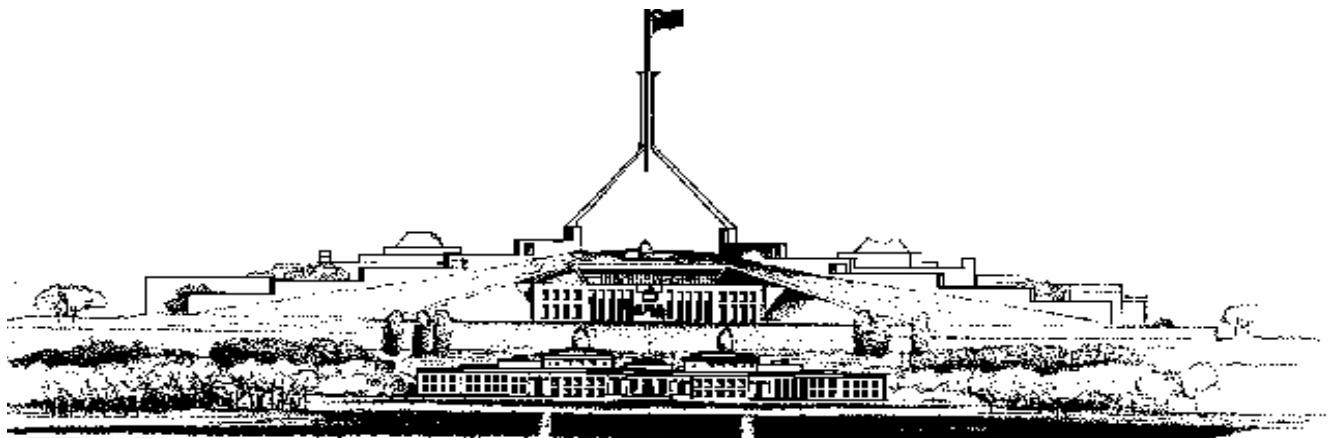




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 2, 2010
Monday, 18 October 2010

FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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SITTING DAYS—2010

| Month | Date |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| February | 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24, 25 |
| March | 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18 |
| May | 11, 12, 13, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31 |
| June | 1, 2, 3, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24 |
| September | 28, 29, 30 |
| October | 18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28 |
| November | 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25 |

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

Governor-General

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

House of Representatives Officeholders

Speaker—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP

Deputy Speaker—Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP

Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

Members of the Speaker's Panel—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP,

Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP

Leader of the House—Hon. Anthony Norman Albanese MP

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

Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Christopher Maurice Pyne MP

Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Party Leaders and Whips

Australian Labor Party

Leader—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Wayne Maxwell Swan MP

Chief Government Whip—Hon. Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon MP

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

Liberal Party of Australia

Leader—Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP

Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Warren George Entsch MP

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

The Nationals

Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP

Chief Whip—Mr Mark Maclean Coulton MP

Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives

Members of the House of Representatives

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

Members of the House of Representatives

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

Members of the House of Representatives

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

Members of the House of Representatives

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

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

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

Heads of Parliamentary Departments

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

GILLARD MINISTRY

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

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]

GILLARD MINISTRY—*continued*

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

SHADOW MINISTRY

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

[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]

SHADOW MINISTRY—*continued*

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

SHADOW MINISTRY—*continued*

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

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Monday, 18 October 2010

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 10 am, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

COMMITTEES
Selection Committee
Report No. 1

The SPEAKER—I present the Selection Committee's report relating to the consideration of committee and delegation business and private members' business on Monday, 18 October 2010. In accordance with the resolution agreed to by the House on 30 September, the committee's determinations have already appeared on today's *Notice Paper*. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.

The report read as follows—

Report relating to the consideration of committee and delegation business and private Members' business on Monday, 18 October 2010

Pursuant to standing order 222 and the resolution of the House on 30 September 2010, the Selection Committee has determined the order of precedence and times to be allotted for consideration of committee and delegation business and private Members' business on Monday, 18 October 2010. The order of precedence and the allotments of time determined by the Committee are as follows:

Items selected for House of Representatives Chamber (Approx 10 am to 12 noon)

COMMITTEE AND DELEGATION BUSINESS

Presentation and statements

1 AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Report on the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to the Republic of Korea, 28 February to 4 March 2010.

The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—statements may continue for 5 minutes

Speech time limits—

Mr Neumann—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 5 mins]

2 PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

Report on the Parliamentary Delegation to European Parliaments and Institutions, 23 to 30 April 2010.

The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—statements may continue for 5 minutes

Speech time limits—

Mr Ruddock—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 5 mins]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

1 MR WILKIE: To present a Bill for an Act to amend the Evidence Act 1995, and for related purposes. (Evidence Amendment (Journalists' Privilege) Bill 2010).

Presenter may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.

2 MR PYNE: To present a Bill for an Act to establish a Commission of Inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution Program, and for related purposes. (Commission of Inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution Program Bill 2010).

Presenter may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.

3 MR ABBOTT: To present a Bill for an Act to protect the interests of Aboriginal people in the management, development and use of native title land situated in wild river areas, and for related purposes. (Wild Rivers (Environmental Management) Bill 2010).

Presenter may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.

4 MR HOCKEY: To move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) Australia's Future Tax System Review (the 'Henry Review') made a large number of recommendations in relation to the system of taxation;
 - (b) the Government implemented very few of the recommendations;
 - (c) the Government has so far not released any of the Treasury modelling or other relevant information and advice underlying the recommendations; and
 - (d) release of that information would be in the best interests of the community by facilitating a fully informed public debate about the way forward for taxation reform;
- (2) orders the Government to release within five working days from the date of this motion, all of the relevant modelling, costings, working papers and supporting information underlying the 'Henry Review';
- (3) requires that, from the date of this motion, no existing papers, emails or other information relating to the 'Henry Review' may be destroyed; and
- (4) requires the Secretary of the Treasury to warrant to the House that all relevant documentation underlying the 'Henry Review' has been released.

Time allotted—40 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Mr Hockey—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

5 MS RISHWORTH: To move:

That this House:

- (1) notes significant community concern regarding the clarity, simplicity and accuracy of

food labelling, including labelling identifying the:

- (a) origin of the food;
- (b) nutritional value of the food; and
- (c) food production methods used, including the use of food technologies;

- (2) recognises that:
 - (a) adequate food labelling laws should aim foremost to protect the health and safety of consumers and eliminate deceitful or misleading labelling information;
 - (b) having clear, simple and accurate labelling on food empowers consumers and enables them to make informed food choices; and
 - (c) for food labelling laws to be effective, they need to be rigorously and consistently enforced;
- (3) supports the Australian and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council's establishment of an independent review into food labelling; and
- (4) encourages the Government and State and Territory governments to examine the results of this review, and work together to ensure that our food labelling laws deliver the outcomes our community desires.

Time allotted—remaining private Members' business time prior to 12 noon

Speech time limits—

Ms Rishworth—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items selected for House of Representatives Chamber (7.30 to 9.30 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

6 MS MARINO: To move:

That this House:

- (1) requires the Government:

- (a) urgently to introduce legislation to reