would ask that the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts table the papers from which he was reading so extensively.

The SPEAKER—Minister, were you reading from a document? Is the document confidential?

Mr Garrett—Yes.

Days and Hours of Meeting

Dr NELSON (3.11 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister and all of his ministers commit to attending this House on scheduled sitting Fridays?

Mr RUDD—I will respond to the Leader of the Opposition's question in these terms: I understand that these matters were the subject of extensive and spirited debate in the House last night, and I understand that there have been extensive and spirited discussions between both the Leader of the House and his inestimable opposition counterpart. But the proposal we have put forward is that Fridays be backbenchers' days, an opportunity for backbenchers in this House to advance the legitimate interests of their constituents. We regard this as an important opportunity for backbenchers to bring to the attention of the nation's parliament the concerns in their local communities. I recall that in recent years, when I was sitting on benches opposite and when I was a backbencher, the opportunities to bring to the attention of this chamber the concerns of my constituents were often constrained by the general business of the House. I believe the innovation put forward by the Leader of the House and fully supported by the government are ap-

propriate in providing a proper, decent national platform for backbenchers seeking to bring to the nation's parliament the concerns of their constituents on local matters. I support this extension of the democratic forum of the House to local backbenchers, and I would hope that it is properly used by both government and opposition members.

Dr Nelson—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: is the Prime Minister simply saying no?

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition knows that there is no point of order.

Youth

Ms OWENS (3.13 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Youth. Minister, what are your plans and priorities for giving young Australians a real voice in government?

Ms KATE ELLIS—I thank the member for Parramatta for her important question and also for the very hard work that she does with local youth in her electorate. In responding to this question, can I first acknowledge that it would not be possible for me to be here outlining this government's commitment to giving young people a voice, and then listening to it and acting upon it, if it were not for the leadership of the Prime Minister in re-establishing the position of a federal Minister for Youth. The position of federal Minister for Youth is, of course, one which was abolished by the former government. This is just the first example of the different approach that this government intends to take when it comes to youth representation.

We believe that young people play a vital role in our community, that they must be listened to and that their experiences and opinions must be included in the democratic process. Too often in this parliament we talk about the youth of Australia being this country's future—and this of course is true—but what we must also recognise is the important role that young people play in the present

and how their experiences, circumstances and opinions must be included in debates in this place. We must recognise that there is a generational divide, which is widening, amongst the Australian community. Generations coming through have different circumstances, different opinions and different concerns to those of previous generations. This is true when you look at the experiences of young people today in attaining first home ownership. It is also true when you look at the experiences of those who are entering adulthood already with hefty debts on their shoulders from their education. And it is also true when you look at concerns about issues like climate change. These are the people who will be experiencing the consequences of the actions that we take today.

In recognising all of these points, this government is acting to establish the Office for Youth. This office will have the role of examining all government priorities, all government policies going forward, so that we can make sure that across all of government the impact on young people will be considered in the policy-making process. In addition to establishing the Office for Youth, this government is also committed to delivering upon our election commitment to establish the Australian Youth Forum. This will be a body by which young people—a broad and diverse range of young people—can come together and talk directly to government about their views and concerns. This will operate all year round and will be an important way in which young people can speak directly to government and have those concerns addressed and responded to by all of our ministers. The Australian Youth Forum will also play the important role of providing a body of experts in youth policy and young people whom we will talk to directly about our priorities and how they will impact on their lives. These are some of the ways in

which we will be giving young people a voice going forward.

As to the more immediate future, can I also say that I have been absolutely amazed by the number of people who have contacted me just in the last couple of months to talk about the impacts of the voluntary student unionism legislation which was introduced by the previous government. These concerns have come not just from students—and certainly students have been amongst that group—but also from vice-chancellors, sporting organisations, local councils and a whole range of people in the broader community. One of the things that I am embarking upon in the immediate future is to visit campuses throughout Australia to talk to the different stakeholders, assess the impacts of the damage caused by the VSU legislation and work with these stakeholders so we can ensure that students in Australia have the services and representation that they need on campus. Young Australians have been silenced for far too long. It is my great pleasure as the Minister for Youth to make sure that not only do they have a strong voice in government but also that it is listened to and responded to by this government.

Days and Hours of Meeting

Dr NELSON (3.18 pm)—Mr Speaker, further to my previous question: will the Prime Minister guarantee that he and his ministers will be here on a scheduled sitting Friday to answer questions on behalf of the Australian people? Please do not give us Ruddspeak for no.

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question. My recollection is that in this House we have never had parliament sit on a Friday. You were in government for 11 years and there was no sitting on a Friday. This government extends the democratic opportunities to members of parliament to be here on a Friday to raise the concerns of their

local members. We have done that, it is a reform and I commend it to the House for its support.

Mr Hunt—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister has just misled the House. We have sat on Fridays.

The SPEAKER—That is not a point of order.

Rudd Government: Election Commitments

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (3.19 pm)—My question is also to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister inform the House of progress in implementing the government's commitments given to the Australian people before the 24 November election?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question. In the light of our democracy it is important to be up-front and direct with the Australian people about what you commit to prior to an election and what you then implement subsequent to an election. Honouring commitments to the Australian people, not consigning them to boxes called 'core promises' and 'non-core promises', is in fact the lifeblood of an effectively operating democracy. We ask ourselves why cynicism emerges in the Australian community about the operation of this place. It goes to the practices that we have seen so often in the past whereby things were consigned to the dustbin of history once governments got past the day of the election itself. That period of core and non-core promises sits squarely in the mind and the recollection of the Australian people.

On education, we said before the election that we would establish a National Curriculum Board to deliver for the first time in Australia's history a national education curriculum for schools. We have implemented that; we have appointed the board. That is the No. 1 first achievement and the first time that a government of Australia has actually

taken steps to bring about a national curriculum in this country through the agency of a national board.

Secondly, on the question of infrastructure, we committed to the Australian people to establish Infrastructure Australia. In the first or second cabinet meeting of this government we took a decision to proceed with that and, as the minister for infrastructure just said, that legislation will be introduced in a matter of days or weeks. We will for the first time in the history of the Commonwealth have the national government taking national leadership in the provision and planning of infrastructure across this country. That is the second commitment honoured.

Thirdly, on the question of broadband, as a result of regulatory advice from the ACCC and decisions taken based on that on the part of the minister for communications, we have the ADSL2+ rollout by Telstra, which brings higher speed broadband to up to 2.4 million extra Australians—one instalment in terms of the much larger program of reform we have in mind when it comes to the overall rollout of fibre optic to the node broadband services across Australia.

On health we committed to the Australian people before the election that for the first time the national government would provide incentive payments to the states to do something about elective surgery waiting lists—a matter of deep concern to working families across Australia. In the past the response has been to blame the states. Labor have taken the attitude: what do we do to fix it? Therefore, we took a decision to provide incentive payments up-front. The sum of \$150 million has been committed and that money is beginning to flow. That is the fourth commitment honoured. Then we go to the whole question of what we do more broadly with the states and territories. We said that we wanted to get—

Opposition member interjecting—

Mr RUDD—I hear the interjection opposite that we should get rid of the states and territories. Would the member who made that interjection like to put their hand up so that we see what strong federalists we have on the part of the conservative parties of Australia. When it comes to making the federation work, it is along these lines: either you can cooperate or you can simply engage in the blame game. What did we do? Within three weeks of taking office, Labor convened a meeting of the Council of Australian Governments and established seven groups to deliver real outcomes in health, education and in other areas, such as business deregulation, by year's end, with a strict program of COAG meetings to be done throughout this year.

On top of that, we turned to our place in the world on Iraq. Prior to the election we committed that when it came to the completion of the rotation of our combat forces in Iraq we would bring our combat forces home. That commitment is being honoured. Together with the Minister for Defence I travelled to Baghdad and spoke to our Iraqi counterparts, as we have spoken to our American counterparts, to negotiate that withdrawal of Australian combat forces—a withdrawal which has come far too late in the piece, given the overall appalling history of the conduct of that war by those who preceded us in this place.

On the question of our international environmental policy, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts has indicated the actions we have taken on whaling. Prior to the election we committed to the Australian people that we would dispatch Australian national assets to the Southern Ocean to monitor and collect evidence for possible international legal action against Japan with the object of bringing to an end commercial

whaling. We have honoured that commitment. The *Oceanic Viking* has been sent to the South Pacific and it has undertaken the photographic reconnaissance of the type that we promised would occur, and its mission is continuing.

Labor said prior to the election that we would bring an end to the Pacific solution. Negotiations have now occurred with relevant ministers of the government both in Papua New Guinea and Nauru to bring the Pacific solution to an end. Those persons who have been incarcerated in those facilities are now no longer there.

On the question of the apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples, we said prior to the election that if we were elected as the next government of Australia we would make an apology early in the history of this parliament. We have honoured that commitment to the Australian people.

This government has been in office for 72 days. It does not matter whether it is on questions of enhancing the independence of the Reserve Bank, on education, health, climate change and current attempts to bring a cessation to commercial whaling in the Southern Ocean or whether it is on infrastructure, broadband and our place in the world or a decision on the future disposition of our combat forces in Iraq, in 72 days we have implemented each of these commitments to the Australian people. We took those commitments seriously, we have honoured our word to the Australian people and we are proud of having done so.

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

REGISTRAR OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The SPEAKER (3.25 pm)—I wish to inform the House that, in accordance with part 3 of the resolution of the House concerning members' interests, I have appointed the

Deputy Clerk, Mr Bernard Wright, as Registrar of Members' Interests for the 42nd Parliament.

DOCUMENTS

The SPEAKER (3.26 pm)—I present the following reports from committees of the 41st Parliament received, pursuant to the standing orders, by my predecessor after the last sitting of the House in 2007:

Standing Committee on Industry and Resources—Renewable power: A case study into selected renewable energy sectors in Australia for the inquiry into developing Australia's non-fossil fuel energy industry—Background information—Interim report, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee; and Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security—Review of the re-listing of three terrorist organisations.

Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS

Reports Nos 7 to 21 of 2007-08

The SPEAKER (3.27 pm)—I present the following Auditor-General's reports Nos 7 to 21 of 2007-08:

No. 7: Performance audit: the Senate Order for Departmental and Agency Contracts (calendar year 2006 compliance);

No. 8: Performance audit: proof of identity for accessing Centrelink payments: Centrelink: Department of Human Services;

No. 9: Performance audit: Australian Apprenticeships: Department of Education, Science and Training;

No. 10: Performance audit: whole of Government Indigenous service delivery arrangements;

No. 11: Management of the FFG capability upgrade: Department of Defence: Defence Materiel Organisation;

No. 12: Administration of high risk income tax refunds in the individuals and micro enterprises market segments: Australian Taxation Office;

No. 13: The Australian Taxation Office's approach to managing self-managed superannuation fund compliance risks;

No. 14: Performance audit: performance audit of the Regional Partnerships Programme: Department of Transport and Regional Services: volume 1: Summary and recommendations; volume 2: Main report; and volume 3: Project case studies;

No. 15: Performance audit: administration of Australian Business Number registrations: follow-up audit: Australian Taxation Office;

No. 16: Performance audit: data integrity in the Child Support Agency: Child Support Agency: Department of Human Services;

No. 17: Performance audit: management of the IT Refresh Programme: Centrelink;

No. 18: Financial statement audit: audits of the financial statements of Australian Government entities for the period ended 30 June 2007;

No. 19: Performance audit: Administration of the Automotive Competitiveness and Investment Scheme —Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research: Australian Customs Service;

No. 20: Performance audit: Accuracy of Medicare claims processing: Medicare Australia

No. 21: Performance audit: Regional delivery model for the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality —Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts —Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN

Report

The SPEAKER (3.27 pm)—I present the report for 2006-07 on the Commonwealth Ombudsman's activities in monitoring controlled operations conducted by the Australian Crime Commission, the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.28 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* and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:

- Aboriginal Hostels Limited—Report for 2006-07.
- Administrative Appeals Tribunal—Report for 2006-07.
- Administrative Review Council—Report for 2006-07.
- Aged Care Act 1997*—Report on the operation of the Act for 2006-07, incorporating a correction.
- Aged Care Commissioner—Report for the period 1 May to 30 June 2007; and Commissioner for Complaints (Aged care)—Report for the period 1 July 2006 to 30 April 2007.
- Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency Limited—Report for 2006-07.
- Albury-Wodonga Development Corporation—Report for 2006-07.
- Anindilyakwa Land Council—Report for 2006-07.
- Army and Air Force Canteen Service—Frontline Defence Services—Report for 2006-07, incorporating the annual report on the monitoring of the equal employment opportunity (EEO) management plan.
- ASC Pty Ltd—Report for 2006-07.
- Attorney-General's Department—Report for 2006-07.
- Australia Council—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)—Reports—2006-07.
- Equity and diversity—2006-07.
- Australian Building and Construction Commissioner—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity—Report for the period 30 December 2006 to 30 June 2007.
- Australian Communications and Media Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Crime Commission—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Customs Service—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Electoral Commission—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Fair Pay Commission—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Fair Pay Commission Secretariat—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Federal Police—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Film Commission—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Film Television and Radio School—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Fisheries Management Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Government Solicitor—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Hearing—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Industrial Relations Commission and Australian Industrial Registry—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Industry Development Corporation—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Institute of Criminology and Criminology Research Council—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Institute of Family Studies—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare—Reports—2006-07.
- Australia's welfare—2007.
- Australian Institute of Marine Science—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Law Reform Commission—Reports—No. 106—Report for 2006-07.

- No. 107—Privilege in perspective: Client legal privilege in federal investigations.
- Australian Maritime Safety Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian National Maritime Museum—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Office of Financial Management—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Postal Corporation (Australia Post)—Reports—2006-07.
- Equal employment opportunity program—2006-07.
- Australian Prudential Regulation Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Public Service Commission—State of the service—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Rail Track Corporation Ltd—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Research Council—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Reward Investment Alliance—Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme, Public Sector Superannuation Scheme and Public Sector Superannuation Accumulation Plan—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Security Intelligence Organisation—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Act—Guidelines—Obtaining, correlating, evaluating and communicating intelligence relevant to security (including politically motivated violence).
- Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Sports Commission—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Statistics Advisory Council—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Strategic Policy Institute—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Trade Commission (Austrade)—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC)—Report for 2006-07.
- Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation—Report for 2006-07.
- Bankruptcy Act 1966*—Report on the operation of the Act for 2006-07.
- Bundanon Trust—Report for 2006-07.
- Bureau of Meteorology—Report for 2006-07.
- Centrelink—Report for 2006-07.
- Civil Aviation Safety Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Classification Board and Classification Review Board—Report for 2006-07.
- Coal Mining Industry (Long Service Leave Funding) Corporation—Report for 2006-07.
- Comcare—Report for 2006-07.
- Commissioner for Superannuation—Report for 2006-07.
- Commissioner of Taxation—Report for 2006-07.
- Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions—Report for 2006-07.
- Commonwealth Grants Commission—Report for 2006-07.
- Commonwealth Ombudsman—Reports—2006-07.
- Activities under Part V of the *Australian Federal Police Act 1979*—30 December 2006 to 30 June 2007.
- Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)—Report for 2006-07.
- Copyright Agency Limited—Report for 2006-07.
- Cotton Research and Development Corporation—Report for 2006-07.
- Crimes Act 1914—Authorisations for the acquisition and use of assumed identities—Reports for 2006-07.

- Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity.
- Australian Crime Commission.
- Australian Customs Service.
- Controlled operations—Report for 2006-07.
- CrimTrac Agency—Report for 2006-07.
- Customs Act 1901*—Conduct of Customs officers—Report for 2006-07.
- Dairy Adjustment Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Data-matching program—Department of Veterans' Affairs—Report on progress for 2005-07.
- Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal—Report for 2006-07.
- Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Defence Housing Australia—
Report for 2006-07.
- Statement of corporate intent for 2007-08.
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry—Report for 2006-07.
- Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts—Report for 2006-07.
- Department of Defence—Report for 2006-07—
Volume 1—Department of Defence.
Volume 2—Defence Materiel Organisation.
- Department of Education, Science and Training—
Report for 2006-07.
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations—Report for 2006-07.
- Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs—Report for 2006-07.
- Department of Finance and Administration—
Report for 2006-07.
- Department of Finance and Deregulation—
Reports—
- Former parliamentarians' travel paid by the department for the period January to June 2007.
- Parliamentarians' overseas study travel reports for the period January to June 2007.
- Parliamentarians' travel paid by the department for the period January to June 2007.
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade—Report for 2006-07—
Volume 1—Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
Volume 2—Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).
- Department of Health and Ageing—Report for 2006-07.
- Department of Human Services—Report for 2006-07.
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship—
Report for 2006-07, incorporating an erratum.
- Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources—Report for 2006-07.
- Department of Parliamentary Services—Report for 2006-07.
- Department of the Environment and Water Resources—Report for 2006-07—
Volume 1—Department of the Environment and Water Resources.
Volume 2—Legislation.
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet—
Report for 2006-07.
- Department of the Treasury—
Report for 2006-07.
- Tax expenditures statement for 2007.
- Department of Transport and Regional Services—
Report for 2006-07.
- Director of National Parks—Report for 2006-07.
- Employment Advocate—Report for 2006-07.
- Environment Protection (Alligator Rivers Region) Act 1978—Report on the operation of the Act for 2006-07.
- Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency—Report for 2006-07.
- Export Finance and Insurance Corporation—
Report for 2006-07.
- Family Court of Australia—Report for 2006-07.
- Family Law Council—Report for 2006-07.
- Federal Court of Australia—Report for 2006-07.
- Federal Magistrates Court of Australia—Report for 2006-07.
- Film Australia Limited—Report for 2006-07.

- Film Finance Corporation Australia Limited—Report for 2006-07.
- Finance—
- Advance to the Finance Minister—Issues from the Advance as a final charge for the year ended 30 June 2007.
- Consolidated financial statements in respect of the year ended 30 June 2007, incorporating a correction.
- Final budget outcome for 2006-07.
- Fisheries Research and Development Corporation—Report for 2006-07.
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand—Report for 2006-07.
- Forest and Wood Products Research and Development Corporation—Report for 2006-07.
- Freedom of Information Act 1982*—Report on the operation of the Act for 2006-07.
- Future Fund—Report for 2006-07.
- Gene Technology Regulator—
- Quarterly report—1 July to 30 September 2007. Report for 2006-07.
- Grains Research and Development Corporation—Report for 2006-07.
- Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation—Report for 2006-07.
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Health Services Australia (HSA Group)—Report for 2006-07.
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission—Report for 2006-07.
- IIF Investments Pty Limited, IIF (CM) Investments Pty Limited, IIF BioVentures Pty Limited, IIF Foundation Pty Limited, IIF Neo Pty Limited—Report for 2006-07.
- Indigenous Business Australia—Report for 2006-07.
- Indigenous Education and Training—National report to Parliament for 2005.
- Indigenous Land Corporation—Report for 2006-07.
- Industry Research and Development Board—Report for 2006-07.
- Insolvency and Trustee Service Australia—Report for 2006-07.
- Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security—Report for 2006-07.
- Inspector-General of Taxation—Report for 2006-07.
- Interactive Gambling Act 2001*—Prohibition on interactive gambling advertisements—Report for 2006.
- International Air Services Commission—Report for 2006-07.
- Land and Water Australia—Report for 2006-07.
- Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995*—Report on the operation of the Act for 2005-06.
- Medibank Private—Report for 2006-07.
- Medicare Australia—Report for 2006-07.
- Migration Act 1958*—Section 486O—Assessment of detention arrangements—
- Government response to the Commonwealth Ombudsman's statements—Personal identifiers 221/07 to 346/07.
- Reports by the Commonwealth Ombudsman—Personal identifiers 221/07 to 346/07.
- Migration Agents Registration Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Migration Review Tribunal and Refugee Review Tribunal—Report for 2006-07.
- Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission—Report for 2006-07.
- Military Superannuation and Benefits Board of Trustees—Report for 2006-07.
- Murray-Darling Basin Commission—Report for 2006-07.
- National Archives of Australia and National Archives of Australia Advisory Council—Report for 2006-07.
- National Australia Day Council—Report for 2006-07.
- National Blood Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- National Capital Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- National Gallery of Australia—Report for 2006-07.

- National Health Amendment (Prostheses) Act 2005*—Independent review of the prostheses listing arrangements—Report by Robert Doyle, October 2007.
- National Health and Medical Research Council—Report for the period 1 January 2006 to 30 June 2007.
- National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme—Report for 2006-07.
- National Library of Australia—Report for 2006-07.
- National Museum of Australia—Report for 2006-07.
- National Native Title Tribunal—Report for 2006-07.
- National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority and National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority Board—Report for 2006-07.
- National Residue Survey—Report for 2006-07.
- National Transport Commission—Report for 2006-07.
- National Water Commission—Report for 2006-07.
- Native Title Act 1993*—Native title representative bodies—Reports for 2006-07—
Central Land Council.
Northern Land Council.
- Natural Heritage Trust—Report for 2005-06.
- Office of Parliamentary Counsel—Report for 2006-07.
- Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General—Report for 2006-07.
- Office of Workplace Services—Report for 2006-07.
- Pharmaceutical Benefits Pricing Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Privacy Act 1988*—Report on the operation of the Act for 2006-07.
- Private Health Insurance Administration Council—Reports—2006-07.
- Operations of the private health insurers for 2006-07, incorporating a correction.
- Private Health Insurance Ombudsman—Report for 2006-07.
- Productivity Commission—Report No. 42—Safeguards inquiry into the import of pigmeat—Accelerated report.
- Professional Services Review—Report for 2006-07.
- Public Lending Right Committee—Report for 2006-07.
- Public Service Commissioner—Report, incorporating the report of the Merit Protection Commissioner, for 2006-07.
- Remuneration Tribunal—Report for 2006-07.
- Renewable Energy Regulator—Financial report for 2006-07.
- Repatriation Commission, National Treatment Monitoring Committee and Department of Veterans' Affairs—Report for 2006-07.
- Repatriation Medical Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002*—Report on the operation of the Act for the period 1 April to 30 September 2007.
- Royal Australian Air Force Veterans' Residences Trust Fund—Report for 2006-07.
- Royal Australian Mint—Report for 2006-07.
- Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation—Report for 2006-07.
- Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission—Report for 2006-07.
- Screenrights—Report for 2006-07.
- Seafarers Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Authority—Report for 2006-07.
- Special Broadcasting Service Corporation (SBS)—Report for 2006-07.
- Sugar Research and Development Corporation—Report for 2006-07.
- Superannuation Complaints Tribunal—Report for 2006-07.
- Surveillance Devices Act 2004—
Commonwealth Ombudsman's report under Part V for the period 30 December 2006 to 30 June 2007.
Report on the operation of the Act for 2006-07.

Sydney Harbour Federation Trust—Report for 2006-07.

Teaching Australia—Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership—Report for 2006-07.

Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Act 1979—Report on the operation of the Act for 2006-07.

Telstra Sale Company Limited—Report for 2006-07.

The Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Limited—Report for 2006-07.

Tiwi Land Council—Report for 2006-07.

Torres Strait Regional Authority—Report for 2006-07.

Tourism Australia—Report for 2006-07.

Venture Capital Registration Board—Report for 2006-07.

Veterans' Review Board—Report for 2006-07.

Wet Tropics Management Authority—Report and State of the Wet Tropics Report for 2006-07

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

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Indigenous Communities

The SPEAKER—I have received a letter from the honourable member for Bradfield proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The need to build on the momentum and success of the intervention into the Northern Territory to protect Aboriginal children.

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—

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Leader of the Opposition) (3.29 pm)—I appreciate very much the opportunity to bring on this matter

of public importance, particularly on a day when the parliament has apologised to those Aboriginal generations that were forcibly removed from their parents. But I do find it extraordinary that not all of the parliament, unfortunately, was able to support a matter of public importance debate on the intervention in the Northern Territory, which is literally about saving and rescuing the lives of Aboriginal children.

The situation in Aboriginal Australia has been well documented in terms of health and life expectancy. Generally speaking, life expectancy is 17 years less for an Indigenous Australian than it is for a non-Indigenous Australian. That equates to countries such as Haiti, Ghana, India and Papua New Guinea. Kidney disease is 10 times more prevalent. Diabetes is three times more prevalent. One in five Aboriginal children at the age of 15 are not in school. One in four currently cannot pass a very basic year 3 reading benchmark. One in three cannot pass the year 5 benchmark. Unemployment is currently running at around 13 per cent for Indigenous Australians, but fortunately it is down from 30 per cent in 1994. More than half of Indigenous Australia is currently in receipt of some sort of welfare support. Hospitalisation rates are 17 times higher for Indigenous Australians. Women are 44 per cent more likely to be hospitalised for assault than non-Indigenous Australians. Imprisonment rates are 13 times higher, and juvenile Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are 23 times more likely to find themselves in detention.

Last year, the report entitled *Little children are sacred* was released, having been commissioned by the Northern Territory government. That report was the straw that literally broke the camel's back. The inquiry was headed by Rex Wild QC and Pat Anderson. The *Little children are sacred* report states that children are described as sacred in

Aboriginal Australia because they carry the two spring wells of water from their country with them. The inquiry visited 45 communities in the Northern Territory and found evidence of sexual abuse of children in every single one of them. For the benefit of the House I will just repeat that: 45 Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory were visited, and in every one of them there was found to be evidence of sexual abuse of children.

If that were the situation in any other part of Australia, particularly suburban and regional Australia, there would understandably be a very strong, immediate reaction and dare I say a radical one. In 2007 the previous government described this as a state of emergency, and that is very much the view on our side of the House. In fact, the report concluded, amongst other things, that Aboriginal child abuse in the Northern Territory should 'be designated as an issue of urgent national significance by both the Australian and Northern Territory governments'. It also reported a submission that in part said:

In cases of sexual abuse, the child is often removed from the community (to be taken to a place of safety or to be interviewed). This can lead to the child believing they have done something wrong, and make families reluctant to report as it is the child who is removed rather than the alleged perpetrator.

In other words, even when people were trying to act, the view was that the children themselves thought that in some way they were at fault and that, and many other things, was leading to inaction on something which violates everything that surely our country stands for.

So the government in 2007 made the decision that some radical reforms needed to be undertaken. The intervention had three principal elements. The first was to stabilise the situation. The second was to try to normalise the services that are provided to Indigenous

people in the Northern Territory, including in infrastructure. The third was to provide longer term support. So that intervention included a number of things. It followed on in part from the recommendations of that *Little children are sacred* report, which focused on education. For example, why do we have truancy rates approaching 65 per cent in areas of Arnhem Land? It made recommendations about the devastating impact of alcohol and the unfettered access to it by many people in these remote communities, and the relationship between the Department of Family and Community Services, welfare payments and policing. A lack of policing that would be intolerable in any other community in Australia was simply considered to be the norm in Aboriginal Australia, as it still is in many remote Aboriginal communities.

On the subject of housing, in some cases you had more than 50 people living in a three-bedroom house. We asked ourselves on this side, and we still do: why is it that, as of late last year, there were 271 fewer houses in the Northern Territory in remote Aboriginal communities than there were five years earlier, despite the fact that an additional \$1 billion had been spent on housing for Aboriginal people in remote parts of Australia?

The report also focused on gambling. Much of the money that arrives in remote communities goes into gambling, alcohol, tobacco and other things, the end result of which is that children are not fed and clothed. The report also addressed the dreadful and devastating impact of pornography in these remote communities.

The intervention, which was put in place by the previous government and supported by the then opposition, had a number of elements. The first was to get fair dinkum policing into these communities and to no longer accept the intolerable. The intervention used police from not only the Northern Territory

but also the Federal Police and police from other parts of Australia and other jurisdictions. It also meant getting the Army in there to make sure that security was guaranteed—in particular, the NORFORCE forces in Northern Australia with which Aboriginal people are familiar.

The intervention also meant community management: appointing managers to actually manage government businesses. A lot of the problems relate to very poor levels of professional administration in many of these communities and also, in many other cases, downright corruption. It also demanded health checks of every child under the age of 16, many of whom had rarely had any examination of their health, and welfare reforms to stop that money going to gambling, alcohol, drugs, pornography and other things—to quarantine in the order of half of the money going to individuals under certain circumstances to make damn sure that it actually gets to the children who most need it and for whom it is intended.

The other thing, which should not be considered innovative but nonetheless had to be done, was to link welfare payments to school attendance. You cannot educate any child until you actually get them to school. Community safety meant getting people in the communities supported by the intervention to be involved in clean-ups, Work for the Dole and other programs. It also aimed to develop market based solutions to housing. Many people in these communities had no hope of ever owning a house or ever being part of the economic mainstream and having the reasonable expectation of owning a house.

We also desperately needed bans and restrictions on alcohol. Anyone in this place who is familiar with any of these communities—whether they be in the Kimberley, whether they be in the Northern Territory, whether they be in the northern parts of the

cape or whether they be in northern parts of South Australia—knows that you only have to spend a very short time there to appreciate the devastating impact of alcohol on Aboriginal Australia. Enough is enough. Compounding all this was pornography, so decisions were made to ban the possession of pornography and also to audit computers.

The other element to this was the permit system. In question time the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs said that the permit system had not been enacted. It had been legislated, but it had not yet taken effect because the legislation needed assent. The permits were removed from common areas—from roads, barge landings and airstrips—but 99.98 per cent of land in the Northern Territory would still require permits. The key element of the permit system was to open these remote communities to the rest of Australia—to open up these communities so that the rest of Australia could actually start to engage with these communities and they with them. It was completely unacceptable, and remains completely unacceptable, that in these communities you have lives of existential despair and the most appalling things being done to children in terms of neglect, sexual abuse and other things, including malnutrition in the 21st century in a developed country like Australia. One reason that that has continued is that the permit system has not allowed engagement with the outside world and calibration of what is unacceptable in these communities with what, by any other standard in any other part of the country, is evidence of a caring, developed and sophisticated society.

We were very concerned when we saw some changes coming to this intervention with the election of the new government. One of the most remarkable Australians is Sue Gordon, the Perth Children's Court magistrate. She has been chairing the former

government's intervention committee. On 15 January this year she was reported as saying that she would be asking the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, who is at the table, to meet the entire Indigenous intervention team, which I understand she has done. She wanted to know what direction the government is taking, and already we have seen changes to the permit system. Sue Gordon said:

Everyone wants to know what is happening following the health checks; what is the next phase? That is what the Government will have to be looking at. There's not much point doing health checks and then no followup.

Australians, and these Aboriginal Australians in particular, need to know precisely the answer to that and many other questions about what is being followed up.

I also point out in relation to the permit system, which we now know the government has been backtracking on, that on the front page of the *Australian* newspaper on 18 January this year Nicholas Rothwell put it very well. He said that rolling back the changes from the intervention, which is what the government is doing, takes us back to the future:

... back to an apartheid world, where visitors to the 73 main towns and communities of the Territory's remote north and centre can go nowhere without the stamped approval of a Land Council commissar.

He went on to say:

The primary effect of permits has long been to cut off remote Aboriginal societies from the outside world: to hinder economic activity, to kill tourist curiosity, to protect the incompetent administrators and local leaders presiding over their dysfunctional little kingdoms. Permits acted as a coded signal to outsiders, saying: 'Leave your usual assumptions behind on entry, because things are different in remote Aboriginal Australia, educational standards are lower, social capital is lower, housing is worse, food is poorer—but

that's all OK, because it's another kind of society.'

It was also, I might add, another way of Aboriginal people basically saying, 'We are too fragile to face calibration or measurement against the outside world.' I have spent about 15 years of my life involved in one way or another in doing what I can to give advocacy for Aboriginal people and the enormous disadvantage that they face, notwithstanding the good intentions of successive governments over a long period of time. But I confess to being guilty, to being, at one stage, one of those people who was not prepared to bring to the national gaze the circumstances that really exist in these communities. I think that in the false name of cultural sensitivity we reached the conclusion that in some way it would diminish the self-esteem of remote Aboriginal Australians if their circumstances went into the lounge rooms of everyday Australia. We were wrong, and on this day and every day I say, 'I am sorry and I apologise for being a part of that.'

We need to open up remote Aboriginal Australia to the rest of the country so that, as non-Indigenous Australians, we can fully appreciate just how dreadful these circumstances are and just how important that intervention in the Northern Territory is, not only to those Northern Territory Indigenous people. We need to extend such an intervention, or one very much like it, into the cape and other parts of Australia. It is time that we made sure the money intended for Aboriginal children and the laws designed to protect and support them were made available to them and that no more apologies be offered for what has happened in the last 30 years. (*Time expired*)

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (3.44 pm)—I congratulate Madam Deputy Speaker Burke on her election to her new position. I know she will

carry it out with great care and attention. First of all, I want to say to the House what a wonderful morning we have had here in this parliament. It can only be described, I think, as a new chapter in our nation's history. For the first time ever there has been a true indication of bipartisan support for tackling Indigenous issues and for ensuring that these very important matters are above politics. We have today dealt with unfinished business. As the Prime Minister said, it is time for all of us, right across the political spectrum, to come together to build a new future. The Leader of the Opposition has outlined in his remarks both this morning and again now the extent of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—not only the horrific 17-year life expectancy gap but also the gap in educational attainment. We have set ourselves targets to close those gaps, and we intend to do everything we can to achieve those. I hope that in the spirit of bipartisanship the Leader of the Opposition and his coalition will join us in making sure that we do everything to close those gaps.

I do think it is important to have an opportunity to update the House on the progress of the Northern Territory intervention. I should just say at this point that the government's position on the intervention is very clear. We supported the intervention when it went through the parliament last year and it remains our firm position in government. It is unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition did not see fit to also read into the *Hansard* the remarks that Dr Sue Gordon made after I had met with the task force. She indicated that she did understand the government's strong commitment to the intervention and our strong commitment to taking a number of issues forward, which is the subject of this matter of public importance. I will touch on those in a minute.

We do understand that one of the critical issues with this intervention is that it is very

complex. There have been a number of areas that have been implemented with, you might say, not a lot of care and thought beforehand. As a result, implementation has not always gone smoothly. One area in particular where we have had continuous work to try and address the problems has been income management. We certainly support the introduction of income management, but there have been many, many issues that have needed to be addressed by either Centrelink or other agencies because of the very complex nature of the project that has been put in place.

The other area that really was the subject of very poor planning was the previous government's decision to just dramatically close down some community development employment programs. We are now starting to get reports from communities. The Leader of the Opposition may have seen the article in last weekend's *Australian* which was headed 'Policy made in haste locks communities in a jobs vacuum'. Unfortunately we are hearing similar things back from communities ourselves—that is, as a result of the previous government's dramatic closure of CDEP, without thinking about what was going to be put in its place, a number of community members are participating less than they were when CDEP was in operation.

Our fundamental approach in this area, our guiding principle, is that of evidence. We intend to base our actions on the facts. We want to make sure that we identify what works and what does not work. That is what will guide our policy. There is not a member in this House that does not want to see the reduction of child abuse. We want to make sure that in this intervention we look at what is working, we look at what is not working and we make the changes that are needed so that we have effective and evidence based policy. As all of us know, policy decisions that are made poorly will have an impact on Indigenous children into the future. So we all

have a responsibility to address these issues. That is why we have made a commitment, as the new government, to have a review of the intervention at the 12-month point. It will be a properly independent and transparent review and will make sure that the results are available for all to see so that we can go forward with evidence that tells us all about what will make a difference for children in the Northern Territory. It will also be important for us to assess, through that review, the effectiveness of the actions taken to date.

I indicated before that the new government has already outlined where it intends to put additional measures in place that will help children in the Northern Territory. Unlike the previous government, we have made a very significant commitment to deliver 200 extra teachers into schools in the Northern Territory. It is the case that at least 2,000 children—and we suspect the number is higher—are not even enrolled to go to school in the Northern Territory. Unfortunately, the previous government did not see fit to address this issue. Those children are not even enrolled to go to school and, if they did turn up at school, there would not be a teacher to teach them. So the government has announced that it will make sure that 200 additional teachers are put in place to make sure that when the children do go to school—and we certainly want them at school—there will be a teacher to teach them.

My colleague the Minister for Health and Ageing will be talking about the additional measures that we intend to put in place in the Northern Territory to improve primary health services. We know that the situation for children—and adults, I have to say—is very serious in the Northern Territory. But I will leave my colleague the Minister for Health and Ageing to talk further in this debate about the improvements we intend to bring forth in the health area.

We have also committed to building three additional boarding schools because we know that, for many senior or older students in the Northern Territory, there are no secondary schools for them to go to. We want to make sure that these boarding schools are built and that children have the opportunity to continue their secondary education so that they have the chance to get an education and get on in life. At the moment they do not have those opportunities.

We have also put in place something that was not done at all by the previous government, and that is a proper process of consultation. One of the important things in any area of public policy—and I have to say that it is particularly important in this area of Indigenous affairs—is to bring people with you, to make sure that you talk with people, consult with them and, in that way, guarantee that your policies are more likely to be well received and implemented.

In December, not long after the election of the new government, the Prime Minister and I went to Darwin and met with a range of Indigenous leaders about the Northern Territory emergency response. We have committed to continuing that consultation and working with representatives throughout the Territory to make sure that what we are doing is effective in reducing, in ways that people in the Northern Territory can commit to, the shocking levels of child abuse.

I thought it might be helpful for members of the House if I gave them an update on progress with the Northern Territory intervention. As I said, my colleague the Minister for Health and Ageing will go through the health areas, so I will leave her to talk about the health checks. In addition to the health checks, in the area of welfare reform, there are now over 5,800 people currently being income managed. We have certainly continued to roll out the program of income man-

agement. I have taken the advice of the chief of operations, Major General Chalmers, in each case, and there are now 24 communities and associated outstations and two town camp regions where income management is taking place.

At the moment, of course, we have only anecdotal information about the impact of income management. There have been difficulties, as I outlined before, and I say to all members of the House—and this particularly applies to our colleagues in the Northern Territory—that if there are difficulties we want to hear about them. I know my colleague the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, who is sitting behind me, has been very responsive in helping us in that regard.

Even though there have been difficulties, there have also been positive stories, particularly of mothers and grandmothers saying that they understand that now they have more money to spend on food, that they are able to make sure that the humbugging and pressure on them that comes from people who want money from them is reduced. As I said before, at the 12-month point we will make sure that we do a proper review of the income management process.

Twenty licensed stores in 16 communities have been engaged in the Family Income Management program, and a further three stores are being operated by Outback Stores. There have been almost 600 non-CDEP jobs created. It has been a very positive change to see that people are now getting paid the proper wages that, frankly, they should have been paid a very long time ago.

On the issue of police, we certainly agree that it is a critical issue and one that should have been addressed a very long time ago. During the current financial year, an additional 35 to 40 police were assigned to the Northern Territory by both the Australian

Federal Police and state governments. Sixty-six members of the Australian Federal Police will be put in place over the next two years. The additional police will gradually be introduced from mid-year, replacing those police that other jurisdictions generously gave to the Northern Territory. That has led to a new police presence in 17 communities, which demonstrates just how important this is.

At this point I want to acknowledge the role of the task force. It has been a very big operation that they have been asked to supervise. I have asked Dr Sue Gordon to stay on as the head of the task force and she has kindly agreed to do that. Major General Dave Chalmers continues to head the operations side. Roger Corbett is a very important member of the task force, and his role in Outback Stores is critical to making sure that communities have the good food and other things that they need in their stores. Dr Bill Glasson is an important member of the task force and I am sure my colleague will talk about his role; it has been a very important one in this intervention.

Finally, I want to go back to where I started. I welcome the new opposition's interest in a bipartisan approach to Indigenous affairs. I hope that we can genuinely pursue our approach to Indigenous affairs in this way. We know that governments of all persuasions in the past have failed. We have made a big start this morning—a very big start. For a lot of people that is going to help with the pain and hurt, but I hope that it will also mean that we can now embark together on the very important task of closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. I sincerely invite the opposition to support the targets that we have set out in our election commitments, which we intend to meet. Together we can make a difference for Indigenous people.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah) (3.58 pm)— This morning we focused on the injustices of the past, and this afternoon we should focus on the injustices of the present. This morning we apologised for the wrongs of earlier generations, and this afternoon we should face up to the wrongs done by this generation— wrongs that are likely to be repeated lest we recommit ourselves to good policy, as epitomised by the Northern Territory intervention.

In 2006, an extraordinarily courageous Alice Springs crown prosecutor, Nanette Rogers, chronicled the most horrific crimes being perpetrated against Aboriginal children, including one case where a four-year-old was drowned while being raped by a petrol sniffer. These crimes did not take place a generation ago, and these crimes were not perpetrated by white men against black, yet they did take place in part because of a culture of idleness and indulgences that successive contemporary governments—I stress contemporary governments—have fostered and permitted.

Let us not make the mistake of thinking that this is the first fault-free generation in history. Let us not think that we are morally superior to our predecessors. Let us not think that everything that happened before 1970 was wrong and everything since has been right. Yes, policy up until that time was tainted by assumptions about the inferiority of Aboriginal people and cultures, for which we should rightly, properly and abjectly apologise, but in terms of practical damage to Aboriginal people's lives welfarism has been just as destructive as paternalism.

I want to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition for a truly magnificent address to this House this morning. He properly acknowledged the pain and the hurt of Aboriginal people, he properly pointed out that life was tougher for everyone in previous generations and he properly accepted the

good intentions of the vast majority of past policy makers and administrators. Let me say that our overwhelming responsibility here in this place now is for present times, not past times. Future generations will not think well of us if we apologise for others' misdeeds while perpetrating and perpetuating misdeeds of our own.

In response to the horrors chronicled by Nanette Rogers and further detailed by the *Little children are sacred* report, the former government undertook a massive and radical intervention in remote Northern Territory townships. It involved more than 70 separate communities. It involved more than \$1 billion worth of new Commonwealth government spending and it promised to restore civic life in these very troubled places. In particular, it involved resident police in all significant townships, strict controls on alcohol, the quarantining of welfare payments, rigorous insistence on school attendance and the opportunity for homeownership.

I congratulate the then opposition, now the government, for supporting the Northern Territory intervention at that time despite ferocious attacks on it from people such as the member for Lingiari, who is now a minister in the new government, and from people such as Marion Scrymgour, who is now the Deputy Chief Minister of the Northern Territory. But there is some evidence that the new government is inclined to water down key aspects of the intervention, and I do not say this in a partisan spirit. I commend the goodwill and the decency that the new minister brings to her job—and I have to say that, in speaking to people involved with the intervention, they have said that they have appreciated her willingness to talk and the spirit that she has brought to those discussions—but the permit system is being restored and the health intervention is faltering. I am pleased that the Minister for Health and

Ageing is here in the House to talk, presumably, about this aspect.

Let me cite—because the minister did not get to this in question time—the attitude of the Labor Party’s former national president, Warren Mundine, to the permit system. I quote him from last month:

The permit system didn’t stop crime. In fact, if you look at all of the reports that have come out in the last few years, crime has flourished under the permit system, so it’s a fallacy to say that it helps law-and-order problems. It really embedded these problems because some powerful people were able to get away with things without being watched.

Warren Mundine said this after the new government announced that the permit system would stay. The new minister really needs to explain why she is right and why Warren Mundine—the most senior Aboriginal person in the Labor Party—is wrong on this topic.

Alison Anderson, the extremely experienced Aboriginal member of parliament for the central Northern Territory, told the *Australian* yesterday that permits had been misused in some remote communities and should not be reintroduced. She said:

I think it has been used as a tool by some people in communities to reject certain people that they disagree with or don’t want out there.

The Labor people who know best—the Labor people most in touch with the reality on the ground—want the permit system scrapped. Why are permits wrong? Because, as that great journalist Nicholas Rothwell, who has made the study of remote Indigenous places something of a life’s work, said:

You’re too fragile to face the world, you need to be protected and coddled, suspect all strangers, the government will serve as your only help.

That is the attitude which people like Warren Mundine and Noel Pearson know is destroying and poisoning Aboriginal communities, yet—alas—that is the attitude which the new government wishes to perpetuate. I again quote Nicholas Rothwell:

In fact there is one reason for the Rudd Government’s move to reinstate permits, and it is an ideological reason. The progressive support base of the Labor Party loves the idea of sacrosanct Aboriginal Australia, untainted by harmful Western influences, its people performing ceremonial activities and tossing off the odd jewel-like work of art.

I say to the ministers at the table: please grow through that. It behoves Aboriginal people for members opposite to grow through their ideological preoccupations, look at what works and what does not work and back the Indigenous intervention.

On the subject of health, it was good to hear the minister talk about Bill Glasson. Unfortunately, Bill Glasson has pointed out that the health checks are rolling out well but there is not the necessary specialist follow-up, despite the fact that 800 doctors—many of them specialists—volunteered their services last year. Those specialists should be deployed. Warren Mundine said, in advice to the minister, ‘I think we should take advantage of what the former government did. We have to build on that. The biggest fear I have is that we start to fall back on our old ways and some of the failed policies of the past.’ I share that fear. I would love to be proved wrong, and I say to the minister opposite: anyone can apologise for other people’s faults, but it takes guts to own one’s own faults. Anyone can judge others harshly; it takes character to avoid making excuses for oneself. In how it prosecutes the Northern Territory intervention, the real character of the Rudd government will be revealed. (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—I call the Minister for Health and Ageing.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (4.08 pm)—Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Congratulations on rising to this high office. I think we might have tested your new position last night. Hopefully it will not be quite so strenuous today.

I am delighted to be speaking on this matter of public importance motion today. It is indeed a matter of great public importance, and it is an honour to be speaking on this issue on the very day when we have really been able to start making repairs to and apologies for the past. It is very unusual for me to say in this place that I agree with the shadow minister who has just spoken.

Mr Hartsuyker—Is this the first time?

Ms ROXON—As old sparring partners, it may be one of the first times. I do agree that for us to make our apology today meaningful—our apology about actions of past governments and past parliaments—we need to ensure that this is the first step in taking actions into the future that will make a difference for Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous children. We want to make sure that today is just the beginning in righting some of the wrongs of the past, and we will make sure that today's words are accompanied by actions today, tomorrow and long into the future. I am very pleased to be following my colleague, the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, who has the not insubstantial task of making sure that we do deal with what can be correctly described as a crisis, a tragedy or a seriously difficult situation. But we do, within this parliament and within our communities, have the wherewithal to make a difference. We now just need to act.

I want to concentrate on the action that is being taken in the health arena. There have been some misrepresentations and, I think, some fears expressed in the media, and there have been some concerns expressed by members opposite, that the health component of the Northern Territory intervention is somehow faltering. Nothing could be further from the truth. Since the intervention was announced by the previous government, nearly 6,000 child health checks have been undertaken across the Northern Territory. The latest figure that we have is 5,796 health checks in 58 different communities and 12 town camps across the Northern Territory. More than 200 healthcare professionals have been involved in this stage, and preparations are now being undertaken for referrals and treatment of many of the conditions that have been identified through the health check process.

I want to make absolutely clear to this House, and to anybody who is listening to this debate, that we are honouring the financial commitments made by the previous government in the Northern Territory intervention. We are committed to the rollout of the child health checks and we are committed to providing the follow-up services that will be needed, but we are committed to much more than that. And this is really the difference. We want to be able to build a healthcare system for our Indigenous communities that will last into the future. We know we have to enhance our primary healthcare services in the Northern Territory. We know we have to find ways to make the workforce sustainable in the long term. We cannot see this intervention as a one-off check, a one-off treatment, and then go back to where we were before. The real art to making this intervention work in terms of health care is to also be building the structure for the future. In announcing today that we are committed to the health aspects of the Northern Territory interven-

tion, I also want to highlight additional things that we are committed to doing which will make a significant difference. Then, if time permits, I will come back to talking more specifically about some of the issues that people have raised in terms of the intervention itself.

What is forgotten when we look at the previous government's decision to intervene is that we talked about one-off child health checks and the follow-up that might come from that, but we are still primarily in the phase of undertaking the remaining health checks. Prior to the election, we committed to doing something which the previous government did not do, and we have now started to roll it out. We committed to actually having an impact on life expectancy and health outcomes for Indigenous people into the future. We have committed a quarter of a billion dollars to closing the life expectancy gap—starting with the babies who are being born today. We will be making sure that they get home visits from nurses and that there are intensive support services available through mums and bubs programs across the country. We already have a number of fabulous Indigenous health services with nurses who provide great maternal health care. They need more support, they need more nursing staff and they need more infrastructure. Our \$260 million commitment will, amongst other things, start to roll out that support to communities across the country. It will fundamentally enhance the sort of one-off approach that the previous government took to the Northern Territory intervention child health check. We need to build the infrastructure that is going to do the checking well into the future, and we need to make sure that it is going to be there for every single Aboriginal child across the country—not just in the Northern Territory.

That \$260 million also makes sure that we are tying together health support with educa-

tional and developmental support. It is critical for us not only to look at how we can make sure that our four-year-old Indigenous children are getting good developmental support—and there are many people in this parliament, such as the parliamentary secretary, who is here, who will be working on those sorts of projects—but also to make sure that the babies actually get a chance to turn into four-year-olds to get that service. We still have appalling figures in this country. The chance of an Indigenous baby dying before they turn one is three times more likely than for a non-Indigenous baby. We know what interventions can make a difference. We know if we give proper prenatal, postnatal and intensive support for mothers that we can make a difference to birth weight and to reducing smoking and alcohol consumption during pregnancy, and that we can help children to have early problems identified and dealt with when they are young so that they can grow into happy, healthy children.

Last week when I was in Alice Springs and visited one of the town camps, I found the circumstances just as confronting as everybody would expect from the media reports—perhaps even more so. It really brings home that, for us to be able to provide decent health services, we have to be able to provide decent housing, decent employment opportunities and decent education. The challenge that the Rudd Labor government have picked up, following on from the Northern Territory intervention of the previous government, is to tie those things together and to make sure that, when we want to invest serious resources, time, energy and infrastructure in health services, we make sure that those services have a proper chance of being successful—by ensuring that there is decent housing for people and that there is a pathway to be able to get early childhood education and get into schools where there are teachers, as my

colleague has already flagged. These sorts of interactions are going to be critical in the next phase of the intervention and the Rudd Labor government's approach to Indigenous affairs.

What I would like to say when people concentrate so much on the very difficult circumstances that we absolutely do face is that there is in the Northern Territory a great strength amongst the Indigenous controlled health service providers. For example, AMSANT, Congress in Alice Springs and others are fully functional and very capable services that were not involved in consultations on the Northern Territory intervention. They were not asked to use their expertise to roll out ongoing support for these health services. We intend to make sure that, with the resources, energy and momentum from the Northern Territory intervention, we develop a proper relationship with those existing services that can provide ongoing support into the future. I think it is really critical that we do that.

We have also made a number of other commitments that are going to be very significant in the Northern Territory. We have committed \$20 million, of which \$10 million will be invested in upgrading our primary healthcare services across the Territory and \$5 million will be invested in providing something that there is, unfortunately, a growing need for—that is, renal dialysis facilities. There are very few satellite services for remote communities. There will also be \$4½ million for sexual assault counselling in the Northern Territory. Another \$50 million—agreed to by COAG before Christmas—will be provided for alcohol rehabilitation programs, counselling and other programs across the country. So there is serious new money being committed by the Rudd Labor government to complement what is being done in the Northern Territory.

I am conscious of the time but I want to quickly flag that the results of the child healthcare checks that have already been undertaken show that a large number of referrals are needed. The highest number are referrals to primary healthcare services—not, as the member opposite pointed out, to specialist services, although there is a need for those. It is those primary healthcare services that we are investing in and supporting long term that are most often referred to. The next highest, which will not be a surprise on this side of the House, is to dental care. The previous government's dental care program, which they lauded so much last year, failed to provide a single dental care service to any person under the age of 25 in the Northern Territory. We are going to fix that with our dental program. The previous government should be ashamed of their record on that. *(Time expired)*

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (4.19 pm)—It is a great pleasure to speak on this very important issue. When one considers the subject of this matter of public importance, one always thinks that there are a range of ways in which we can assist. We are very privileged in this place to be able to make a difference to our constituents and all Australians. I see quite a number of new faces in this chamber. Whilst I do not know them personally, I well imagine that being able to make a difference was very much part of their motivation for coming to this place.

We can make a difference through leadership and we can make a difference through policy development, outcomes and settings and the delivery of services. But we can also make a difference through providing hope—replacing despair with hope, creating opportunities and building self-esteem. We in this place should never underestimate the power of hope in uplifting all Australians. If we can provide people in very difficult positions with a way forward, a path to a better future,

that is a very powerful driver, and I think it helps to build a much stronger community. If we can keep safe our children who are at risk and replace that feeling of fear with a feeling of safety, I think we will immediately provide positive outcomes.

I think most people who looked at the *Little children are sacred* report found the contents most confronting. People in this House were horrified by the problems that were chronicled in that very difficult report. I would certainly like to commend the intervention and the very strong stance that the previous government took in breaking the policy mould and taking a very strong position on this very difficult problem. It is all too easy to come up with excuses not to act. It is all too easy to bow down to vested interests. But I think the power of that intervention was that that very intransigent problem that we have—not only in the Northern Territory but in other areas as well—was very strongly confronted, as were what I would call those very noisy vested interests. I would plead with this government to not give in to the squeaky wheel. I implore them to take the very hard road and confront those vested interests to ensure that we get the very best outcomes.

No intervention is going to be perfect. Governments since Federation, through a range of policies, many of them misguided but certainly well intentioned, have attempted to solve the problems of our Indigenous communities. We need to keep our shoulders to the wheel. I see the intervention as a very good first step. I am concerned at the potential for the roll-back of the intervention and I would hope that the government will continue to confront the problems that we have. I have a very substantial Indigenous population in my electorate and, when I see young people who are offered hope and solutions, I see the dramatic change which occurs in their personal demeanour and their

future. I think we can continue to make a difference right across the Northern Territory.

Unfortunately, remote Australia becomes a very challenging area in which to roll out policy. If you were going to design a model of an area in which it was difficult to roll out policy, you would come up with something that was very much akin to what we have in remote Australia, where we have vast distances and relatively sparse populations. Everywhere we roll out policy, we have a difficulty with labour forces, we have a difficulty with getting to the people, we have perhaps a reluctance for people to come and seek help and, in many cases, we have a lack of trust in the sorts of services that can be offered by governments and their associated bodies.

Let me commend this matter of public importance. We must continue to strive, on this very important day in our history, to improve our health outcomes. We must continue to ensure that our little children are safe, to ensure that they feel they have a future and to build their self-esteem so that they can take their rightful place in our society and contribute to it. If we build self-esteem and keep our children safe, together we can achieve some really outstanding outcomes.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (4.23 pm)—Madam Deputy Speaker Burke, let me also congratulate you on your elevation to that noble role. I would like to share some of the sentiments that the member for Cowper has just put forward. We will stay committed to this intervention, to deliver the very necessary results that are required on the ground in remote communities.

I think Shadow Minister Abbott indicated how much we owe to Nanette Rogers, the Crown Prosecutor, for bringing these matters very publicly to our attention. But could I

say—and all credit to Ms Rogers—that she was prosecuting briefs that were prepared on information that was relayed by the Northern Territory Police; therefore, I think it is incumbent upon us to look at what the Northern Territory Police have had to say about the scope of this intervention and how it should proceed, and what they have said specifically about the permit system. To date, the Leader of the Opposition has essentially argued that we need to wind back the permit system. He makes out that it is, effectively, a barrier to remote communities' participation in economic benefits. This intervention is not about the participation of a community in economic development. That is something we specifically have to do. The Minister for Health and Ageing just indicated what we need to do and are continuing to do in relation to health, as we will also do in relation to education and training to ensure that the Aboriginal youth of these communities have access to all the necessary skills and abilities to allow them to fully participate in the economic benefits of our communities.

This is specifically about being able to access the remote communities of the Northern Territory. I did pay due deference to the views of Nanette Rogers, but perhaps I could indicate what the Police Federation of Australia said in their submission of 9 August to the Senate inquiry. They question the connection between the permit system and child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities and, therefore, they claim, changes to the permit system would be unwarranted. They go on to say:

Operational police on the ground in the Northern Territory believe that the permit system is a useful tool in policing the communities, particularly in policing alcohol and drug-related crime. It would be most unfortunate if by opening up the permit system in the larger public townships and the connecting road corridors as the government intends, law enforcement efforts to address the

'rivers of grog', the distribution of pornography, and the drug running and petrol sniffing were made more difficult.

They are not my words; they are the words of the Police Federation of Australia representing the specific interests of the police officers of the Northern Territory. They have indicated very clearly, from a law enforcement perspective, that it would be a retrograde position to do what the former government intended to do and that is to abolish the permit system.

In looking at what the Leader of the Opposition said about being able to open up these communities to the rest of the country at large, this exercise is not about opening up the communities but about addressing specific issues, specific problems, in these communities currently. If the police are coming out and making substantive submissions like that to the then government—which, incidentally, were ignored—it is incumbent upon us on forming this new government to at least listen to those people who operate on the ground, who have responsibility for law enforcement, who care about what occurs in these communities, who care just as much as the Crown Prosecutor who prosecuted all of those matters. These people were the very ones who laid the initial information, who laid the charges and made the arrests. We have decided here simply to take one version, and we are certainly committed to proceeding with the intervention, but in looking at what is a good tool in law enforcement we cannot take our eye off what has occurred and what is the practical experience of police. (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—The discussion is concluded.

**PARLIAMENTARY RETIRING
ALLOWANCES TRUST**

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Defence Science and Personnel) (4.29 pm)—

Congratulations, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your appointment. I ask leave of the House to move a motion to appoint a member to the Parliamentary Retiring Allowances Trust.

Leave granted.

Mr SNOWDON—I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Contributory Superannuation Act 1948, Mr Somlyay be appointed a trustee to serve on the Parliamentary Retiring Allowances Trust.

Question agreed to.

**APPROPRIATION (DROUGHT AND EQUINE INFLUENZA ASSISTANCE)
BILL (No. 1) 2007-2008**

Cognate bill:

**APPROPRIATION (DROUGHT AND EQUINE INFLUENZA ASSISTANCE)
BILL (No. 2) 2007-2008**

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (4.30 pm)—I would like the attention of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to be drawn to some of the deficiencies in the drought administration as it now operates. The area south of Hughenden, the southern half of North Queensland's mid-west, was in very serious drought. A large number of stations were in that situation, but a survey only took into account a number of stations in the Hughenden shire area—Flinders, if you like—that in fact had not bad rainfall. The area that was very badly short of rain was not surveyed at all. So we would ask the minister to look again at the anomalies that led to that arising and also to have a look and see if we can help those people south of Hughenden that are in this situation.

The second part of the Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 1) 2007-2008 and the Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 2) 2007-2008 are about the

issue of equine flu. The contribution of the previous speaker, the member for Wide Bay, was a most extraordinary contribution. One has to really wonder about a party that would put a person like that up front. We are talking about quarantine. Let us go through it. He allowed the grapes in from California in the same month that one-tenth of the entire grape production in California was wrecked by Pierce's disease. There was damage done to the Australian industry by these imports, even without the disease. When he was confronted at the central council meeting of the National Party—by no less a person than Jeff Seeney, until recently the Leader of the Opposition in the Queensland parliament—his reply was that it only affected Queensland. We did not have to worry about the grapes coming in from California, because it only affected Queensland—that was his answer! If anyone doubts me, they can ask Mr Seeney. That is what was said. Mr Seeney was very, very angry indeed. Let us move on.

On the issue of pork, the outcome before the High Court was that the pork farmer lost the pork case. The reason they lost was that the High Court said there were actually no guidelines by which a decision could be made. They could not say it was a bad decision, because there were no rule in there by which to make a decision. There could have been no more scathing indictment of the quarantine services of this country than that passed by the High Court in the pork case. Let us move on.

Black sigatoka came in and cost us nearly \$100 million in the banana industry. Every single quarantine official said that it had come in from the Torres Strait. I was the minister for the Torres Strait for nearly a decade, so I speak with very great authority. It is very simple—very, very simple—as I have told the quarantine service again and again: there are only two ways that anything can get in from the Torres Strait to Australia.

There are private aeroplanes, but that is negligible. The main way is the Jardine ferry. Everything has to go across on the Jardine ferry. Unless you want to go through four feet of water, you have to go on the Jardine ferry. So all you have to do is pay the ferryman to check that no bananas or vegetable matter are coming in from the Torres Strait, and have checks at the Horn Island airport. That is all you have to do to stop anything coming in from those areas.

Spiraling whitefly, which would be absolutely devastating to the Australian beef industry; bluetongue disease; and most certainly foot-and-mouth disease are all endemic in the Indonesian archipelago, and yet there is nothing to stop them from coming into Australia; there has been no effort made to pay the ferryman at Jardine, and there has been no effort to pay anyone at the Horn Island airport. So we got the black sigatoka and it cost us \$100 million. Let us move on.

The former Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry actually raised the issue of citrus canker. After having read the *Australian* newspaper, the last thing that I would ever raise if I were that member—the Leader of the National Party, as he is now—would be the issue of citrus canker. There were very serious issues raised about this. It is some reflection upon this House that the former minister has never been asked to front his responsibilities and the fact that citrus canker came in at Emerald, where people had—as the media reported—brought product in from overseas with the agreement of the quarantine service, which the former minister was responsible for.

Whether the former minister knew of the special permit that was given for them to bring matter in that obviously had citrus canker in it is something that I think the current government should have a look at. There were some generous donations involved,

according to the newspaper. I will say no more. But I would not have raised it if I were the Leader of the National Party—it would have been the last thing I would ever have raised. But he has never been noted for intelligence—no, I withdraw that remark unequivocally.

Beef is arguably the fourth biggest product in this nation—most certainly the biggest agricultural industry is the beef industry. None less than Senator Heffernan expressed his absolute disgust that the quarantine service, for which the former minister was responsible, allowed beef to come in from Brazil, a foot-and-mouth diseased country—and from a part of that country that was provisionally declared at the time the beef came in—and it ended up on the Wagga Wagga dump, where pigs regularly eat.

This man has got away with the most incredibly irresponsible behaviour. It is no use for you to say it was some officer in the department that was to blame. If you are the minister, you are to blame. I was the minister for the best part of a decade and, if something went wrong, I knew it was my fault. I never resiled from my responsibilities. On two occasions I handed in my resignation to the then Premier, because I thought things had gone wrong and I knew that it was my duty to take full responsibility for it. No responsibility has been taken by this ex-minister in his entire history in this place—not once. Yet he should take responsibility for losing four seats in the last election for his party—the Liberal Party in one case—Page, Flynn, Dawson and the Liberal seat of Leichhardt.

For those of you not familiar with the sugar industry, there was a burning issue. It was the issue of ethanol. This former minister is on record again and again in this place making negative statements about ethanol. So who is to take responsibility for the loss

of those seats? I will tell you who is to take responsibility for the loss of those seats: the minister. It was his responsibility as agriculture minister to introduce the use of ethanol in Australia—like every other responsible country in the world is doing. Canada, Brazil and the United States have done it and even countries that cannot grow grain or sugar cane are doing it, such as Europe and Japan. But no-one takes responsibility. In fact, he got promoted. Do you think you can go forward with a person that has provided you with that sort of leadership?

Let me move back to AQIS for a moment—to the subject of white spot in prawns. Imported prawns were allowed into this country from countries that had white spot. So we had an outbreak of white spot which devastatingly damaged the prawn-farming industries of Australia. Is there anything that has not been wrecked here by the irresponsibility of the people responsible for AQIS in this place?

The papaya fruit fly cost us \$75 million. It came in from the Torres Strait. Where was the paying of the ferryman to inspect product coming down from the Torres Strait? Where was the paying of the people at Horn Island? These were the simplest of actions that needed to be taken—and it was \$75 million of taxpayers' money gone. Now some people have been bankrupted and are living in sheds—and I do not hesitate to name the founders of the coffee industry in Australia, the Jaques family, people who were reduced to penury by the irresponsibility of this minister and his administration. But they have fought back yet again successfully.

Let me move on. The ex-minister spoke about the diversion of the northern floodwaters. I thought that was a beauty. He spent a lot of his speech saying it was raining in one part of the state and there was drought in another. This came as a great revelation to all

of us! Having come up with this marvellous breakthrough in understanding the geography of Queensland, he then said we should harvest the floodwaters of North Queensland and divert them south. In fact, his Premier, Peter Beattie, proposed that and yet his party attacked Premier Beattie when he proposed it! And in all my years in this place I have never heard him open his mouth on this. Who was responsible? Who was the minister that should have been damming those floodwaters and making use of the great resources that God has given us? Who was it that should have been helping people who did not have much water—such as those in Central Queensland, for example? I am not saying it should go to southern Queensland, but most certainly to Central Queensland. Who should have been doing that? The person who should have been doing it was the minister for agriculture. After 12 years in government, he stands up here and says that—even after his own party has attacked Mr Beattie for making the proposal.

Mal Brough, who is no longer in this place, advocated the same thing on numerous occasions, but he was given no support by the minister for agriculture. The current Leader of the Opposition, Brendan Nelson, whose electorate is very suitably named the Bradfield electorate—after the great man who proposed the diversion of some of these massive waters of North Queensland into Central Queensland—advocated it. He got no support from the current leader of the National Party—not a word of support in 10 years. Senator Heffernan, a great advocate for the development of water resources in our nation, has had no support from this particular person. In the mandatory code of conduct, where we desperately needed assistance to fight off the two great oligopolies that have 82 per cent of the retail fruit and vegetable industry in Australia, this person actually ensured as the minister that it would

not go there. Peter McGauran quite clearly was fighting tenaciously on behalf of the farmers. Did he receive any support from this minister? No, of course he didn't. If this minister had backed him in cabinet then we would not have the ridiculous mandatory code of conduct that we have today. Minister Dutton, who did an excellent job—he has been one of the finest and most successful ministers in this place—went out very courageously fighting the battle of the managed investment schemes that desperately needed to be assailed for the good of the farmers of Australia. Did he get any support? No, he didn't. He fought the battle courageously by himself and half-won the battle for us, and God bless him. But God will not bless those people who did not support Dutton. They did not support him publicly and they did not support him privately. So all the more power to him!

The former minister mentioned woody weeds. I happen to represent an electorate that is suffering from what has been described as the greatest environmental holocaust in Australian history—the acacia prickly tree, which has now gobbled up six million hectares—almost an area the size of Tasmania—in 30 years. All native flora and fauna have been destroyed by it. Who was the minister responsible for dealing with this issue and for doing something about the destruction of all this magnificent area, an area which is described on the old map of Queensland as being the richest natural grasslands in Australia? That pasture was utterly destroyed by the prickly acacia tree. Whose job was it to protect those grasslands and our native flora and fauna? It was this ex-minister—and he comes in here and has the hide to start pointing the finger at the Labor Party for doing nothing about woody weeds! They have been here for 10 minutes! It absolutely amazes me that a party that is trying to

fight back into existence would put this man up front.

But I have not finished there. He then attacked them for taking funds away and said, 'We had put in huge amounts of funds.' I will tell you the funds that he put into agriculture. He gave us a buyout so that he could win back the votes of the fishermen. He gave us a buyout after closing down about 2,000 fishermen in Australia. He took their livelihoods away and gave them some ridiculously small figure to compensate them for the loss of what had been a great business for some 2,000 Australian fishermen. Unfortunately for us, 700 of them were in North Queensland.

He gave us compensation of \$150,000. The tobacco farmers, who were earning on average \$200,000 a year, were completely destroyed. There were 2,000 tobacco farmers in Australia and now there is none. They were completely destroyed and got \$150,000 in return. He said, 'We gave them this money.' Yes, he did, but he took away their right to make a living and he gave them a pittance in return to try and buy his way through the election because of his misdemeanours. A lot of those people, sadly, still vote for that party. They still have loyalty. They still believe in the National Party, even after what has been done to them.

The egg industry got compensation, but only after they took 2,000 egg farmers out of the industry. There were over 2,000 in the egg industry, now there are fewer than 300. The sugar industry signed a deregulation agreement with the ALP. I am told it came out of Canberra. Whether it came out of Canberra or out of Brisbane, who cares, the net result was the deregulation of the sugar industry and the removal of tariffs. The ALP removed half. But this man who purports to represent farmers took the other 50 per cent of the tariffs away. Of course, our incomes

on the Australian market then dropped by 50 per cent. In the supermarkets, Mr Woolworths and Mr Coles did not drop the price to the consumers, nor did they drop the price to the consumer for dairy products. I sat with five members of my old party and their faces went white when they saw this ex-minister's press release where it said, 'We will give \$150,000 to every farmer, but only if every state deregulates.' He held a gun to their heads. It was politically stupid, of course, because I think the Labor governments would probably have done it anyway. He forced them to do it which meant of course that the targets were pinned onto the National Party. I said to one senator there that day: 'You're a great free trader. You should be very happy about this event.' He said, 'Yes, but I did not want us to be blamed for it.' Well, blamed they were.

If I speak with some passion and rage, it is because I represented nearly 300 dairy farmers; I now represent fewer than eight. Every single one of those people who exited the industry represent heartbreak and bankruptcy. Those people got up at 5.30 in the morning and were still milking cows at seven o'clock at night. They employed nobody; they did everything themselves. Those people were shattered. A lot of them are still showing loyalty to this party. Those poor people. What great deception has been worked upon them. This ex-minister forced the issue with his statement, and five of them who were there that day went white in the face.

I should say this: Ian Causley fought like a tiger against that dairy deregulation. Larry Anthony could not go public, unfortunately for him. He was diametrically opposed to that deregulation. I was diametrically opposed. It was Julian McGauran who raised it. For those people who represent the National Party in this place, reflect upon the fact that, within four years, Causley had resigned—

and there was no way they could hold the seat once he had resigned—Julian had joined the Liberal Party, I had become an Independent and poor old Larry, one of the best men in this place, had lost his seat in parliament. He was loyal to the government, he had cabinet solidarity and he had a sense of decency, but it cost him his seat in parliament. This place lost a great member of parliament. So four were lost, and whose responsibility was it? It was the bloke who has just been made Leader of the Nationals. He pontificated in this place earlier today and told us all about woody weeds, how much money he had given to close down all these industries and how we should divert the northern floodwaters.

In speaking to this legislation today, and speaking with some considerable passion, it is my sad and sorry lot in this place to represent dairy farmers. Every four days in Australia, a dairy farmer commits suicide. But if I speak with passion and try and hurt some of the people who have hurt us so dreadfully then I am entitled to, just as the good Lord whacked into those moneychangers in the temple. There are not anywhere near as many sugar farmers as there are dairy farmers. We are closing four mills every three years. We only have 24 mills left. Brazil is opening 25 new mills every year, because they have ethanol and we do not. We pay \$1.40 for our petrol and the Brazilians pay 74c. Whose fault is that? Who was the Minister for Transport and Regional Services and who was the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in this place back then? In the trials at Nuremberg, the prosecutor listened to all the terrible people called Nazis. Each of them blamed public opinion, Hitler or the army. They all had somebody to blame. Why did 30 million people die in the Second World War, six million poor Jews in the concentration camps? The reason for that obviously was the penguins in Antarctica. Why is

it that a dairy farmer commits suicide every four days in Australia and a sugar farmer commits suicide every two months in Australia? Someone is responsible for that. Unfortunately and sadly for me, I know the sugarcane farmers personally. This place must take responsibility. (*Time expired*)

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (4.50 pm)—I thank those contributors to the debate, both the Leader of the Nationals and the member for Kennedy. I understand the member for Kennedy's passion, particularly with respect to the sugar industry. Within a couple of weeks of receiving this portfolio, I was pleased to meet some of those people who work in the sugar industry in his electorate in the town of Innisfail. On some of the issues that the member for Kennedy raised, I have spoken to the departmental officers concerned, and I undertake to report back to him on the issues he raised with respect to EC funding to the south of Hughenden. I will report back to him on that. Also, I will make some further inquiries on some important issues he raised concerning border integrity with respect to the Torres Strait. I do understand the member for Kennedy's passion with respect to quarantine and the threats that an inadequate system can pose to the nation, particularly to those involved in our primary industries. We will have more to say about that later.

I would also like to make comment, before I get to my closing remarks, on the comments made by the Leader of the Nationals. If you listened to what the Leader of the Nationals said on radio and what he said today in this place, you would think you were listening to two different people, because there is no relationship between the two concepts at all. We had something verging on reasonable in the chamber today when he had all his peers watching, but when the Leader of the Nationals has been on radio

there have been extraordinary claims. The comment was made, which Labor had raised prior to the election, that if we were successful we would conduct a review to see how exceptional circumstances funding could be improved. We had outrage from the Leader of the Nationals on the radio saying that this was putting everything under threat. Then, having caused a stir in the community, having tried to make a whole lot of people in a desperate situation frightened about what the future would hold, he comes into this chamber and says, 'We're not critical of there being a review.' Don't say one thing in here and send a completely different message to the rest of the Australian public. It does farmers no good at all to have a fear campaign that simply makes them think they are not entitled to assistance to which they are patently entitled.

The Leader of the Nationals said, 'Labor's got form on exceptional circumstances.' You bet we have form on it. We started it in 1992. It is a Labor reform which has always enjoyed, at each stage of its development, bipartisan support. When we were in government and we introduced exceptional circumstances funding, we had the full support of the opposition—at that time they were responsible in the way they dealt with that. When the government changed in 1996, exceptional circumstances funding continued to have bipartisan support across the chamber. It was not until we had the comments of the Leader of the Nationals in this parliament subsequent to the election that we had the first signs—since exceptional circumstances funding was first introduced—that that bipartisanship is going to be dropped.

In terms of getting a good outcome for our primary producers, the members of the National Party in this chamber should have a talk to each other—and it will not be hard; there are only 10 now, so there are not that many of them—about the implications of

turning exceptional circumstances funding into a party political issue. Since 1992 it has not been, and it would be a very big step. If they do want to take that step, my second piece of advice is: work out how it works. I was astonished to see, following the statement about savings measures that was made by the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, a media release go out and media comment be made by the Leader of the Nationals. The Leader of the Nationals heard that there were some areas where what had previously been forecast was going to be reduced and he put out a media release about what a disgrace this was. It says:

“The announcement today by Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner that drought funding will be cut – while much of the country remains mired in a big dry that has lasted up to seven years – is incredibly hard-hearted and short-sighted,” Mr Truss said.

He used to be the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. He ought to understand how it works.

In September, when the drought was looking worse, more appropriations were required. When the outlook is worse, in a demand-driven program you do not change the rules for who qualifies so that when times are tougher more people will qualify and you will need more money. When the forecasts improve because there has been sustained rain in some—not all—parts of Australia, you do not change the eligibility rules; you have to change the forecasts. This means either one of two things. One of the following two things has to be true—and I am not sure which is more frightening. Either the Leader of the Nationals knew full well what was going on, decided to con the people of rural and regional Australia about what was happening with the exceptional circumstances forecasts being changed and ran a scare campaign so that people who were eligible might not even bother to apply, because

he put the message out that the changes had all gone through, or—actually, I reckon this one is more frightening—he just does not understand how it works. Given that he used to be the minister for agriculture, you would want to think he at least understands how exceptional circumstances works. But with the fear campaign that he has run, completely irresponsibly and only to the detriment of primary producers, we have ended up with a situation where the explanation is either that he did not understand it or that he did understand it and decided to run the fear campaign anyway.

The great irony of it is that, having run the whole fear campaign, he then comes into the parliament to speak about the Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 1) 2007-2008 and the Appropriation (Drought and Equine Influenza Assistance) Bill (No. 2) 2007-2008, appropriation legislation that is about providing more money. How do you know that appropriation legislation providing more money is coming up and then speak to it while at the same time running a fear campaign saying the government are not looking after the farmers because everything is being cut? If everything is being cut, we are letting down the farmers and all the things that the Leader of the Nationals has claimed are true, why do we have appropriation legislation before the parliament right now for more money? When you make cuts in agriculture and you are taking away a whole lot of entitlements for farmers, it is unlikely that in the process you will be spending more. Yet we have appropriation legislation that has been on the *Notice Paper*. When money is being appropriated it is because the money is going to the department; that is the concept of an appropriation. I think every other member in the parliament understands that. It is a bit tragic that the person who does not understand it is leading the political party that claims it is the

representative of the bush. It is an extraordinary claim.

As we go through the first speeches, which are going to start the moment I sit down, I will enjoy hearing the stories and finding out the number of people who now represent this side of the House who have significant primary producers within their seats—including, as the member for Kennedy said, those sugar seats that were won by the government at the election. Anyone who wants to claim that the National Party represents the bush really needs to have another look at what the people in the bush are deciding to do with their votes.

The appropriation bills before us will provide additional funding for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to continue delivering drought relief and to provide assistance to the horse industry as a result of the equine influenza outbreak. Given the comments from the member for Wide Bay, the Leader of the National Party, I must say that for him to be in here speaking on funding to do with the outbreak of equine influenza holds a very deep irony. I will have to await the outcome of the inquiries currently underway before I have an opportunity to say more, but I suspect the opportunity to say more will come.

The measures were announced last year by the previous government as drought conditions worsened and, as conditions improved subsequently, the measures were modified to provide an immediate response to the equine influenza outbreak last August. I am pleased to advise the House that, despite the concerns about how the outbreak initially occurred, it does appear that the measures taken subsequently mean that we are hopeful—and I do not want to be overly optimistic—that by 14 March there will no longer be red and purple zones in Australia with respect to equine influenza. There is

still a way to go. A lot of people have had intense hardship on this—and I have to say that they include a lot of small businesses. They have fallen shy of the guidelines but have suffered in a very serious way. The equine influenza assistance would have run out on 8 February—last week—but it will now continue until 14 March.

The assistance is vital to farmers and farm dependent small business operators affected by the drought and to those affected by the horse flu outbreak. Funding for the measures was not included in the May 2007 budget. They were announced by the previous government in September and October 2007. The equine influenza measures were extended by the government earlier this month.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has been meeting all payments for the assistance packages from its existing appropriations, but it is now in urgent need of additional funding. When this appears in the *Hansard*, for the benefit of the Leader of the National Party, existing appropriations—footnote: more money—are otherwise due to run out at the end of February. The amounts and assistance provided are as follows: drought assistance measure, \$699.127 million—that is extra; equine influenza assistance measures, \$255.705 million—once again, that is extra; and the Equine Influenza National Eradication Response, \$97.2 million—and again, that is extra. This money will allow the department to continue funding these vital assistance measures.

While the Leader of the National Party might be able to get a run from time to time on the radio with the campaign he has tried to run of late, ultimately, if primary producers lose out and lose out significantly from a fear campaign that makes them think they are not entitled to benefits which are available to them, there will be nothing but shame for the National Party in the bush.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (5.02 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

APPROPRIATION (DROUGHT AND EQUINE INFLUENZA ASSISTANCE) BILL (No. 2) 2007-2008

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (5.04 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

AGED CARE AMENDMENT (2008 MEASURES No. 1) BILL 2008

Debate resumed.

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (5.05 pm)—Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, I would like to pass on my congratulations to you on your election to the role of Deputy Speaker in the House. And through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would also like to congratulate the member for Richmond on her appointment as Minister for Ageing. The Minister for Ageing and I actually share a common border. We have adjoining electorates. I think our new roles are very appropriate in that we represent many constituents who are older Australians. I wish her well in her new role.

The bill before the House today was in fact introduced by the former Minister for Ageing under the coalition government. The bill lapsed with the proroguing of the parliament for the general election in November. Early in 2007, the then coalition government announced a \$1.6 billion package of reforms, known as Securing the Future of Aged Care for Australians. It was aimed at creating a fairer system to finance aged care, provide greater access to capital funding in high care and continue to grow and develop care for people in their own homes. The Aged Care Amendment (2008 Measures No. 1) Bill 2008 provides the framework necessary to implement the financial aspects of those significant reforms.

There is no doubt that Australia's population is changing, with an increase in the number of older Australians who need help and support from the government. These older Australians need to be assured that they can age with dignity, supported by the appropriate services to assist them, whether that be at home or in an aged-care facility. My own electorate of McPherson on the Gold Coast is a great example of an older age profile. More than 22,000 of my constituents are aged over 65, and there are 15 aged-care facilities in the electorate, with four more aged-care facilities in the pipeline. Supporting those aged-care facilities are many services that assist and help people to age with dignity in their own homes.

The 2004 report by Professor Warren Hogan highlighted the need to improve funding of our aged-care system, and the former coalition government responded to that report with a \$1.6 billion package of reforms. The bill before the House today amends the Aged Care Act 1997 to simplify and make fairer the fees and charges paid by residents of aged-care facilities, as well as the subsidies paid by the Commonwealth government for residents who cannot fully meet their own

care and accommodation costs. The bill better targets both the asset test that determines the level of accommodation fees required from residents and the aged-care income test. For example, self-funded retirees currently pay higher income tested fees because nearly all of their income is counted under the income test. However, pension income is currently not counted under the income test. This clearly disadvantages self-funded retirees compared to part-pensioners of similar means.

The new income test treats all people in the same way and all income the same, irrespective of whether it is a pension or a private income. The new arrangements will also combine and better target the current concessional resident supplement and the pensioner supplement into a single asset tested accommodation supplement. The maximum level of the new accommodation supplement will also be increased through principles and determinations which will be made under the amended legislation. Self-funded retiree residents with few assets will become eligible for accommodation assistance for the first time from the Commonwealth government. This new income tested fee will apply to new and existing residents. However, it should be noted that fees for existing residents will not increase as a result of this measure but may in fact reduce for some residents.

The bill also broadens the eligibility for community care grants for providers of community aged-care packages and extends eligibility to providers of the flexible care types, Extended Aged Care at Home and Extended Aged Care at Home Dementia. That means that new and existing community care recipients will benefit from this measure through better assurance of quality care in the community. Recipients will also have more information about their service choices and complaints processes. Service providers

will be assisted by the development of mechanisms to improve the quality of service provision and the identification of best practice approaches. The bill also extends the application of the aged-care legislation to include the territory of Christmas Island and the territory of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

The bill before us today also makes technical amendments to improve consistency and clarity within the legislation, addresses unintended consequences of the operation of the legislation and streamlines the administration of the legislation. These minor technical changes complement the changes I have described above.

It is proposed, with the agreement of the parliament, that the new arrangements will take effect from 20 March 2008. The opposition offers bipartisan support for the bill and commends the government for not cutting funds to implement these important initiatives that were first flagged by the previous coalition government. There is no doubt that older Australians, those very special people who have helped build the strong nation we have today, need confidence in our aged-care systems. They need to know that there is security for the future in the delivery of first-class services and aged-care facilities. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond—Minister for Ageing) (5.11 pm)—Firstly, I thank the member for McPherson for her contribution to the debate and her support of the Aged Care Amendment (2008 Measures No. 1) Bill 2008. This is indeed a very important bill that enables implementation of changes to the Aged Care Act 1997. It is particularly important, given the ageing population, the increasing demand for residential aged-care services and the need to ensure that the residential care provided to our elderly is and continues to be of the highest possible standard. As has been noted, the proposed

amendments to the Aged Care Act 1997 simplify and make fairer the fees and charges paid by residents as well as the accommodation supplements paid by the government for residents who cannot fully meet their own accommodation costs.

Most importantly, the bill removes existing inconsistencies between and inequities in the treatment of pensioners and self-funded retirees. The changes ensure that all people will be treated alike, whether it be for the purpose of assessing a person's contribution to their accommodation costs or a person's contribution to their care costs. The amendments will also enable the phasing in of higher levels of government accommodation subsidies, and this will improve the revenue stream available to aged-care providers to support their continued investment in high-level care. Also, important resident safeguards that have been an integral part of the financing system for aged care will continue. These will be supplemented by additional protections to ensure the proposed changes do not adversely affect any existing residents. Chief among these safeguards is that a resident's accommodation charge will not be increased for the entire time that a resident remains in continuous care. The maximum charge will continue to be determined based upon assessable assets at the time of entry to care and will remain fixed. Even if a resident transfers between homes within 28 days, the maximum level of their charge in the new home will be capped at the level of the charge they paid to the first aged-care home.

In the lead-up to the implementation of the changes on 20 March 2008, the Department of Health and Ageing will be working closely with care recipients, their families and aged-care providers. This is critical to ensure a smooth transition to the new system and to ensure that care recipients, their families and providers are aware of the changes in their rights and responsibilities under the

legislation. The Department of Health and Ageing will be issuing detailed information about the changes and of course anyone with any queries can also directly contact the aged-care information hotline on 1800500853.

Certainly, when it comes to aged care and aged-care services, we saw 11 years of neglect and underinvestment by the Howard government. Under the Howard government, we saw major problems in relation to bed shortages and we saw waiting times for care lengthen. Indeed, we now have fewer beds per capita than we had in 1996. In that time we also saw a huge turnover of ministers for ageing; indeed, it was a bit of a revolving door, with seven ministers in 11 years. As I have said, there was a massive underinvestment in aged care. The Howard government's bed allocation system did not reflect the needs of older Australians and it did not ensure that areas with the greatest shortage were able to provide aged care. The Rudd Labor government is very concerned and wants to make sure that older Australians receive appropriate care for their needs.

Elderly people have every right to receive hospital care in the same way as any other Australian, but the Howard government presided over such a serious decline in aged-care beds that frail older people did not receive appropriate care for their needs and ended up inappropriately accommodated in hospitals. Indeed, as I have said, under the Howard government, aged-care bed shortages across Australia worsened and waiting times for care lengthened.

The *Caring for our health?* report by state and territory health ministers, which was released in June 2007, stated that in August 2006 there were about 2,300 older people in public hospitals who should have been in an aged-care facility. The average cost of a hospital bed to the states and territories is about

\$1,120 a day, while the average cost of an aged-care bed to the Commonwealth is about \$100 a day. This means that, in a single year, it costs \$937 million to accommodate 2,300 frail older people in hospital on any one night but it would cost only \$83 million to provide more appropriate aged-care services. So this is, indeed, a cost shift to the state health system of \$854 million. Of course, if frail older people are not receiving appropriate care services, it means that much-needed hospital beds are unavailable to Australians of all ages waiting for surgery or medical treatment. Under the Howard government, the aged-care sector also faced increasing difficulty in attracting and retaining nurses and care staff.

In contrast, the Rudd Labor government, to meet the challenges of the 21st century, is committed to building a modern Australia. Of course, one of those major challenges is the ageing of our population. The federal government will tackle issues affecting the ageing of the population through action—in particular, also working with the states—to get that outcome. The government will make reforming the transition from hospital to aged care a priority for those older Australians who need care services. The government has committed to provide up to 2,000 transition care beds and up to 2,500 aged-care beds. The government has also pledged to provide \$300 million in zero-interest loans to construct and extend residential aged care in areas of need. Also, reform of the existing aged-care planning and allocation arrangements will be undertaken to ensure that the time between the allocation of new places and their becoming operational is reduced to a minimum.

To tackle the nursing workforce shortage, the government has announced the establishment of a program to bring nurses back into the hospital and aged-care workforce. The Commonwealth will increase the num-

ber of qualified nurses in aged-care services by providing a cash bonus of \$6,000 each for up to 1,000 nurses who return to work in the aged-care sector after at least a 12-month absence. An additional \$1,000 will be provided to aged-care providers for each eligible nurse they employ; this will assist with the cost of retraining and reskilling each nurse. The number of training places for personal care workers is also being increased with an additional 450,000 vocational education and training places.

It is an absolute honour and privilege to be the Minister for Ageing. Since being appointed, it has been my privilege to attend, as part of my official duties, such places as St Bartholomew's House in Perth, which is a \$25 million joint funding project with the Western Australian government for a new facility for elderly disadvantaged men. It was also wonderful to attend Southern Cross Care in Darwin to announce a \$6.5 million plan for a new aged-care home for disadvantaged Australians; in Adelaide to announce 375 new bed licences for South Australia; in Melbourne to announce 60 new beds for eastern Melbourne; and in the Southern Highlands, where I had the pleasure of attending the opening of stage 1 of a 90-bed extension at Warrigal Care's Bundanoon facility.

I look forward to continuing to work closely with residents, their families and the aged-care sector to ensure that our seniors get the care and services they need and deserve. In closing, I reiterate my thanks to the member for McPherson, who contributed to the debate on this bill, for her support. As has been recognised, this bill is necessary for the reform of aged-care financing and for ensuring that the system not only supports increasing demand but does so in a manner that is indeed equitable and sustainable for our ageing population.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond—Minister for Ageing) (5.20 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Mr Hale, for the committee elected to prepare an address-in-reply to the speech of His Excellency the Governor-General, presented the proposed address, which was read by the Clerk.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call Mr Hale, I remind honourable members that this is his first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

Mr HALE (Solomon) (5.22 pm)—I move:

That the Address be agreed to.

Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on becoming the new Speaker of the House of Representatives. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Prime Minister for this opportunity and the privilege to move this motion in reply to the Governor-General's speech, on a day that our community, our party and our Prime Minister have ensured will be a significant one in our history. To stand here today, in the arena where for over 100 years the passions, values, wisdom and vision of so many Australians of all walks of life have shaped our great nation, is truly a humbling experience. I acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, the Ngunnawal people, who have lived in the region around Canberra for over 20,000 years. It is also appropriate, as the new member for Solo-

mon, to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the region I represent, the Larrakia people, many of whom are here today.

There are a number of people who have supported me. Bob and Bev Hale, my parents, are here with me today. They have been fantastic role models for me in my life and recently celebrated 41 years of marriage. They have always encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams and have supported me to that end. I have a wonderful relationship with them and appreciate their support. I thank my wife, Jennifer, for her support and love and my five children, Robert, Anthony, Jaclyn, Gabby and Dominic, all of whom are here today. Thank you also to my sister Jacintha, her family and my wife's family. Thank you to the Australian Labor Party, the Northern Territory secretary, George Addison, the honourable member for Lingiari and Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Warren Snowdon, and Northern Territory Senator Trish Crossin, for their much valued advice since being preselected on 16 February 2007. To all other people who have helped me along the way—they know who they are; and some, I know, would wish to remain anonymous—I sincerely thank you for your contribution.

The electorate of Solomon consists of the cities of Darwin and Palmerston. It is a part of Australia with a rich cultural heritage and magnificent natural endowment. It is a place of great historical significance and considerable strategic importance to the nation. I was born in the Queensland town of Ipswich in 1969. My parents took up teaching positions in Maningrida, a community in Arnhem Land, in 1974. The general consensus at the time amongst the extended family in Queensland was that the urge to discover the last frontier would wear off quickly and they would be back in six months. I am forever grateful to them both that we did not leave.

I believe that living in the Northern Territory, coupled with the role models my parents have been, has shaped my character. I would go as far as to say that if every Australian could live in a place like the Northern Territory, or in an Aboriginal community, during their childhood, we would be a far better place. I feel very fortunate that I have done both.

During my time in Maningrida I met the then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. There was much excitement in the Hale household. I grew up in a very Labor environment and would often listen to renditions of the *Worker's Song* sung by dad—depending on how late it was on a Friday night. But the passion they had for the underdog, for the worker or for the less fortunate rubbed off on me, and that is the passion that I carry with me today. That is what we do in this party. It echoes the sentiment, Mr Speaker, that you expressed in your first speech to this House—I will not go into the year!—when you quoted Henry James Scullin stating: 'Justice and humanity demand interference whenever the weak are being crushed by the strong.'

I attended the first meeting the Prime Minister had with the leaders of the various Aboriginal land councils, organisations and communities. It is often said that a good listener is the wisest of persons, so it was no surprise to me at this meeting that the Prime Minister simply listened. One of the reasons these cultures have survived for so long is their ability to change over time. However, it is us who need to change. We need to listen to what our Indigenous brothers and sisters are saying to us and to act on what we are hearing. As a nation we can now move forward and work to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity. It is not about finding someone to blame or to seek retribution; it is about recognising the

suffering of Indigenous people and acknowledging that things should have been done differently. In the words of a former Prime Minister, it is about opening our hearts.

The significance of the apology to the stolen generations should not be lost by political differences or opposing media opinion. The word 'sorry' will forever hold a special significance for all of us in this chamber and around the country on what has been a truly historic day for Australia. Today we start a new chapter. We have opened our hearts; now it is time to use our hands and our heads to ensure all Australians have every opportunity to realise their full potential.

Solomon is home to people from all corners of the globe, and this diversity has shaped our part of the world for the better. The positive influence that the Chinese community has had on the development of Palmerston and Darwin has been profound. With a history in the Territory stretching back over 100 years, one only has to take a walk around Darwin or visit any of the many markets to understand how this presence has enriched Darwin and Palmerston. It is fantastic to see the new Chinatown development rising on Mitchell Street and, like many Territorians, I can't wait to see this project completed. As the Chinese are currently celebrating a new year, the Year of the Rat, let me take this opportunity to say to all Chinese Australians: Gong Hee Fat Choy—Happy New Year!

The Greek community has also had a profound effect on the development of Solomon. The ties between Darwin and Greece go back many decades, and Darwin has a sister relationship with Kalymnos. Like many Territorians, I look forward each year to sharing in the festivities of the Greek Glenti on the Esplanade. I can see Tony Burke nodding there!

I have used two examples there, not to diminish the enormous contribution many

other communities make to the electorate of Solomon but to give a flavour of the wonderfully diverse and rich cultures that make Darwin and Palmerston such a great place to live.

It was with a great deal of excitement that I was recently appointed a special adviser to the new Minister for Sport and Minister for Youth, the member for Adelaide. I congratulate her on her appointments. I believe that sport is the base to much of Australia's community fabric. The enthusiasm we as Australians have for our sport and our sporting heroes is known and respected around the world. We cry with our cricket captains, duck and weave with our boxers and readily adopt people from other countries if they wish to continue their chosen sport under the Australia flag. We sing about it, we paint our faces and we tattoo our bodies—and many a family feud occurs when rival teams clash on the field of battle. But all the time we maintain our sense of humour and an ability to laugh at ourselves, and I hope we never lose those two traits as a country. In the Northern Territory, we have produced many champions in a wide range of sports. Today I noticed Essendon legend Michael Long was here to celebrate the apology. What a legend he has been for the Territory. There are too many to mention for fear of missing one. The key is to get kids into the habit early in life to ensure it is a positive influence on them for their entire lives.

On Christmas Day last year, after having breakfast with family, I visited St Vincent de Paul's Christmas luncheon for the needy and homeless. Many of the people there use the services provided most days and would not survive if those services were not there. However, they still had a sense of humour. I overheard one patron say to another, 'Things must be really bad—even Damian Hale has to come here for lunch!' As they finished lunch, they dispersed back into the escarp-

ment. Some live in the 'long grass'; others live in doorways in the city centre, under bridges or in bus shelters. There are 100,000 homeless people in Australia, many of them children; that figure is not acceptable. Organisations such as St Vincent de Paul, Mission Australia and the Salvation Army are stretched well beyond their limits at present. One of the great challenges that face the new government is to bridge the gap in Australia between the people who are enjoying the fruits which come at times of economic prosperity and the people who have missed out on this economic prosperity. I appreciate the strong leadership the Prime Minister has exercised on social equity. I welcome the positive steps the government has taken since, and we will work in government to achieve real results in this area.

As a government, we need to make decisions on the role that the north of Australia will play in Australia's future development and population expansion. The shortage of water in many parts of Australia begs the question: should we be looking north for the major future expansion of our population? Obviously, the issues of responsible water use and land use need to be considered. Climate change has caused all of us to reassess our role on this planet. We are all only custodians of the environment and we need to make sure we preserve it for future generations.

The north of Australia has an amazing amount to offer young people currently residing in the southern states. The development will need to be sustainable; it will need to be well planned and measured. It is my belief that the Northern Territory is the future of Australia. The Northern Territory still offers itself as a frontier for all young people in Australia to come and make their mark. The government's housing affordability scheme is a step in the right direction for the people of Solomon, many of whom have been un-

able to afford to buy into the current markets of Darwin and Palmerston. I urge my colleagues to embrace the development of north Australia and to understand the financial commitment that is needed to develop the Northern Territory in its future expansion.

We are currently experiencing a skill shortage in Solomon, similar to the rest of Australia; however, it has been magnified by our robust economy, due in most part to the resources boom. Mining continues to be fantastic for the economy of the north; however, it has also contributed in part to putting pressure on skill capacity requirements. A lack of investment in skilling our population has also left a chronic shortage of skills Australia wide and even more so in the underpopulated north. As a qualified greenkeeper and a Northern Territory and Australian Apprentice of the Year, I understand the value of a trade certificate. Trade certificates will survive favourable and not so favourable economic conditions. Paul Henderson, our Chief Minister, is a qualified marine fitter, an apprenticeship he completed in an English shipyard—but we will not hold that against him. The value of the trade certificate will never be underestimated. It is essential that we continue to invest in other industries to further drive our economic development. This will ensure we are not solely reliant on the resources boom. The government's commitment to an education revolution has also been keenly received, as has further investment in trade training centres in schools.

The Darwin Convention Centre and waterfront development is nearing completion and already has in excess of 30 bookings. The Darwin skyline has some 13 cranes operating as developers realise the opportunities in Darwin. Recently released figures estimate that some \$5 billion worth of work is currently in progress in Darwin alone—not bad considering the population of the Northern Territory is just over 200,000. The nearby

city of Palmerston and the adjacent rural area are in the top 10 fastest growing areas in Australia. The time is right for further investment in the Northern Territory.

On 19 February—next week—we will mark the 66th anniversary of the bombing of Darwin, the day that World War II came to Australian shores. It is a reminder of the sacrifices many brave men and women have made and continue to make to defend the democracy we enjoy and often take for granted. Further to this thought is the sacrifices the families of defence personnel make, especially when their loved ones are overseas. There are close to 13,000 defence personnel from the tri-services in Solomon alone, many of whom have been or will be deployed at some stage.

Being in government means we have a job of work to do. It is about delivering on our commitments to the people of Solomon and Australia. For Solomon, it is commitments such as extending Tiger Brennan Drive, establishing a superclinic in Palmerston, installing CCTV cameras to make our community safer and providing more computers in our schools.

The historic resilience of the people I represent never fails to amaze me. Darwin was bombed in 1942 and blown away in 1974, but the reason it always bounces back is simple: it's the people. It is a privilege and a pleasure to represent people with passion, something I will never take for granted. We have a balance of purpose, a positive business environment, a strong union movement and government leadership, which have given the Northern Territory a vibrant economy. In the electorate of Solomon, we have been able to achieve this economy with strong business acumen and disciplined union activity, which endeavours to deliver benefits for everyone. The electorate of Solomon is a melting pot of multicultural

cuisine and truly represents all that is great about living in Australia. I am honoured to move this motion in reply to the Governor-General's address.

The SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Mrs D'Ath—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

The SPEAKER—The question is that the address be agreed to. I call the Minister for Home Affairs, who, whilst making his first speech in this place and therefore deserving of the extension of the usual courtesies, has other, greater experience.

Mr DEBUS (Macquarie—Minister for Home Affairs) (5.37 pm)—I rise to speak for the first time as the member for Macquarie. I also acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, the Ngunnawal people. It has been my enormous privilege to represent the people of the Blue Mountains in the New South Wales state legislature for many years. And it is now an even greater privilege to be the Labor member for a Macquarie electorate which again includes Lithgow, Bathurst and Oberon. It is the seat held by Ben Chifley, the man who fought the banks, who carried himself with extraordinary integrity through massive upheaval in the Depression-affected Labor Party, who fought for a decent social security net for the unemployed, who was Curtin's strongest supporter when a Labor government saw Australia through the Second World War and who with great competence saw Australia through a dramatic period of postwar reconstruction. We would not now endorse every one of his attitudes and views—he was of course a man of his time—but few would seek to deny his magnificent status in the history of this nation or the profound regard with which his memory is now held in my electorate.

The seat of Macquarie represents most—not quite all, but most—of the spectrum of

Australian society and opinion. Our best guess is that, at the general election of 2004, the vote of the major parties in the subdivisions that make up the new seat was almost exactly evenly divided. The state seat of Blue Mountains, half of Macquarie, has not been out of government for half a century. We reflect the mood of the nation.

Nor are we short of history in the seat of Macquarie. I am aware of evidence of Aboriginal occupation for around 25,000 years, but it is almost certainly much longer—Daruk, Gundangurra, Wiradjiri. Bathurst is the oldest European settlement west of the Great Divide. A Government House was erected there for Macquarie in 1817. The agricultural landscape of the Upper Macquarie Valley is the oldest in the nation; the agricultural landscape in the Oberon Shire might well be the most beautiful. William Cox had built a road across the Blue Mountains by January 1815. Charles Darwin travelled from Sydney to Bathurst in 1836 and made some very good observations on the geomorphology of the Blue Mountains. In 1851, the gold rushes began near Bathurst.

Lithgow is a cradle of Australian industry; the ironworks established there in 1875 were transferred to Port Kembla in 1928. Thomas Sutcliffe Mort established an abattoir and freezing works in 1873. The Blue Mountains saw the beginning of the modern tourism industry. The conservation movement in Australia may be said to have begun with the early attempts to preserve what has now become the World Heritage Blue Mountains National Park.

Chifley won this seat in 1928 and lost it by the narrowest of margins as Minister for Defence in 1931, when the Scullin government was swept from power. Having lost my own seat, as a state minister, in 1988 by an even narrower margin—through the combined efforts of anti-gun control campaigners

and extremists opposed to homosexual law reform—I hope I have some limited insight into what Chifley then experienced as he struggled through the 1930s, finally recaptured the seat in 1940 and, of course, famously served the people of his electorate until his death in 1951, when he was replaced by Tony Luchetti for the ALP.

Malcolm Mackerras calculated that Tony's personal vote was twice as high as that of any other member of the House, and he served until 1975. I knew Tony Luchetti as I have known later members for Macquarie and Calare. David Simmons and Ross Free became ministers in the Hawke government. Maggie Deahm, member for Macquarie from 1993 to 1996, staffed a polling booth for me at the last election. Alistair Webster, Liberal member from 1984 to 1993, is still active locally. Kerry Bartlett was my Liberal opponent at the last election and I salute him for his hard and fair campaign.

Peter Andren, member for Calare from 1996 to 2007, had all those high qualities that were so sincerely described in the speeches by the Prime Minister and the member for New England on yesterday's condolence motion. Nobody campaigning as I did in Bathurst and Lithgow could have had the slightest doubt that Peter was a man of profound integrity at both a political and a personal level or that his constituents were almost universally of that opinion. I honour him and I believe that serious practitioners of politics will be learning from him for years to come.

This is my third or fourth career. I have been a journalist, a lawyer and a politician—three, I think I can safely say, of the most commonly, and unfairly, derided professions in our culture. I have indeed seen the worst of all three professions, but overwhelmingly I have seen the best. Contrary to popular opinion, Australian democracy is well served

by the great majority of those who enter public life and by the scrutiny provided by journalists, whatever excesses may occasionally occur. And we too easily take for granted the probity and rigour of our legal system, the high standards espoused by the legal profession and, most of all, the independence and capacity of our judges.

When I retired from the parliament of New South Wales in March last year, I was somewhat tempted by the idea of a quieter life and I was conscious of the sacrifices my family had already made. In the end, though, my desire to participate in a process of national renewal under a new Labor government was too strong. I had found myself appalled by attacks upon refugees. As a person committed to reconciliation with Aboriginal people, I had watched in dismay as a discourse of blame, abuse and division once again took hold. I had seen the gargoyles of the right-wing commentariat encouraged to create the straw man of the activist judge as a weapon of intimidation against the courts. I had noticed the tendency to deride well-reasoned judgements based on sound legal principle if they took into account human rights or considerations of international obligation. Under the strictures of the previous government, it had begun to seem very old-fashioned to espouse notions of tolerance and inclusiveness, to look to Australia in the context of a thriving participant in the Asian region rather than the last outpost of some postcolonial dream, to view the arts and our great cultural institutions as vital to the growth of Australia as a society and to acknowledge the proud history of the trade union movement in defending the rights of working people.

In one of the most satisfying achievements that I had as the Attorney General of the state of New South Wales, I was able to assist in the fight to bring the James Hardie group of companies to account for their atrocious

treatment of victims of asbestosis. With the late, great Bernie Banton, for whom we had condolences yesterday, and my new parliamentary colleague Greg Combet, we worked to bring James Hardie to the negotiating table and we ultimately succeeded. When the deal was finally done, Greg caught a cab to Sydney airport to fly back to Melbourne and I saw, with my own eyes, members of the public surrounding him at the taxi rank and waving through the cab windows at intersections when they recognised him. As the Howard government churned out its tedious anti-union propaganda, I thought about the sight of Combet, one of those reviled union bosses, cheered on street corners by random passers-by like a visiting rock star, and I began to hope that it was the federal government and not I who was out of touch with the Australian people. To my delight, as I began to campaign in the seat of Macquarie last April, I discovered that, indeed, it was not I who was out of step. As I stood on railway stations, walked through shopping centres and knocked on doors, I encountered an enthusiasm for change which I had rarely experienced. The Work Choices legislation, the refusal to sign Kyoto, the war in Iraq, the Wheat Board scandal and the vilification of refugees and unionists did not sit well with the coalminer in Lithgow, the prison officer in Oberon, the doctor in Bathurst and the retired clergyman in Wentworth Falls. The people once represented by Chifley were inspired by the new vision Kevin Rudd presented—not all of them, of course, but they came out in their hundreds in shopping centres to tell me so—and they came out to vote.

So what now is the challenge? It is to keep faith and to help create a new modern society. I have lost count of the number of people who talked with me in the supermarket in Katoomba, in the pub in Springwood and at a preschool in Lithgow with metaphors of renewal: ‘It feels like someone has opened the

windows’; ‘I feel hope for the future again’; ‘I feel proud of my country again.’

In the portfolio with which I have been entrusted, there are many opportunities to keep that pact of trust with the Australian people. Home Affairs, I am reliably informed, is a departmental configuration which dates back to 1901. It was one of the first seven departments of the Commonwealth. I am also told that one of the first ministers for Home Affairs was King O’Malley—although I have been advised against overstating my connection in that regard unless I want a good seat in an Irish pub. The portfolio today is, of course, infinitely more sophisticated and complex than it was then, covering areas within the Attorney-General’s Department, including criminal law and its reform, strategies for dealing with money laundering and drugs, the operations of the Australian Crime Commission and much else; also the Australian Customs Service, the Australian Federal Police and Commonwealth territories. Our focus is not only domestic but also on Australia’s role in supporting our neighbours in the Asia Pacific. That role is notably carried out by the Australian Federal Police—one of the best and most educated forces in the world, leaders in building and promoting positive relations in our region. And, similarly, the Customs Service performs miracles on a daily basis.

I must say that, as a former Attorney General, I firmly reject the notion that law enforcement agencies and the courts need to be at odds. To the contrary, the professionalism of our police can only be enhanced by the rigour and scrutiny brought to them by the courts. I have myself had a lifelong interest in the criminal law, in schemes to divert offenders from custody and in prison reform. Priority reforms for 2008, in my eyes, are the issues of rights for victims of crime and sentencing and offender management. But I am

also keen to work with colleagues on coordination of criminal justice reform; for example, the Model Criminal Code and its implementation. I want to move away from the adversarial approach which characterised the previous government and to take a consultative approach, including the legal profession. In New South Wales I found in the past the contribution of the Law Society and particularly the Bar Association to be invaluable, and I propose, in consequence, to hold a major forum later this year at which academics, the profession, the Australian Institute of Criminology, the Law Reform Commission and police unions will all be invited to participate and discuss proposals for reforms to federal criminal justice legislation.

I would be remiss on today of all days in the history of our parliament if I did not take the opportunity to mention also my great commitment to issues of Indigenous law and justice—a commitment which began with my involvement long ago in the first Aboriginal Legal Service at Redfern. I am committed to improving Indigenous community safety, to reducing Indigenous overrepresentation in the justice system and to doing my utmost, in cooperation with ministerial colleagues around the country, to protect Indigenous children. My responsibilities for criminal justice issues, crime prevention, victims of crime and Indigenous justice matters will allow me to follow through on important issues with which I have dealt in the past.

Shortly, I shall visit the Northern Territory to discuss the implementation of aspects of the Northern Territory emergency response in that jurisdiction from the point of view of my portfolio. I know that the House was discussing this issue earlier today. I will be making that visit well aware that the emergency response is often referred to as ‘the intervention’ in the Northern Territory, where also, as the minister responsible to territories,

I am overseeing a range of programs that have caused considerable comment and controversy in the Territory. As members are aware, the government supports a range of programs in place now in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, but with the support we are also aware that we have responsibilities and I accept the responsibility to ensure that, where the measures are working, they are continued and also to find out what we can do better. I will be doing so by working with people on the ground and by taking the advice of experts. I intend to work closely with Territory ministers to ensure that the Home Affairs portfolio serves the Northern Territory community just as well as it must serve all Australians in all jurisdictions.

It is not just the Northern Territory that requires our dedicated attention to criminal justice and Indigenous justice issues. The agencies reporting to me have been charged with a responsibility to ensure, in the spirit of reconciliation which this House has come to terms with this week, that we are closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage and decreasing the level of Indigenous representation in the criminal justice system Australia wide. And I am particularly interested in working with the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General to develop a national strategic framework for Indigenous law and justice. The Council of Australian Governments recently agreed to take action to address Indigenous disadvantage, focusing on gaps in life expectancy, child mortality, literacy and numeracy. Child abuse not only has immediate physical, social and emotional health consequences for children but also has crippling consequences for long-term life directions. We need a broad and balanced approach, informed by Indigenous voices, organisations and by experts, that involves both justice sector agencies and prevention approaches.

Mr Speaker, I could test the patience of this chamber for much longer by talking of national issues and the excitement I feel at the historic opportunity this government has been given by the Australian people to build our economy for the future, to redress inequality, to restore the environment. But the timeworn maxim rightly states that ultimately all politics is local, so I will return to the electorate of Macquarie and pay tribute to those who worked so hard to assist in my campaign. They range from a few stalwart comrades like Merv Savage and Jim Angel, who have worked with me across eight elections, to my new friends in Bathurst and Lithgow who were able during the course of half a year to introduce me into the heart of their own communities.

My campaign was supported actively by literally hundreds of volunteers—and I hope I have sufficiently thanked them in one way or another in the last couple of months. Knowing that I could spend 20 minutes just reading out their names, I mention only a few among them: my astoundingly efficient campaign manager, Brenda Finlayson; Luke Foley; Amber Jacobus; my campaign committee chair, Wayne McAndrew; Mike and Sue Dickson; Councillor Paul Haysom; former Senator Sue West; Dr Chris Halloway; Cath Knowles; Mark Worthington; Arthur Williams; Mathew Martin; Pat Okon; Alex Bukarica; Gary Brown; Andrew Teece; Don Macgregor; Marilla North; Blair Kavanagh; Sarah Shrubbs; Mark Andrews; Susan Elfert; Pam Crafoord; Mick Fell; Rose Tracey; Peter Letts; Karl Bennett; Sandra Stringer; Amanda Blanch; Steve Bevis; and Judy Brentnall. You can see that we are not intensely multicultural in Macquarie.

I was especially assisted by the state member for Bathurst, Gerard Martin, and his electorate officer, Fran Van Dartel, and by our duty senator, the Hon. Steve Hutchins, who was also active famously in the seat of

Lindsay, and by Phil Koperberg, state member for Blue Mountains. I should also mention generous support from friends outside the electorate, not least Elsa Atkin, Yolanda Lucire, Errol Sullivan and Sally McInerney. And I am particularly indebted to a number of trade unions—the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, the LHMU, the Finance Sector Union, the PSA and especially the CFMEU through its mining and construction divisions. A profoundly important contribution was made by the Your Rights at Work campaign coordinated in Macquarie by Daniel Walton. Throughout these arduous months I had the experience common to many—probably everybody in this House—the support of my family was the foundation upon which all else stood, and my partner, Leela, who had been anticipating a somewhat easier life in the last year, was absolutely steadfast.

During the election campaign the government laid down a significant program for the next three years and beyond in the electorate of Macquarie. The central west of New South Wales stands in great need of the roll-out of high-speed broadband internet infrastructure. Within the great agenda for improving education at all levels, the promised upgrading of trade training facilities and computer upgrading at secondary schools will be of particular importance to school retention and workforce participation rates. New projects to improve the Great Western Highway and the investigation by Infrastructure Australia of long-term transport needs are critical for regional development. Substantial water-saving projects in Lithgow and Oberon will drought-proof local industry while improving environmental flows, especially in the Fish River. I am committed to supporting the establishment over time of new industries and job opportunities in the Lithgow Valley and in Bathurst.

In the Blue Mountains a modified version of the GP Super Clinic and a number of new childcare centres are high on the government's priorities. Here too, road and internet infrastructure improvements are critical. The improvement to health services will generally be an important task, but everywhere in my electorate an improvement to the funding of the dental health programs neglected by the last government is of the greatest significance to people who are less well off.

It is hard to imagine a better day upon which one might make an inaugural speech in this House. Earlier I said that the new government had to keep faith with those who wanted a new beginning. What better way was there to do so? I look forward to serving the people of Macquarie and the citizens of Australia.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call Mr Robert, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech and I ask the House to extend to him the usual courtesies.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (5.58 pm)—It is with great humility that I rise today to deliver my first speech to the 42nd Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. I am humbled by the trust that the people of Fadden have placed in me as their representative and I can assure them that I will not let them down. I enter this place with youth, vigour, determination and experience to ensure that the people of Fadden have someone that has the courage and capacity to fight for them.

I am especially pleased to have been elected on the 200th anniversary of when a great hero of mine, William Wilberforce, secured passage of the Slave Trade Act that abolished the abhorrent trade throughout the Commonwealth. His firm Christian commitment, his passion for justice and his unstinting resolve to fight for what was right

are a great personal inspiration. I look forward to bringing the same courage of my convictions to the inevitable parliamentary battles that are ahead.

The electorate of Fadden was named for Sir Arthur Fadden, a distinguished parliamentarian who served briefly from August to October 1941 as the Prime Minister of this great nation. He led Australia during a critical period of our history, and he often joked that he was like Noah's flood: he led the nation for 40 days and 40 nights.

There have been three previous members for Fadden. I specifically want to acknowledge the immediate past member, the Hon. David Jull, who held the seat for 23 long years with great distinction. I believe he is the longest-serving Queensland Liberal parliamentarian, and his legacy is surely substantial.

The electorate of Fadden is one of the most beautiful areas of this nation, located in the magnificent Gold Coast. I make this claim with great boldness here in this House, secure in the knowledge that Fadden is the fastest-growing federal electorate in the country, having grown by 31.6 per cent in the last six years. Indeed, more people want to relocate to Fadden than to any other federal electorate represented in this place, and frankly, colleagues, it is not hard to see why. Fadden is as diverse as it is spectacular. The suburbs of Labrador, Runaway Bay, Hollywell and Paradise Point cling to the magnificent Broadwater in the east, one of the nation's great, exquisite playgrounds. To the west are the hinterland suburbs of Nerang, Gaven, Pacific Pines, Oxenford and Upper Coomera, that range from rural to family-friendly suburban areas. To the north are the cane fields of Woongoolba and the emerging areas of Coomera and Stapylton, and in the centre is the magnificent Gold Coast Marine Precinct, boasting some of the world's great

luxury boatbuilders as well as what is arguably the theme park capital of the nation.

Fadden clearly offers a lifestyle unparalleled, with world-class shopping, entertainment and living. There is a strong and vibrant heart to the electorate, and the Gold Coast also boasts the highest number of small to medium enterprises per capita in the nation. Fadden, together with the other two great Gold Coast seats of McPherson and Moncrieff, which are proudly held by Liberal parliamentarians, makes the Gold Coast the small to medium business capital of the nation. Fadden, and the Gold Coast, clearly has much to be proud of.

The background I bring to this place is one that resonates with and complements the broad base of the Liberal Party. I grew up in Bundaberg on a cane farm with hard-working parents who sacrificed a great deal for me and for my brother and sister. My family would later embark on a range of successful small businesses and would prove that hard work, initiative and risk-taking maximise one's opportunity for success. I am forever grateful for my family's unconditional love and support. I owe them a debt of gratitude and acknowledge my parents, Alan and Dorothy Robert, who are in the gallery this afternoon.

The value of family to our way of life is undeniable. The great Christian statesman Edmund Burke spoke of the 'little platoons' of our society—of family, church, neighbourhoods, workplaces and professional associations. He said:

... to love the little platoon we belong to in society is the first principle ... of public affections.

I think we must recognise that the most important of these little platoons is the traditional family unit. Family is the glue that holds society together; indeed, it is the bedrock of the nation. Families must be supported and encouraged, and what constitutes

the traditional family unit should never be weakened. If we lose the family we lose everything.

My family, like many others, struggled financially to ensure that my siblings and I could enjoy the best possible education. I completed my schooling at the Rockhampton Grammar School, and my experience there strengthened my resolve that parents should be able to send their children to a school of their choice. I note that many parents struggle and sacrifice to do so. I firmly believe the federal government has a responsibility to support the private school system as the states do the public system.

I was fortunate at Rockhampton Grammar to secure a scholarship to the Australian Defence Force Academy as an army officer cadet. Twenty years ago this year, I marched into the academy, which is five kilometres down the road, at barely 17 years of age. Five months later I would stand in the military guard of honour that opened this great Parliament House. Following the academy, I attended the Royal Military College Duntroon and was subsequently fortunate to serve with a diverse range of units. These included the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, and the 51st Battalion, Far North Queensland Regiment, based on Thursday Island, which was at the time the largest Indigenous unit in the Defence Force. This period was also a time of study, mostly part-time, for many years, to complete two master's degrees in business administration and information technology, which would prove of tremendous value in later life. My military and tertiary education was instrumental in the success of future endeavours. Both are of great benefit to the development of future leaders and deserve our support.

A great part of my 12-year military career was spent working within military intelligence, specifically in intelligence and secu-

riety. That included a five-month tour of duty with the peace-monitoring force in Bougainville following the civil war. I was proud to have served my country overseas and to have helped bring peace to an island that had suffered so much. I was proud to have worn a military uniform and to have served in the long military tradition of this nation and of my family.

My cousin was the first casualty in Korea as an Air Force pilot, and my uncle Alan was twice wounded in Korea with the 3rd Battalion. My grandfather enlisted at age 42 to fight with the 9th Division in Africa during World War II and would die midwar whilst on leave. His daughter, my mother, was two years old. He was a grandfather I never knew because he loved his country more than he valued his own life. Three cousins, who were brothers, fought in World War I, two of them with the 3rd Light Horse Brigade in Gallipoli. One of them, a young lieutenant with the 8th Light Horse Regiment, gave his life on 7 August 1915 with 233 others when the 8th and 10th Light Horse charged valiantly at the Nek. They lie buried where they fell, as do over 100,000 other Australians buried on foreign soil.

Notwithstanding our military service in the Sudan and the Boer War, that fateful day of 25 April 1915 began a great tradition of men and women serving this Commonwealth—serving us—with honour and distinction in demanding and dangerous operational areas. We owe our veteran community a debt of gratitude that in many ways we can never repay. They have served selflessly, many of them shedding their blood to protect and preserve the rights that we daily take for granted. This place has an absolute responsibility to respect and care for our veteran community. This place must ensure that our great nation remains safe and secure with a Defence Force capable of projecting power wherever it is needed. Our nation has a right

to defend itself and an obligation to all Australians to maintain our national security. I look for inspiration to that great nation of Israel, which has an absolute right to exist and to strongly defend its borders from all aggressors. Its growth and prosperity is an inspiration to all free nations.

Following my military career, a colleague and I founded an IT services firm that has since grown to be a nationwide company. For the last two years our firm has been named in the *Business Review Weekly* Fast 100 list, which recognises the fastest-growing 100 companies in Australia. I was proud to have led our firm during a period of exponential growth. Founding and developing a small business is difficult. It demands tremendous risk-taking, resourcefulness and courage in the early days to go without paying yourself for six months to meet cash flow requirements, to mortgage the family home and to work long hours to get ahead. This is what it means to start and run a small business in Australia. This is what it means to step out and employ fellow Australians.

Small business owners fight a daily battle to survive, to grow, to improve the livelihood of their families and to generate employment. They achieve this in the shadow of ignorant governments that battle tirelessly against them with moribund ideologically based legislation such as unfair dismissal laws, the rolling back of individual statutory agreements, land tax and payroll tax. The sheer notion that Labor state governments still tax the payroll of a small business for simply employing Australian workers is patently ludicrous; it is grossly anti-business and it is anti-employment. I salute all small business owners and I thank you for your contribution to our economy and our way of life. You employ 50 per cent of all Australian workers and you are, indeed, the backbone of this country.

I salute the tens of thousands of Gold Coast small businesses and thank you for the risks that you take. Thank you for employing Australians to help achieve record low unemployment. Thank you for your courage despite the dark, looming spectre of union interference cresting the horizon of your businesses.

I specifically acknowledge my business partners—David Smith, who is in the gallery today, and Andrew Chantler. They embody everything that is great about the Australian business owner: they work hard, they take risks, they put others first and they provide opportunities for everyday, ordinary Australians. I look forward to strongly defending small business in this place against narrow-minded collectivists who know little, if anything at all, of the challenges of the small business environment.

The purpose of my life has always been guided by a strong Christian faith that has set my moral compass and cemented my values. These values led me to become a founding director of Watoto Australia and a member of the Watoto International board, which operates one of the world's largest and most unique orphan programs, operating out of Uganda, where there are currently more than two million orphaned children due to HIV-AIDS and war. The Watoto model is to rescue children and care for their physical, spiritual and emotional needs, including housing them with a mother and seven new siblings. These houses are grouped into villages with electricity, running water, schools, medical clinics and auditoriums. The premise is that orphaned children growing up in a home with a loving mother, with an identity and with an opportunity to go to the best schools, universities and technical colleges, will shine more so than if simply placed in an institution. I believe that, as we rescue a child, we raise a leader and we will rebuild nations. Children are 100 per cent of the fu-

ture of every nation. We have a responsibility to protect our children and provide them with the best of education and care to preserve our nation's future. We also have a responsibility as good international citizens to reach out with appropriate aid and development to build nations and enhance our international security and standing.

My own political journey began very early in life, when I first joined the Liberal Party in 1991. I was motivated to action as I witnessed the diabolical consequences of the recession which, apparently, 'we had to have', the crippling interest rates and the very high level of industrial disputes which so adversely impacted on my family and many surrounding families. Through all of this turbulence, the urgency to ensure that this place governed for all Australia and not just for sectional interests became self-evident. Sir Robert Menzies said to those who came to the Canberra Conference in October 1944:

... what we must look for, and it is a matter of desperate importance to our society, is a true revival of liberal thought which will work for social justice and security, for national power and national progress, and for the full development of the individual citizen ...

These great tenets of what it means to be a Liberal hold as true today as when the party was founded. Among other things, I choose to stand in parliament to defend these views. I firmly believe they represent a path for every good citizen to have not only a chance in life but also a self-respecting life. I am proud of our nation's common Judaeo-Christian heritage and the values that underpin that heritage and, indeed, underpin our society and way of life. We welcome new Australians from all nations and we look forward to them integrating into our great nation and embracing our shared values.

I am proud of the personal freedoms we enjoy, based on a bedrock of Christian based

ethical standards. I believe in the family as the basic building block of society. I believe strongly in the sanctity of life. I stand for one common law for all Australians and will vehemently oppose any move to establish any other parallel law within Australia. I stand for a secure nation able to defend its borders from aggressors, internal or external. I agree with Jefferson that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. I stand for the great tradition of smaller government and deregulation within a set of traditional virtues, initiative, hard work, saving, mateship and a fair go for all. I also support an appropriate safety net to assist the disadvantaged and the hurting without creating an ongoing welfare society.

I am an ardent and passionate supporter of free enterprise and of allowing people to engage in the free market unencumbered by government interference. People need to be provided with incentive and opportunity to better themselves, not mechanisms to vainly attempt a false equality. People must have the basic freedom and right to enter into an employment agreement with their employer, unencumbered by a third party. Small business must be able to operate in an environment of incentive and reward.

I began this speech by saying how humbled I am by the trust placed in me by the people of Fadden. Winning the seat well in the almighty shadow of the enduring legacy and strong personal following of the Hon. David Jull was achieved through the efforts of hundreds of people. I would like to take the opportunity to thank many of them now, as without them I would not stand here today. I have already acknowledged my parents, and I do so again in consideration of their great love and guidance. Thanks also to my brother Ian for never ceasing to believe in me and my sister Lisa, who always ensured I remained firmly grounded. I am indebted to some of the most tireless Liberal colleagues, with whom it has been my pleas-

ure to work. To my campaign director, Steve Houlihan, who ran an excellent campaign to his enduring credit, you are not only a great campaign director but an astute political mind and a good friend. To his wife, Janet, thank you for releasing him to fight the campaign of his life. To my campaign personnel coordinator, Robert Knight, thank you for encouraging me to contest the seat and well done on a sterling job in difficult circumstances. Ably supported by your wife, Kerry, I salute you both.

To other tireless supporters: Phil Hunniford, Shannon Crane, Felicity Stevenson, Sandra Kuppe, Ros Bates, Simone Holzapel, Christopher Stear, the late Bill Stear and many others, a huge thank you. To my patron, Senator Brett Mason, you were always available and I look forward to campaigning with you in the future. To the FEC chair in Fadden, Peter Gallus, thank you for your guidance and support. To the Young Liberals, for coming out each weekend to campaign, well done. To the Fadden Liberal branches, and of course the Fadden women, thank you for your support and encouragement.

Let me also acknowledge some especially dedicated people on the campaign trail—87-year-old Nan Rogers, who campaigned with me for 70 days straight, as did Laurie and Betty Robertson. I am humbled by your commitment and support. Your lives are already rich through your community service, and my life is richer for the pleasure of knowing you. To 91-year-old Ron Bagely, you salty old seadog, I only hope I have your stamina in later years. To your wife, Judith, you bring grace and dignity to the party. To those parliamentarians who campaigned in Fadden, notably the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Brendan Nelson, the Hon. Tony Abbott, the Hon. Julie Bishop and the Hon. Ian Macfarlane: thank you. To my colleague and friend Steve Ciobo, thanks for all your support, guidance and answers to a mil-

lion questions, some of which I may have inadvertently asked twice. You were a great coach. To the state director, Geoffrey Greene, your advice and guidance has been and will always be appreciated. Thank you to the state secretariat campaign staff: Peter Epstein, Sara Allard and Glenn Snowdon. To the many others who gave their valuable time, I sincerely thank you.

Let me conclude by acknowledging some great influences over my life: Robert Brown, Bill Thorburn, Brian Willesdorf and Gary Skinner. To my local community church, Southport Church of Christ, so compassionately led by Pastor Ross Pelling, thank you for your prayerful support. Let me also acknowledge some great and enduring friends: Ben Butson, Anthony Coleman, Steve Peach, Bryce Savill, Rob Molhoek and Peter Melville.

Finally, to my beautiful wife, Chantelle, who is in the gallery and our two sons, Caleb and Isaac: I thank you, Chantelle, for your love, support and patience over the many years of my military service, business pursuits and humanitarian work around the world. You and our beautiful children remain my inspiration to make this a better world as a gift for future generations we will not see. (*Time expired*)

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call the honourable member for Forrest, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech. I ask the House to extend to her the usual courtesies.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (6.20 pm)—I rise to make my first speech with a mixture of pride and honour, because I have been chosen by the people of Forrest to be their voice in federal parliament. I acknowledge and thank them for their vote of confidence in my ability to represent them in an electorate which is one of the fastest-growing, most diverse, dynamic and productive regional

areas in Australia. I live and work in the small regional town of Harvey. As in most small towns, it is necessary for local people and families to work together to make sure that the community functions effectively. It does not happen on its own.

Like many people in regional areas I have worked with and for the community for the majority of my life. Equally, I respect and understand that those same communities know best what works for them. I was raised, very fortunately, in a pioneering transport family and both of my parents were very strong and committed community volunteers. My father was a Lions Melvin Jones recipient who provided his earthmoving equipment and expertise for countless community projects throughout his life.

My mother was a very quiet achiever, dedicated to her family and the local community. She was a life member of St John's Ambulance. She assisted with Meals on Wheels, school canteens and many other organisations. But they both instilled in me a hard work ethic, strong family values and an absolute commitment to the broader community.

I worked in an accountancy practice until my husband and I purchased a small dairy farm in Harvey. Hard work and a progressive commercial focus has seen this venture grow into a significant family business. And like most small family businesses that meant that I had to basically master every job. It was this hands-on environment—and it was hands-on—that led me to agripolitical and broad regional involvement. As a member of a range of regional, state and national bodies, boards and groups, I have negotiated pretty complex issues with federal and state governments over many years and I am perfectly comfortable driving a tractor or a truck—I have got the truck licence—as well as dis-

cussing business strategies in any boardroom.

In building a small business during tough economic times and dairy deregulation, I have learned to be highly resourceful and innovative in order to survive and succeed. This enabled our business to operate effectively in a new environment of productivity and competitiveness. From my extensive community and regional involvement, I have a very sound grasp of the grassroots issues concerning families, individuals, business and community groups. I have worked with people of all ages, from kindergarten to senior citizens, as well as junior and senior sporting groups and football clubs as president for the last 10 years—and we won premierships! I have been a very strong advocate for the region, irrespective of whom I had to deal with. And I will voice my views for the people of Forrest in the same manner here in parliament. I well understand the challenges that lie ahead for one of the fastest-growing areas in Australia.

Politics is about people. I entered politics to be of further service to the people of Forrest. I will provide them with emphatic and strong representation here in Canberra. Many of these people assisted me during my campaign. I would like to briefly take this opportunity to thank my family and friends, my campaign team, my Liberal colleagues and my supporters, the branch members, and those in the wider community, particularly those who were with me from day one. Thank you all most sincerely for your loyalty and dedication, especially over the last 12 months. I am now the seventh member and the first ever female member for Forrest.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

Ms MARINO—The electorate of Forrest was first proclaimed in 1922. It was named after Sir John Forrest, who was the first Premier of Western Australia. My electorate

covers 21,000 square kilometres, encompassing the south-west corner of Western Australia, from a little-known place called Yarloop in the north down to Walpole. It is beautiful. Forrest includes the city of Bunbury and the 10 shires of Harvey, Donnybrook-Balingup, Dardanup, Collie, Capel, Busselton, Augusta, Margaret River, Bridgetown-Greenbushes, Nannup and Manjimup.

My immediate predecessor, the Hon. Geoff Prosser, was a very well known identity in the south-west. In this House, I acknowledge his contribution over the past 20 years to an electorate that is now the home of over 140,000 people. It is worthy of note that approximately 22 per cent of the people living there are children, up to the age of 14 years—a higher percentage than those living in the rest of Australia. But, for me, the group aged between 15 and 24 years stands at only 12.2 per cent, a lower percentage than the rest of Australia. Here is where some of the regional issues kick in. I am using this statistic to illustrate that this is an issue facing youth and families in regional areas such as Forrest. I attribute this lower percentage to the need for students to leave my regional area to pursue tertiary education at universities in Perth and beyond. Many never return to live and work within the region again.

To improve student retention in the south-west, I will maintain support for the development of a further tertiary institution. It is essential to create additional strengths for the south-west economy, integrating with expanding mining and resources sectors and providing industry and various employment sectors with related programs such as engineering and surveying and trades that in the longer term will help to provide and address some of the chronic skills shortages in my region. Equally, it would attract and retain residents to study, train and work in our local communities. This initiative, importantly,

could also reduce the financial burden on south-west students and their families who need to leave home to study at metropolitan universities and tertiary institutions. I want to ensure a sustainable evolving generation for tomorrow. Talented, motivated young people are essential to my region and to Australia. With a population growth projection of 45 per cent in the greater Bunbury region, Busselton and surrounding areas between now and 2021, the challenge ahead is to plan for and invest in the infrastructure and social services required to accommodate this growth. I take great comfort from the knowledge that Forrest is actually a microsnapshot of regional Australia. When I stand in this House to action initiatives, I can be assured that the benefits will apply to the broader regional population as well as to my own electorate.

Significant growth in industry also requires regional infrastructure. You want to hear about industry? Come to Forrest! The south-west is the source of many internationally renowned products. The mining sector is the highest earner in the region, followed by forestry, agriculture—which includes horticulture and viticulture—and tourism. In fact, the south-west of Western Australia is an absolute and utter economic powerhouse. I want to deliver that message here: it is an economic powerhouse. For example, we have major supplies of alumina, the world's largest and highest-grade spodumene and the world's largest tantalum deposit. As a result, the Bunbury port is one of the busiest in the state. Investment in road and rail infrastructure is essential to facilitate proposed expansions in this resource sector—and, let's face it, investing in Forrest is investing for Australia.

I wish to briefly focus on two key issues facing not only the people in my electorate but also the Australian public. The first issue is water, and the importance of economically

and environmentally sustainable land and water management. Harvey Water, in the Forrest electorate, is a regionally owned and operated irrigation scheme run by farmers. It is acknowledged as a world leader in its field. Secondly, we need to focus on food production that is also economically and environmentally viable. It is critical for farmers and growers to have continued access to quality water and land. Australian food has a hard-won international reputation as being clean and green. Furthermore, the production of food close to local and regional markets helps to reduce the carbon footprint of the Australian food supply. I am proud to say that we have some of the most efficient producers of food and fibre in the world, and I believe that our communities must be able to buy quality, fresh, locally and regionally produced home-grown food. Government must ensure that the policy environment progresses the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the agricultural sector.

As part of that, I also value small business. It is a critical part of the economic and social fabric of so many regional centres and towns right across Australia, particularly in Forrest. The majority of small businesses are family owned and run. They are a major employer nationally and are the cornerstone of our society. And never forget: small business is a critical player in strengthening competition in the marketplace.

It is my intention to engage in trade practices and small business issues. My focus will also be on implementing and building on practical plans to create regional economic development, employment and social opportunities, making my south-west an even better place to live, to work, to invest, to raise a family, to enjoy recreation and to retire.

The people of Forrest will have my full representation, from those who live in the

major population centres to those who live in the rural and wider areas. I will continue to work diligently to address the issue of drugs in schools and in the wider community, and to strive to ensure security for our seniors. Every person has the right to feel safe and secure in their own home.

As part of my representation of the people in Forrest I will also maintain a focus on health delivery outcomes and work towards attracting more doctors and allied health professionals to the region to ensure medical services and aged-care facilities keep pace with the projected population growth.

Finally, I need once again to acknowledge and thank the people of Forrest for their support. To them, I say this: you can be assured that I will be 'focused on Forrest' and that I will continue to work tirelessly on your behalf as your voice in this parliament. Thank you.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call Dr Kelly, the parliamentary secretary for defence support, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech. I ask the House to extend to him the usual courtesies.

Dr KELLY (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support) (6.35 pm)—May I convey to you, Mr Speaker, my congratulations on your elevation. Hopefully it will be a fulfilling, if not necessarily peaceful, tenure.

I stand here today as the newly elected member for Eden-Monaro as a consequence of a mood for change and a demand for action. The community of Eden-Monaro is special in the way that it will not sit still when it sees failures of leadership on the things that concern it. The evidence for this can be seen in the formation and growth of the Clean Energy for Eternity, or CEFE, movement. This is a broad based community phenomenon that has raised awareness and

galvanised citizens, councils and community organisations into action on climate change. It has been a privilege to work with this group, and I believe it is something we can build on to help deliver the secure future we all seek for our children.

I see the same community spirit in many other aspects of life, such as the Home in Queanbeyan project, where our citizens regarded the homelessness situation as unacceptable and have generated the support required to do something about it. I have also seen this time and again at the individual level in those who devote their time to the Rural Fire Service, SES, scouts, disabled care, auxiliary support for our hospitals, sporting organisations and many other critical community endeavours. Our community organisations also look beyond our borders to help those less fortunate, such as the Bega Valley Advocates for Timor-Leste and the Tumbarumba group supporting Ugandan children through the Watoto program. It is inspirational to be a part of this, and to dedicate my energies to supporting and harnessing this spirit and drive so that our community can reach its full potential.

Through our outreach effort during the campaign I have heard the message from our community loud and clear. They demanded action on the decline in health services in rural and regional Australia. They want something done to improve the options for our young, to ensure them the availability of full-time employment and to spare them the depredations of the extreme Work Choices laws. They insist that the neglect of our key infrastructure be addressed. Our farmers need help to tackle the existential challenges posed by climate change and weeds. I am proud of the measures we committed to in order to address these concerns.

We will deliver on the specific commitments we made to the electorate, and I will

fight hard for our fair share of this government's national plans with regard to health, education, water management, broadband services, child care and renewable energy. I aim in particular to work with our community to make Eden-Monaro a centre for leading-edge technology and creative thinking when it comes to the renewable energy industry. This will aid our struggle to address climate change but it will also benefit our regional economy and provide our youth with career options that will keep them with us. In this regard I embrace the objectives of the CEFE movement and challenge all our councils, households and industry to pursue the CEFE target of a 50 per cent reduction in carbon emissions and the transition to 50 per cent power generation from renewable energy by the year 2020. I am setting this fifty-fifty by 2020 goal as an aspirational objective for Eden-Monaro.

It was a difficult decision for me to leave the Army and take this step into politics. I dearly love the Army and had the prospect of a number of years of rewarding service, further promotion and a secure future ahead of me. This was outweighed, however, by a burning desire to end the previous government, driven by my personal experiences and my concern for the future that I would bequeath my son.

Two factors sealed my decision. The first is my faith in the Prime Minister to manage this country and its security with intelligence, common sense and compassion. The second factor was the appeal of coming home to my roots in Eden-Monaro. My family were instrumental in building this region and continue to play a part in generating its prosperity, community spirit and values. It began back in the 1850s with my great-great-great-grandfather, Daniel Gowing, who pioneered much of the early industry, such as founding the Tathra Wharf, and was a well-known philanthropist. This was built upon by

my great-great-grandfather, Thomas Joseph Kelly, who founded the Bega Cheese Co-op and was its first chairman. His original land is still dairy-farmed today by the family. These pioneers of industry understood the fundamental values of cooperation, fairness and family. These values are alive today as the Bega Cheese factory benefits from a collective agreement and is an integral part of the community.

My great-grandfather, Benjamin George Kelly, was a schoolteacher who taught all over the region and ran for the seat in 1940—for Lang Labor at the time. One of his sons, Father John Kelly, was parish priest in Bombala and Braidwood and became the monsignor who supervised the Catholic education system in the region. He unfortunately passed away in August last year before seeing me complete what his father attempted in 1940. His brother, my grandfather, Benjamin Joseph Kelly, also born in Bega, had been, along with other members of the family, in the volunteer Light Horse and went off to the Second World War as part of the 2nd/3rd Machine Gun Battalion. He fought in the Middle East before being captured by the Japanese in Java and spending the rest of the war working on the Burma-Thai Railway. These examples inspire me to believe in service and an overriding responsibility to community before self. I hope now to build on their legacy.

My own life experiences have also played a major part in shaping my views. My immediate family suffered through the devastating pressures of debt and poverty. This followed my father's falling into bankruptcy when his business partner absconded with their joint funds. I recall vividly the experience of living in my aunt's garage in a row of five beds, my first taste of barracks life! I also remember surviving through this time on the charity of the St Vincent de Paul Society and how important these groups are to

those who fall through the cracks. This experience taught me what a devastating effect debt, homelessness and poverty can have on families and the physical and mental health of individuals.

As a young man fresh from university, I was privileged to work for three years on behalf of the victims of asbestos in the firm of Turner Freeman in Sydney, where I met my good friend and colleague our Attorney-General Robert McClelland. In those days it was all to do with discovering and proving the culpability of the miners and producers of asbestos. It was at once rewarding to be part of the effort to disclose this shocking story of negligence and deliberate cover-up over many decades but at the same time distressing to watch the suffering and sit by the death beds of wonderful men and women and their families. In this respect it is important to note that Bernie Banton was only one of many hundreds who suffered appalling and agonising deaths. I think of people like Peter Calkin, who spent every last waking moment of his life ensuring the security of his family when others might have been tempted to focus on themselves. From this searing and unforgettable experience I learned the importance of ensuring the protection of working people by law. I also learned the importance of the right of working people to organise, as the asbestos victims would never have achieved justice without the support of their colleagues.

This was followed by 20 very special years in the Australian Army. The memories and experiences of those years cannot be captured in this short speech, but I treasure every moment and every friendship cemented over that time. The Australian Defence Force is a special institution which not only serves our security but is the guardian of many of our fundamental values, forged through a tradition that all Australians respect. During my time in the Army I served

in conflict zones in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific, which enabled me to draw lessons that are applicable to all environments and types of operation. My experience ranged from fundamental infantry tasks of toting rifle and radio on patrol to helping to direct operations at the highest level. It also involved labouring to establish the rule of law and postconflict reconstruction. I am now excited about bringing this experience to bear in helping to formulate our security policy.

I am highly conscious, though, that as we sit here today in these air-conditioned and comfortable surrounds there are hundreds of my ADF brothers and sisters who are doing it tough in some of the harshest conditions on the planet. Whether it is a matter of humping around in body armour in 50-degree heat or at 20 degrees below zero, struggling to avoid a cocktail of diseases or wondering whether you are spending your last moments in one piece, our ADF personnel will always be in my thoughts.

I know that for every member deployed there are many others preparing to go, returning, or supporting our personnel in establishments all over this country. I will bend every sinew to promote their welfare and safety, and to support their families. Defence families are always under intense stress. Moving house is said to be one of the most stressful experiences of life, and we compound a constant requirement in this regard with the worries they face for their loved ones in high-risk training and overseas deployments. I aim to advocate for ways to ease that strain.

I am also highly conscious of the fact that I am the only war veteran represented in parliament since the retirement of Graham Edwards. I feel a particular responsibility to be a voice for our veteran and ex-service community in this government. I serve fair warn-

ing to my colleagues that I will be an extremely persistent and annoying advocate on behalf of that community. Many veterans are looking to us now after bitter disappointments, and we must consolidate ourselves as the party they should naturally look to by not letting them down.

The Federation seat of Eden-Monaro is thought to be special because it is described as the bellwether that determines which party will form government. I believe that it is special for many other reasons. It is special because of its people and because of the land itself and the seas that frame its eastern flank. I urge all Australians to come to Eden-Monaro to find out for themselves why it is so special. Come to its glorious mountains and experience their magical rhythms in winter and summer. Experience the breathtaking scenery of the Alpine Way, the Snowy Mountains Highway and the Princes Highway. Enjoy the voluptuous country around the south-west slopes and the awe-inspiring Yarrangobilly Caves. Come to the historic towns of the Monaro plains and the Bega Valley. Marvel at the sweeping coastal views and beaches of the south-east coast. It is worth enjoying this experience before seeking to travel overseas.

We nevertheless face serious challenges in rural and regional Australia, and I am pleased now to be in a position to help deal with them and to advocate for the communities whose problems are so little understood in the major cities. We must devote a more concerted national effort towards weed control. Our agricultural sector loses in the order of \$4 billion a year as a result of the weed threat, not to mention the environmental damage such as the menace of blackberry in the Kosciuszko National Park.

Health in our regions is in crisis, and I expect to now see a major and focused effort across all levels of government to address

this. The shortage of doctors in some of these towns has reached an unacceptable level. I pay tribute to those country doctors such as Dr Colin Pate of Bombala, recently recognised in the Australia Day honours list, who are battling on under the pressure. We must bring them help. I call on the doctors of this country to come to the rescue of these towns as an act of national service. I ask our graduating doctors and those looking for a change to commit to a country town for a five-year period in your careers. You will find that the experience will enrich your life. You will be seduced by the charm of these towns and communities and you will have the satisfaction of having rendered your country as vital a service as those who serve us in uniform. The gratitude and reverence these towns will show you will humble and inspire you.

I want to assure the hardworking men and women of the land in Eden-Monaro that this government is as much for you as anyone else. You have often been disappointed in your representation and have sometimes turned to alternative voices, only to often be again let down. I say to you that I am your man; I am in your corner. I want to ensure our towns are living and vibrant economic, cultural and historical centres, not museums.

I believe the future of this country will largely be shaped by our response to the challenges posed by two liquids: water and oil. We cannot grow and will find it difficult to sustain our current lifestyle if we do not come up with a major national effort on our water resource management. We must give thought to whether we are selecting the appropriate land usage in tune with our various regions. We should reach out more vigorously to countries like Israel to collaborate on the development of water management and agricultural technology.

With regard to oil, I view the threat posed by the future dependency of this country on

overseas and dwindling supplies as a critical strategic vulnerability. I believe we must follow the lead of the Swedes in taking a proactive approach towards eliminating this substance from our economy. The future oil shocks that we are facing will have the greatest impact on communities like Eden-Monaro and, for their sake, I intend to keep this issue in the forefront of our thinking. One of the primary purposes of government is to anticipate future threats and take appropriate risk management measures, so we cannot turn from this challenge.

One of the major motivations in the journey to this place has been my Iraq experiences, which, as many know, included the Abu Ghraib and AWB sagas. While I have seen appalling suffering and destruction and experienced the loss of friends in Somalia, Bosnia and Timor Leste, in Iraq this was greatly intensified and made more painful by the frustrations of the operation.

I left Iraq carrying with me the ghosts of some special people—people like Lieutenant Colonel Chad Buehring. Chad was a bloke everyone liked. He loved kids and was a wonderful family man. On one particularly dark day—among many in Iraq—Chad was with me and many of our colleagues when our building came under sustained direct fire and was struck with 27 rockets. Chad, like the true soldier he was, rushed to the window with his M16 to try to return fire. Chad took the force of a rocket strike against his window and had half his head and his left hand blown away. He did not die immediately but there was nothing that could be done for him. We took around 20 casualties in that attack, and I was to lose countless other friends amongst UN workers, Iraqi colleagues and my coalition brothers and sisters in my year in that tortured land. I entered into this political venture as part of a compact with them to hold the previous government to account and to right the wrongs of Iraq, and I feel

those colleagues with me as I stand here today. We now have our work cut out to make their sacrifices and the efforts of our troops in Iraq worth while and to give them meaning. I am looking forward to this government contributing ideas to the solution to that conflict and bringing more effective direct assistance to the Iraqi people.

Given all I have seen in my 20 years in the Army, I am delighted now to see a new direction is possible in our security policy: a wiser, more sophisticated approach that acknowledges that security is achieved by working on a number of levels. One of the greatest challenges we face is from Islamic extremism. I believe that this stems from the watershed struggle for Islam that is currently playing out, similar in nature to the Christian experience of the Reformation, which had far bloodier consequences. It is vital that we reach out to the moderate voices of Islam, to do all we can to assist and encourage them in this struggle. The greatest contribution we can make to our own security is to ensure we have social cohesion here at home. Our greatest ally in the fight against Islamic extremism is our own Islamic community. We must reach out and embrace them as fellow Australians and work hard at interfaith dialogue.

Further to this, we need to pursue a more intelligent approach to multilateral security, both in our constructive engagement with the United Nations and in our regional outreach. Over the last 11 years I have watched in my work with the UN and our neighbours how much our standing has suffered and how our effectiveness at advancing our security interests has been impeded by neglect in these respects.

I also want to take advantage of this opportunity today to pay tribute to the men and women who worked so tirelessly on the Your Rights at Work campaign. The Work Choices

experience showed us why it is still vital that the fundamental human right of working people to organise be protected. It has also shown us, however, that the Australian union movement must take this reprieve as an opportunity to re-examine itself and explore ways to reach out to working Australians with a positive message and experience regarding the benefits of union membership. The union movement desperately needs the same fresh thinking and creative leadership that the country responded to in the Rudd Labor team. I stand ready to do all I can to help promote that process in this new role.

So much also needs to be done for those in our community who are struggling to deal with the care of the disabled, the challenges the disabled themselves face and the mentally ill. I was proud that we committed to supporting the work of the Home in Queanbeyan project. This project points the way to the ideal of the community and government working in partnership. It is not good enough that we expect government to provide all the answers to these great challenges. We all bear a responsibility to do what we can to help our fellow Australians in their need. I want to prioritise my support to community based projects in this respect, and I call on all in our community to come together to join this partnership and to emulate the Home in Queanbeyan model.

On this historic day I would like to say to our Indigenous community in Eden-Monaro: 'I hope to help you to help yourselves.' There are projects and ideas that we need to pursue to empower the people of these communities, and I will be reaching out to them to explore how we can advance these.

There are countless people that I ought to thank, for their support to me personally and for the campaign, but it would not be possible to name them all here. I have been steadily seeking them out to thank them individu-

ally, and I want them all to know that I am fully conscious that I only stand here thanks to their effort. There are two people I do wish to single out, though: my wife, Shelly, and my son, Ben. They have experienced all the stress and heartache of a Defence family. They know the wrench as a little piece of your heart breaks away at every separation on deployments, and the personal stress that has come with my commitment to call things as I see them and to make a personal stand when I feel something is unacceptable. I have not always been to them what I should have, and I want to fully acknowledge here that I would not have achieved anything without them.

Finally, can I say to the people of Eden-Monaro that we are now a team and I am looking forward to working with them. I am conscious of the record of previous members for the region, and I have a great deal to live up to. Jim Snow, who represented the electorate from 1983 to 1996, has shown me what being a good local member is all about. Juggling my Defence responsibilities with my electorate work will be difficult, but I know the people of this region have always understood the need to support the national interests with respect to security and I will be grateful for their indulgence in this respect.

I am proud to be here and to be in a position to continue my service to the country as part of this wonderfully talented Rudd Labor team. I now anticipate a future for this country of prosperity enhanced by compassion and justice, where we can move beyond the small-minded and the mean-spirited and, as Lincoln said, give flight to the better angels of our nature. Thank you.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (6.56 pm)—I have chosen to confine my remarks this evening in the address-in-reply debate to the apology to our Indigenous peoples moved in the House this morning and sup-

ported by the parliament. Last Saturday, a number of Indigenous people met with me in my electorate office in Perth. On a number of occasions since the government announced the date for the formal apology, I have invited Indigenous people to my office, and they have all been willing to meet with me to discuss the apology and I thank them for that. On this most recent occasion, a proud Nyungar woman told me her story. I have sought, and been given permission from her, to relate to this House some of what she told me.

She is considered one of the stolen generations and, as she spoke, I was not thinking about whether the term 'stolen generations' was or was not the most appropriate way to describe her life circumstances. No—I was listening to what had been stolen from her: her childhood innocence, her trust in people, her sense of self, her sense of belonging, her culture, her heritage. Whether, as a young child, she was taken from her family because of race or because of welfare, she lost her childhood. Whether, as she grew older, she was separated, time and time again, from her brothers and sisters because of race or because of welfare, she lost her family. Whether, as a young woman, her first child was taken from her because of race or because of welfare, she lost the opportunity to nurture and love her baby.

As she told her story, in a voice so soft that I strained to hear her, and as she described her feelings of alienation and deprivation, it was palpable that she was hurting as much then as 40 or 50 years ago. She spoke of painful events in her childhood as if they were yesterday, and as if her heart would break yet again. We are about the same age. As she spoke, I thought of my childhood, with my parents and sisters and brother, and grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins, all living on the same farm

in the Adelaide Hills and enveloping me with love and support, and I cried with her.

This woman is part of the history of Western Australia, a history that is and will remain highly controversial when it comes to matters Indigenous. It is, however, an incontrovertible fact that there was state legislation, beginning with the Aborigines Act 1905, which imposed a strict regime of control over the state's Indigenous population. This 1905 act conferred on a Commissioner of Native Affairs powers over Aborigines, including the power to remove Aboriginal children from their families by virtue of the commissioner's role as guardian of all Aboriginal children up to the age of 16 years. This act also gave the commissioner the authority, under ministerial warrant, to direct Aboriginal people to any reserve or settlement the commissioner thought fit. It also outlawed miscegenation—the procreative sexual union between the races.

Such were the times and prevailing attitudes that similar legislation and accompanying practices existed in the 19th and 20th centuries in European settlements across the globe. Over the next 50 or 60 years, Aboriginal children were separated from their mothers and their families on a systematic basis. In Western Australia, Aboriginal people were directed to settlements at places such as Moore River; Carrolup, near Katanning; and Roelands, outside Collie. Particular attention was directed at the growing number of what were termed half-caste children and how to address that problem. Whatever motives lay behind this legislation and however one chooses to interpret it, the acts and statements of those entrusted with its powers made it clear that it was based on Darwinian theories of survival of the fittest. The full-blood Aborigines were thought to be a dying race. The problem was what to do with the half-castes.

In 1936, the Western Australian Native Administration Act gave much wider powers to the commissioner over a wider range of persons of mixed descent. Virtually any children of Aboriginal descent could be forcibly removed from their families and placed in government institutions to be trained in the 'ways of white civilisation'. The commissioner, not parents, controlled the lives of Aboriginal children until they were adults—21 years of age. From this age, any person of quarter-caste descent or less was prohibited by law from associating with Aboriginal people. In this way, Aboriginal people were forced to live in the white community, but there were no measures introduced to ensure their acceptance. As the first Western Australian commissioner, appointed in 1914, explained at the inaugural Commonwealth-state conference on Aboriginal affairs in 1937, 'the natives must be absorbed into the white population of Australia' and that while the state had control over their marriages this would 'prevent the return of half-castes who were nearly white to the black'. While the commissioner noted that, 'It is well-known that coloured races all over the world hate institutionalisation, they have tremendous affection for their children,' he was confident that with the absorption over time of the entire Aboriginal race into the white community it would be, as he said, 'possible to forget that there were ever any Aborigines in Australia'.

Throughout the 1950s and sixties, Indigenous children continued to be separated from their families and institutionalised in places such as Sister Kate's Children's Home. The reasons children were sent there and how they got there are a complex tale. They were sent for welfare reasons. Single Aboriginal mothers, for example, had no access to social security up until the 1960s and were particularly vulnerable to having their children taken away from them and put in homes.

Some were forcibly removed, others were placed there by families who could see better opportunities for their children than they could offer. There is evidence that children were sent there based solely on their Aboriginality. In more recent times, some who grew up at Sister Kate's have acknowledged the opportunities and benefits, including an education, that they gained. A few years ago, I attended an anniversary event at Sister Kate's and Magistrate Sue Gordon spoke, as did many other Indigenous people present, of the good times and the bad growing up at Sister Kate's.

The damage done to many children who were brought up in closed institutions cannot be overlooked, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous. White children taken from their families in the post-war era and placed in homes by welfare authorities and Indigenous children in institutional care can suffer life-long psychological, emotional and physical damage. A number were subject to gross mistreatment and abuse.

In more recent times, there has been greater understanding of the harm occasioned to children who are separated from their families and as a consequence feel they have lost their identity, their sense of belonging, their inner security. And where there was and is physical, mental or sexual abuse, the effects can be profound, challenging their capacity to take part in society, to form lasting relationships and to mature into functional adults. The policies and practices of the past, for which we as a parliament extended our apology today, existed up until the 1960s in one form or another. Today, welfare authorities still remove children from families, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. In many Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities today there is despair, disadvantage and dysfunction. As legislators, we must understand the circumstances that gave rise to

the stolen generations so that we do not repeat the injustices of the past.

As a minister for just over four years in the coalition government, I had the privilege of having responsibility for two separate portfolios that brought me into close contact with many Indigenous people, people who were working hard to overcome the challenges that confront current generations of Indigenous people. As Minister for Ageing, I was acutely conscious of the fact that, in the provision of aged-care services, the government assessed Indigenous need at a far earlier age than that of the rest of the population, recognising the brutal truth that the life expectancy of Indigenous people is 17 years less than the rest of the population. As Minister for Education, Science and Training I was assisted by many Indigenous people who served on advisory committees and who provided me with valuable counsel and advice on Indigenous education and training issues. I thank them all for their support.

There was an outstanding initiative involving the federal government and all state and territory governments when relevant education ministers—and I was among them—agreed unanimously in 2006 to a series of recommendations relating to Indigenous education in a report entitled *Australian directions in Indigenous education*. The recommendations covered early childhood Indigenous education, partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities, school leadership, quality teaching, pathways to training, and employment and higher education. It is my hope that the relevant ministers will recommit to these recommendations in this report so that educational outcomes for all Indigenous Australians can be improved and they are at least the equivalent of those of the rest of the population.

We must break the perpetuating intergenerational cycle of social and economic dis-

advantage. The Indigenous population is young. About 40 per cent are under 15, compared with 20 per cent of the non-Indigenous population. While we can point to improvements in educational standards for Indigenous Australians over the last decade or so, we should not accept that incremental gains are acceptable. All governments must accelerate the pace of change by making Indigenous education at every level core government business.

I visited many communities and observed a number of wonderful initiatives. In the Tiwi Islands, for example, the local community have taken responsibility for the education of their children, supervising the building of a boarding school for the island children, funded by the federal government. At Eva Valley, a school sponsored through the Ian Thorpe foundation has a focus, through its Literacy Backpack Project, on supporting literacy levels in the school and in the home. And at Woolanang in the Northern Territory, I was so impressed with the facilities and opportunities for Indigenous children that I worked hard to secure more funding for this and similar boarding schools in the 2007 budget. These schools offer a safe, secure and nurturing learning environment.

Two of the most successful development programs, the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program and the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program, have seen young Indigenous people provided with opportunities to pursue academic and training pursuits. These young people are selected by their communities to undertake studies away from their communities and in some of Australia's best schools, public and private, and best universities. It is the hope of the Indigenous communities that they are developing through these programs the next generation of Indigenous leaders. There is much more to be done to heal the ravaged communities in the Northern Territory, and I hope that the Northern Territory

emergency response is permitted to run its course as introduced, in the interests of every child who is at risk.

Today must mark the beginning of another journey. It cannot be, nor should it be, seen as the end of a journey; it must be seen as the beginning of the next. The opposition welcomes the government's initiative of a joint commission on Indigenous policy.

This brings me back to last Saturday and the woman who spoke to me of her life story. She is one of generations of Indigenous Australians who feel so deeply the loss of the precious things in life that were taken from them. To meet with her and with others was important for me, to shed light on our past, shake my comfortable certainties, enlarge my appreciation of the challenges we face as a country and enrich my understanding of reconciliation. It will be hard for any of us who have not experienced their story to fathom the depth of their feelings. One of the Indigenous men said to me: 'Julie, I don't blame you. It was the time. It was the place. It was the circumstance.' Time, place, circumstance. To the Indigenous people who made the time to see me and tell me their story, I say thank you. This is the time, this is the place, this is the circumstance in which I say, in the terms of the motion, 'Sorry'.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (7.12 pm)—Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, I congratulate you on your election to your office. Can I start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet here today. There has been no greater recognition than the events that have taken place in this House in the last couple of days, for the very first time in Australian history. Firstly, there was the welcome to country, which I found deeply moving and, in fact, quite emotional. It seemed to have a nice fit in this place. It seemed so natural and so much a part of the way this House should have always been and yet,

starkly, it was the first time it had ever happened. Secondly, there was the apology. The apology was a long time coming. It was something that this nation as a whole had to do and something that I think we wanted to do, but we needed the leadership to carry it out. That took place today and, for all the fear that surrounded it, it was a day of happiness. It was a day where people were smiling. It was a day where, as a member of parliament in this place, I felt in a way complete about what our role is and about the things that we need to do to make this an even better country. Those were two very significant events. I will have more to say on both of those and some other significant issues in relation to the first Australians at a later time.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Indigenous peoples and elders of my local region, the Ipswich region and the Inala region and surrounds. I am great friends with all of them. I deeply respect them. I love working with them and want to continue that relationship in the future. We have some wonderful Indigenous folk in our area, who contribute so much not only to their own people but also to the greater good and to everyone else in the community. I wanted to take the time to acknowledge them.

Being elected to this place is always a great privilege. It is not my first time, obviously. This is my fourth election. I am deeply honoured and deeply privileged, as is everybody, to be elected to this place. Being elected for the fourth time is of course an even greater honour. In saying that, I wanted to let the people of Oxley know that I feel more committed, more energised and more prepared to work even harder for them today than on the very first day I was elected.

I feel this new energy. You might say that that is just because we have got into government—finally. I was elected to opposition

in 1998 but I have finally got into government here now. But, it is more than that. It is about a new agenda, about a new government with fresh ideas. It is about the great opportunities that we have. I cannot think of a time in our history when we have been in a better position to make those significant changes that will carry us forward in the 21st century and deliver all those things that need to happen. There is a whole century ahead of us, a whole heap of things that we have to do. When I contemplate those thoughts, and that I can be a part of an Australian parliament that has acknowledged the original Australians, along with the Australians that came on the first fleet and all Australians today, I think this is a great honour for me as well as for everybody who has been elected here.

I very much want to thank the people of Oxley for the trust that they have placed in me. I want to reassure them that the fact that they have given me an almost doubling of my margin will only drive me to work even harder. The challenge is there: can I possibly increase it one more time! Having a solid margin in a seat, I can assure you, is no excuse for not working very, very hard. I continue to do that. I have always believed in that and I have very strongly believed in the view that if you are a good local member and you work hard then you have a very good chance of being re-elected.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who helped me get re-elected. As we in this place all know, you cannot be a one-man team, as it were—there are just so many people involved. Let me start by acknowledging and thanking my family: my wife, Margie, and my three children Tim, Emily and Madeleine. They might only be young—Tim is 12, Emily is nine and Madeleine is eight—but they are incredibly good campaigners. There would not be a day at school during an election campaign when

they are not telling their young friends that they should be voting for their dad. It is a wonderful thing to see. My wife, Margie, who is an incredible campaigner herself, very diligently did a lot of work on my campaign to make sure that it flowed and that we did all the things that we promised that we would do. I think it is a really important thing that, when you get out into the community and you promise to do a whole heap of things, you actually do them.

It is very hard to do that when you are a member of the opposition. I experienced that, as many of my colleagues have in this place, for many years as an opposition member. To go out there and to be able to deliver for the community while not being in government is very hard. Can I assure them here tonight that, now being a member of the Rudd government, I will be doing my utmost to ensure that every single one of the election promises that we made during the campaign will be honoured. I am very comfortable and I feel at ease in saying that, because I know that, through the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and all of our ministers, we have made an absolute commitment that we will honour all of our election promises—and for that I am very grateful to my party. Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, you would know from your experience over many years, perhaps more than mine, that it is often the case that governments make promises during election campaigns but find that they just cannot keep them for whatever reason. I am very proud to say that I am going to be part of a government that honours and keeps all of its election promises.

I also want to thank very deeply the Australian Labor Party in the Oxley region for all the hard work that they did—but not only them. I want to thank ALP members everywhere who came and gave support, not only in my seat but in other seats; my FEC and FDE that worked so hard; all of my local

branch members; my campaign committee—which sometimes you do not know how many people are on, there are so many people out there working for you—and to all the young people who came and assisted and made my job so much easier and allowed me to focus on getting out there on the street, talking to people, whether it be in their homes, at shopping centres, at railway stations or on the side of the road. I am deeply in their debt for helping me to be re-elected one more time.

I also want to thank Kevin Rudd and I want to thank all the members of our caucus. We did a great job, but it is by no small means through the leadership of now Prime Minister Kevin Rudd that we actually managed to do what we did. The strong message of fresh ideas and change is not only a slogan but a reality and something that we will experience through this place in the coming term.

I want to particularly make mention of something that I think is significant. We tend to do this at the end of a parliamentary term rather than at the start, as they are all marked by a significant thing or event, something that truly marks what they are about. I will not tread through history, because I do not have time tonight—I will do that on other occasions. I think this parliamentary term will be remembered for a number of very significant events—I won't number them—but I think the turning of the corner, the most significant event, as I have mentioned, is the apology to the stolen generations and Indigenous people in this country. I think that will go down in history in 20, 30, 50 years time as: why did this not happen earlier? Why did it take so long? I think that this is one of the things that will mark this term of the Rudd government. The other is, very importantly, the issue of those promises that I mentioned earlier. They will be honoured. I can assure you of the work that I will do, and

that I know all of my colleagues will do, to ensure that all of those commitments are honoured. We will ensure that we will be remembered as a government that had only one type of promise: a core promise, one that was actually delivered for the people we wanted to help and we promised we would help.

I also want to acknowledge and thank the new members. I have to say they would have to be the best and brightest class, and some of my most favourite people in the world. I say the best and brightest—possibly except for the class of '98, which is the class I came in. But they come very close!

I mention the following people in no particular order. Brett Raguse in the seat of Forde, giant killer, did a sterling job, always had faith that he could win the seat and worked like there was no tomorrow, and for that he has been well rewarded. Yvette D'Ath in the seat of Petrie, another giant killer, went out, worked very hard and wore out several pairs of shoes, as I understand. Jon Sullivan in Longman did a brilliant job. Chris Trevor, 'CT', in Flynn is in a tough part of the world but he is a tough character and he deserved his seat. There is James Bidgood up north in Dawson. My very good friend Shayne Neumann from Blair fought a wonderful fight—one that he had had some experience at fighting in the past—and won a great victory. He never lost faith, he never lost his belief in the party, the ALP, or the people of the region—the people he was going to help—and I think that is part of the reason that he got here. There are also Jim Turnour in Leichhardt, Kerry Rea in Bonner and Graham Perrett in Moreton. Congratulations to you all—I am only going to mention the Queenslanders—for a truly well-deserved victory and for being a very significant reason that we now have a great Labor government with Kevin Rudd as the Prime Minister.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank a number of members who are no longer with us. At the top of my list is the Hon. Kim Beazley, the former member for Brand, an incredible public servant, an incredible person who gave his whole life—everything of himself—to his electorate, to his party, to people. He did a wonderful job and he has got so much more to contribute. It is very sad not to see him in this place, because of all the great things he did, but in the end he left at a time that was right for him and right for other people. I congratulate him on that decision.

Still in Western Australia, I also want to make particular mention of my very good friend, who is no longer a member of parliament, Kim Wilkie in Swan, who fought incredible fights. Swan is not a seat traditionally held by Labor. Kim Wilkie actually won that seat in Western Australia against the trend, against all odds and against all betting, I would say, but he just could not quite do it a fourth time. It was so close, it was incredible—a very hard one to call. But Kim, I know, will contribute in a whole range of ways and will continue to contribute to public life, so I wanted to make particular mention of him. He was a great member of parliament, he did a lot of good work in this House and he will be well remembered.

I also want to mention Senator George Campbell, who did some very good things in this place—in the Senate—and who will be leaving us at the changeover, along with Senator Linda Kirk. Ann Corcoran in Isaacs did a fantastic job; she was an incredible team player. My very good friend Graham Edwards retired but he will always be in our memories. There was no more unique or colourful a character in this House than Graham Edwards. His exploits were so many and there are so many tales to tell I would not have the time tonight, but he is a great man,

a truly inspirational person who will be well remembered.

Michael Hatton, a good friend of mine—we sat close to each other—is a man of boundless energy and boundless speeches, and I see Michael Danby, the member for Melbourne Ports, having a laugh. Nobody made more speeches—apart from maybe John Murphy—than Michael Hatton, so good luck to him in the future. Kelly Hoare followed in some great traditions, and Dr Carmen Lawrence in Fremantle had an incredible career. Senator Robert Ray will leave us a little bit later on. Bob Sercombe in Maribyrnong did a wonderful job of looking after the portfolio of the Pacific islands, and I was very proud of the work he did. Rod Sawford from Port Adelaide was the voice of sometimes reason but certainly the voice on many different issues and a person that never feared speaking out. I want to mention all of those people because I think it is important.

There are many opportunities for me to speak in this House and I have made many speeches, so I am not going to talk on a whole heap of other traditional things. I have left one person to last that I want to make a particular mention of and to honour—the late Peter Andren, who was an incredible person, a wonderful person in this House, who brought a unique perspective, a different colour to this place. He had an incredible work ethic. He was well loved by many people in here and well disliked by many others. He was not disliked because he was not a hard worker or a great MP but perhaps because of some of the realities that he thrust in all of our faces. Peter is a great loss to many people, and a lot has been said about Peter already and will continue to be said in this House, but I want to make particular mention of him.

As I have said, I have made a number of speeches and I will not follow the traditional

protocols but I want to make mention of a couple of things. I took it to heart when the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, asked us to go out and visit schools and a homeless shelter in our electorates. I thought it was a really great idea. I took it to heart so much that that very afternoon I organised to visit not four but six schools. I went and visited two independent schools in my electorate, two public schools in my electorate and also my local TAFE. I saw a great institution called Education City in Springfield and had a talk to them about the difficulties and challenges they face in delivering excellent educational services for young people. I learned a lot and I will use that knowledge to help guide our education policy into the future.

I also visited one of my local youth homeless shelters at Goodna and caught up with some great friends there and some great people. I had a good look at some of the real issues that young homeless people face. There is so much more we can do. The words ring in my ears when I hear the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, talk about a bipartisan approach and that we have to take the politics out of some issues and work together in a bipartisan spirit to achieve things. I think the issue of homelessness is another one of those issues. These people need our help. These people need us to do more for them. That is certainly one of the things that I will be working very hard to ensure we deliver on.

I will quickly mention some of the issues I campaigned on not because they helped me get elected but because they are issues of great importance to local people in my area. I campaigned on the full upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway versus the Goodna bypass, and I have done that for many years—for a decade, I have campaigned for this road.

Mr Danby—Like a broken record.

Mr RIPOLL—Almost like a broken record—thank you, Member for Melbourne

Ports. But the reality is this road is about people's livelihoods, their lifestyles and their sanity. I am very happy that that commitment has been made and that the minister responsible made it the No. 1 priority not in Queensland but in all of Australia—for that I thank him very much. I campaigned on the issue of the cost of living—of how difficult it is becoming for ordinary people; on housing affordability; on dental health; on broadband; on general health issues; on Medicare; on education and skills; on infrastructure, which I dearly love as a portfolio area; on Work Choices; on people's work lives; on their family lives; on climate change and the environment, just to name a few—all great things to campaign on but, even more importantly, great things to work on into the future to make people's lives better, which is why we are here in the first place.

I said I do not have the time tonight to deal with all the issues I would like to speak about. That would take a number of hours, but can I just note now, before my time expires, that I will take significant amounts of time in this House to highlight the injustices, the inequalities and the rampant, drunken way in which the previous Howard government wasted taxpayer dollars, the way they pillaged our economy and the way they ramped up inflation. I am also going to be looking very closely at the deception of the Australian people in the way they were always conned into believing for many years that all was fine in the house of the Howard government. But, the day after the election, we learned that things were not so rosy.

Mr Speaker, while I have the opportunity, I congratulate you on your election to high office. Already you have demonstrated your great skill as a Speaker, and I thank you very much.

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 7.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

North Korea

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (7.30 pm)—Perhaps it is because of my family background that I often speak in this House on matters of egregious abuses of human rights. I do not think there is anywhere else in the world where there is a greater abuse of human rights—and I include the terrible situations in Darfur, in Burma and in Zimbabwe—than in the hellish state of North Korea. We often make jokes about the dear leader Kim Jong-Il and the laughable Stalinoid military parades of the North Korean regime. Surprisingly—or not surprisingly, perhaps—it may be because of the lack of success of the attempted illegal heroin trade via the North Korean ship *Pong Su* that the North Korean embassy has just closed here. Apparently Pyongyang's embassies all operate on the basis of having to fund themselves—most of them, as we know, by illegal activities.

In North Korea, two million people died recently during the famine. The state of human rights in that country is one of the most desperate in the world. Because I take these things seriously, I went to London to attend the 8th International Conference on North Korean Human Rights and Refugees, which was held at Chatham House, with the earlier donors' conference held in the Attlee Room in an extension of the House of Commons. We heard from some of the extraordinary people who are bringing the situation of North Korea to the attention of the international community. The conference was organised jointly by the Citizens Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, Korea University's Graduate School of International Studies, Chatham House and the Rafto Founda-

tion for Human Rights in Norway. It was sponsored by the National Endowment for Democracy, the Norwegian foreign ministry and the *Chosun Ilbo*, the South Korean donor. We had very passionate addresses from Kjell Magne Bondevik, the former Norwegian Prime Minister, and Lord David Alton, chairman of the UK's North Korea All-Party Parliamentary Group. Perhaps this House should examine the idea of looking at the human rights situations in countries we do not have diplomatic representation with at the moment, with the North Koreans leaving.

I want to focus on the North Koreans whom I met there. I have met one of them before. One of the documents—if that is what we can call it—that I got there was an incredible picture that you can get from Google Earth of the Korean peninsula at night. Of course, South Korea is all lit up, but there is not a single point of light in the whole of North Korea. The desperate lives that people must live in that benighted country are evidenced by this document, which I will seek to table in a minute. But the North Koreans impressed me so much. There was a former North Korean Air Force captain, Park Myeong-ho, and other people who spoke about engagement with North Korea. North Korea seems to be being affected by the opening up of the world, particularly South Korea, towards it. There are satellite phones that border guards now use to contact North Korean dissident groups and radio stations in South Korea. The regime seems to be crumbling, and I think it is incumbent on the world community to see that this does not happen in a way that is unmanaged, with hundreds of thousands of refugees and desperate people coming out.

I want to focus on two people in particular. One is a great Australian scholar and fluent Korean speaker, Andrei Lankov, formerly of the ANU and now professor at Kookmin University in Seoul, who has the

idea of engagement with North Korea with a view to improving human rights in that country which can only happen with changing the regime. The second is the pianist Kim Cheol Woong, who shows the human potential of the North Korean people. He was here last year in Australia to open the Melbourne Jazz Festival. The crime that he was jailed for originally in North Korea was that he played jazz in his repertoire at a Korean concert. That shows the kind of state North Korea is, when it can jail a great artiste like him. To see Kim Cheol Woong here in Australia entertaining Australian people and then to see him there at the conference in London is an example of the human potential in North Korea and perhaps why that regime needs to be changed. I am very proud to report they are bringing the ninth conference on North Korean human rights to Australia to be held in Melbourne in January next year. (*Time expired*)

The SPEAKER—During his contribution the honourable member sought leave to table a document. Is there any objection to leave being granted? There being no objection, leave is granted.

Federal Election

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (7.35 pm)—Mr Speaker, allow me at this stage to congratulate you on your election to this high office. You have been a member of this House for many years, as was indicated during the debate prior to your election, and I have to say that if we have to have a government member I could not honestly think of a better government member to have as the Speaker of the House of Representatives. You have always been firm and fair, you understand the standing orders, and if you have a robust relationship with the clerks, as you attested to in your acceptance speech, it is obviously because you understand, as do the clerks, the standing orders and, on occasions, you might

have a genuine difference of opinion on how those standing orders ought to be applied.

I want to say just how proud I am to be an Australian. We have a wonderful democracy. We are the sixth-oldest democracy in the world. Last year on 24 November we had an election. The government won and we lost, and while one might quibble with the outcome one certainly cannot contest the importance of the process. We are singularly fortunate as Australians, because, unlike people in so many other parts of the world, every three years we are able to judge the government of the day. Australians get the government they deserve. That is appropriate, and all of us, regardless of the result, should rejoice in the fact that we are a country which has freedom, stability, and a way of life that has made us the envy of people throughout the world.

In this the first adjournment debate speech I have delivered in the 42nd Parliament, I would genuinely like to take the opportunity of thanking the electorate of Fisher for returning me as its member. It is wonderful to survive a tsunami. Right around the country, people survived tsunamis, and some people, sadly, did not. It is a great privilege to be elected to represent the most wonderful part of Australia and one of the fastest-growing areas in our country. The Sunshine Coast is a place to which people choose to come to bring up their families and to retire. It is undoubtedly an iconic area and I must say that I am singularly fortunate to have been selected at so many elections to represent the people of Fisher in the Australian parliament.

It is always dangerous to cite names and thank people for the debt you owe to them, but I would like to thank my wife, Inge, for her incredible support during the election. She was absolutely wonderful and it would not have been possible to achieve the result that we achieved without her input and sup-

port. I would also like to thank my campaign director, Michael Bloyce; my FEC chairman, Ken Hines; all the branches in the electorate of Fisher; and all the membership of the electorate of Fisher for their very strong support. We faced a very difficult election. We have only ever had four prime ministers from Queensland. We had Andrew Fisher, after whom my seat is named; Arthur Fadden, who was Prime Minister for a short time during the war; Frank Forde, who was Prime Minister between Chifley and Curtin; and now we have Kevin Rudd. With Kevin Rudd coming from Queensland it was always going to be an extraordinarily difficult ask for people not only on the Sunshine Coast but throughout Queensland to return the government. The quality, or otherwise, of the Labor candidate did not matter. Every single Liberal Party and National Party candidate at the election on 24 November faced one opponent—that, of course, was Kevin Rudd, who has now been elected as Prime Minister of Australia. I salute his election and I congratulate him. I do believe that our Prime Minister is a person of great integrity and quality. While I do not agree with his policy on many occasions, I think we are fortunate to have a person of very good values elected as Australia's Prime Minister.

Mr Somlyay interjecting—

Mr SLIPPER—Mr Chief Opposition Whip, you are right. The Prime Minister was, I believe, born in your electorate, and he was nurtured in your electorate. Half of the Prime Minister's family was conservative. In any event, there is a sense of reflected pride and glory that we have a Prime Minister from Queensland, and he is prepared to stand up and be counted on the issues that he believes are very important. A lot of people were critical of the apology, but I have to say that the Prime Minister announced his policy before the election and I am very much in favour of people delivering on their commit-

ments to the Australian people. It is to the credit of the Prime Minister that he got elected and one of the first actions he took was to implement that campaign promise. *(Time expired)*

Federal Election

Mr MURPHY (Lowe—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Trade) (7.40 pm)—Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your elevation to high office. I also congratulate the deputy speakers—the member for Chisholm and the member for Maranoa—and I wish you all the best for the 42nd Parliament. I think the House has made a great choice in making you the Speaker. On this historic day, I sincerely thank the electors of Lowe for their vote of confidence in electing me to the 42nd Parliament. I am honoured and privileged. I will continue to work hard for my constituents' interests to the best of my ability. I thank my wife, Adriana, my local ALP branch members, my staff and my supporters for their very hard work during the campaign and their ongoing hard work and encouragement. Without their hard work and support, I know that I would not be standing in this place tonight.

Our Prime Minister, Mr Kevin Rudd, and our Deputy Prime Minister, Ms Julia Gillard, have been elected with a mandate to bring to this 42nd Parliament an exciting agenda for change. I congratulate both of them tonight for their relentless campaigning and outstanding leadership since the election, which offers so much hope for our nation and the opportunity to achieve so much for our great country. As I reflect on the past 10 weeks that have elapsed since the Rudd government assumed office, it is astonishing to note how many things have taken place of which I am proud. Today, on this momentous occasion, the Prime Minister delivered, in this place, on his promise to deliver to the stolen generation and our Indigenous Australians. What

a momentous occasion it was! How proud of our Prime Minister Australia feels tonight! I look forward to speaking on the Prime Minister's motion soon.

Further, since the election the Prime Minister delivered on his promise and ratified the Kyoto protocol at the climate change conference in Bali, Indonesia. I am very proud of that. The Prime Minister has also travelled to Iraq and Afghanistan to support the brave members of our Defence Force. How proud I am of that. The Prime Minister has practised cooperative federalism, successfully conducting early in January the first of what will be many COAG meetings. I well remember the day Kevin Rudd was elected Leader of the Opposition in December 2006. One of the first things he spoke about was his determination to promote cooperative federalism. How proud I am of him in relation to that.

This week the Prime Minister has also shown great leadership and support for our neighbours and friends in times of trouble following the failed assassination attempts on the political leaders of East Timor—President Jose Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao.

At a local level the Prime Minister, like me, has expressed his anger with the former government for the concealment of its plans, prior to the federal election, to close the east-west runway at Sydney airport. Just three days after the federal election, Sydney airport foreshadowed the closure later this year of the east-west runway. My constituents well know the implications for increased noise of the closure of the east-west runway. Sydney airport was obliged to inform the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government well in advance of these works, yet we did not hear a peep from the former minister be-

fore the election. That is an absolute bloody disgrace!

Safety is always paramount at our airports; however, consultation is imperative. The constituents of Lowe deserve much better, with honest communication about the proposed developments of Sydney airport now that it has been privatised by the Howard government. I commend the action of both the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, the Hon. Anthony Albanese, the member for Grayndler—who, like me, well knows Sydney airport—and the Prime Minister, who already have ordered an independent engineers' report on the project and have suggested that a report on environmental impacts be sought. The newly reconstituted Sydney Airport Community Forum meets on Friday and I look forward to standing up for my electorate and prosecuting, through that forum, the many issues that relate to the airport. Despite the efforts of the former government to leave remnants of their negative, exclusive attitude to consultation, the election of a Rudd Labor government strengthens my resolve to deal with each challenge in the 42nd Parliament—(*Time expired*)

Federal Election

Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples Australian Rugby Union

Mr JOHNSON (Ryan) (7.45 pm)—On this first full sitting day of the 42nd Parliament, it is a great privilege to be back in the parliament to represent my constituency of Ryan. I am very indebted to the people of Ryan who supported me in what was clearly a difficult election for the coalition, but I like to think it is a reflection of the dedicated representation that I have given to the Ryan electorate, to the western suburbs of Brisbane, where I went to school and went to university as, of course, a younger man. I pay tribute to all those in the community that

played a very strong role in ensuring that my election was successful.

As someone who believes very much in democracy, I also want to extend very warm congratulations to the new government. I extend very strong and genuine congratulations to the new Prime Minister; I wish him well in his high office. It certainly must be an honour to reach the high office of Prime Minister of this great country. I know that the people of my electorate, both those who voted for me and those who did not, will wish him well, because he has both an enormous privilege and an enormous responsibility—and I think that sentiment is shared by all those who represent their various constituencies in this place.

Tonight I want to flag a couple of things. The first is that in this place, on this historic day—the day that the national parliament extended an apology to the stolen generation for all the dreadful things that happened in our nation's history—I want to add my name to the record, both as an individual and as the federal member for Ryan. I think it is entirely appropriate that the country is able to express its deep regret, its deep sadness and its deep sorrow for the terrible deeds that happened in the past. I believe that it is also fully incumbent upon the national government and the national parliament to do all in their power in terms of their resources to address and redress the pressing needs of our hundreds of thousands of Indigenous Australians who are not as advantaged as many others in the country—to ensure that they share in the prosperity and the wealth of our country. Today was an important day; it was a first step. I should add that I think it is a condition precedent to Australia moving forward. But it is not the sum total of what this country can and must do.

I also want to acknowledge the concerns or the anxieties of some of my colleagues

who might have reservations about the issue. I think, if we are to be very fair, we should also respect the views held by others. We should not seek to diminish their right to hold their views. They are entirely right to hold the views they hold for whatever reason they hold them. We should not seek to diminish ourselves, those who have a certain view, by condemning the views of others—and I think it is very important not to do that. We should say, in fact, that they have a right to hold those views but, as a national parliament, we should express a position.

I also take this opportunity on this first day back, in terms of a full question time, to express my great disappointment that the new federal government has decided to abolish a \$25 million commitment by the last federal government to support the Australian Rugby Union with the construction of an Australian national rugby academy at Ballymore, Brisbane. I played a role in this and I think, given the issues of young people, of obesity and of drugs, we need to do all we can to encourage young Australians to participate in sport. This academy would have been a wonderful nurturing ground, a wonderful nurturing facility, to get young men into an active sport, which in this case is rugby. Back on 30 June 2007, \$25 million was committed by the former Prime Minister. It was not committed in the campaign itself; it was not an election commitment. It was not given in the caretaker period. It was a commitment. Now, as I understand it, because of paperwork, that commitment will not be honoured by this government. (*Time expired*)

Ms Fiona Selimi: Rooty Hill High School

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (7.51 pm)—Mr Speaker, congratulations! The following is a shortened speech by Fiona Selimi, the dux of Rooty Hill High School:

Aristotle quotes “Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly, we are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.” This leads me to believe that perhaps achieving ones potential and surpassing it essentially relies on the ability for one to continuously pursue and persist with the challenges life heaves at us. Coincidentally, Persist is Rooty Hill High School’s motto which goes with participation, excellence, respect and responsibility, safety, innovation, success and teamwork. Therefore excellence to me is, as Aristotle quotes, not an act but a habit. Attaining excellence involves having to sacrifice, and I sacrificed many things, my friends, my family and even myself. Seeing that 90.25 as my UAI gave me a tremendous sense of triumph and joy as I knew that within the situation I was in, I couldn’t have done any better. Most of you wouldn’t know this, but I worked 6 nights a week and weekends at my family business, totalling an average 40 hours per week. I didn’t have time to catch up with friends or family, all my days entailed were school and work then sleep, but I thought to myself, if I can attain the best mark possible and go to uni, then during that 5 month break once the HSC has finished I can go out and have a good time, and it was quite hard missing all my friends birthdays, parties and generally just hanging out, but that sacrifice led me to where I am today—attending the University of Sydney for a Bachelor in Applied Science, Medical Radiation Science, Diagnostic Radiography. The HSC takes an emotional toll on anyone who partakes in it, whether they want to become a doctor, a lawyer or both it takes an immense amount of commitment, dedication and persistence in order to achieve your desired goals, but nothing is impossible. Education is power, which is why it is so significant to actually attain a great education, something that I accomplished whilst attending Rooty Hill High. The fact that classes became smaller enabled all my teachers to evenly focus all their attention on every single student therefore most teachers will go beyond that student/teacher relationship to actually become your friend and in turn, constructing a strong and caring relationship with most, if not all their students. Most teachers provided me with

their emails and contact numbers so I could get in touch with them after school hours and during the holidays if I had any questions, which to me was one of the most considerate things any individual could do, so I thank each and every one of them for that. 2007 for me was quite a unique year; it was an emotional and physical rollercoaster with experiences of extreme angst, happiness and stress. The HSC itself was perhaps 60 percent of my own hard work and 40 percent of support and encouragement from others. I would first and foremost like to thank my family, especially my mother, my father for his constant support, Jasmine for her exceptionally wise advice and her ability to drill those rational thoughts back into my head every time I had the urge to drop out of year 12, Sami, my brother who was the most influential person during my entire education and who literally took timeout of his own busy schedule running our family business to help me out whenever I needed it. My best friends of course, Loren and Roxanne, where would I be without the both of you, your support and constant encouragement led me to where I am today and for that I thank you both. As I speak here now, this very moment, my aim is to inspire any candidates completing their HSC in 2008, at Rooty Hill High to try their best, because at the end of the day that is the only thing that matters, if you try your best and exceed your potential, then anything is possible. “The impossible is nothing and nothing is impossible.” That is my quote for today and hopefully it will be used in speeches to come, just as Aristotle’s quote was used in mine.

Fiona Selimi’s mother died when Fiona was in year 10—and they rubbish us westies. I seek leave to table the full speech.

Leave granted.

Fadden Electorate: Telecommunications

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (7.55 pm)—Mr Speaker, thank you for the liberty you gave me in delivering my maiden speech with respect to time. I appreciate that no such liberty will be given henceforth in this place. And thank you for the opportunity to raise a significant issue within the electorate of Fadden. Fadden, as this place well knows, is

the fastest-growing electorate in the entire nation. It is also one of the three Gold Coast seats, and the Gold Coast has the largest number of small to medium enterprises in the nation. In that context, I raise the issue of the parlous state of ADSL telecommunications or high-speed broadband within the electorate. Considering it is the fastest-growing electorate in the nation and has more small to medium enterprises Gold Coast wide than any other electorate or city in the nation, this is of significant concern.

For the last 18 months Telstra have under-invested in the exchange areas. They have not added any more ADSL ports to current exchanges nor upgraded exchanges, to the point whereby suburbs such as Oxenford, Gaven, Coomera, Upper Coomera and parts of Maudsland are not able to get high-speed broadband. This has a significant impact on families moving into the area and of course on the small business community which is trying to grow and thrive in the area.

I was perplexed when the Prime Minister during question time today made the point that, with ADSL2 being turned on, over two million new connections will be available. I have spoken with the head of Telstra for the Gold Coast and presented the issues which the constituents of Fadden have. Telstra made it very clear that ADSL2 on the Gold Coast, although switched on progressively over exchanges, will not allow a single new user to get ADSL services. Existing users will be able to upsell, paying more money for a higher speed or higher rate broadband using ADSL2. But no new ports will be added, no new equipment, no exchanges upgraded; therefore, no new connections. I can only assume that the Prime Minister during question time was speaking about other electorates because, in the fastest-growing electorate in this nation, there will be no new connections because of ADSL2.

Furthermore, until the government make a decision on their next generation plan for high-speed broadband, whether it is fibre-to-the-node or other architecture or technology, Telstra will not invest in what they see as old or outdated equipment, thereby not allowing any more ports into exchanges either wholesale to competitors or to onsell through their own retail arm.

Even if the government was to make a decision today on the new technology for fibre-to-the-node, it would still take approximately 12 months for the rollout of such technology before new connections are available to the fastest-growing electorate in Australia and, indeed, the home of small business, the Gold Coast. If the government were to make a decision today, it would still be 12 months away from new connections. I raise this issue with the House. It is, frankly, not good enough for Telstra to leave Fadden in the lurch and to deny people the opportunity of high-speed broadband.

The government's rhetoric during the election campaign with respect to all Australians needing access to high-speed broadband to enrich their life and to advance their business was entirely correct. Unfortunately, their words speak louder than their actions. So I do ask the government to facilitate the move on their next generation architecture to make a decision to allow Telstra to upgrade their equipment. And I beseech Telstra to look for equipment to put in the exchanges in Fadden and to add ports in Fadden so that people in the fastest-growing electorate of this country are not disadvantaged as they currently are.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 8 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 8.00 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Ms Macklin to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to social security, veterans' entitlements and military rehabilitation and compensation, and for related purposes. (Social Security and Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment (Enhanced Allowances) Bill 2008)

Ms Gillard to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Higher Education Support Act 2003, and for related purposes. (Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Assistance) Bill 2008)

Ms Gillard to present A Bill for an Act to amend the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000, and for related purposes. (Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (2008 Measures No. 1) Bill 2008)

Ms Roxon to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989, and for related purposes. (Therapeutic Goods Amendment (Poisons Standard) Bill 2008)

Mr Debus to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995, and for related purposes. (Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Amendment (Assessments and Advertising) Bill 2008)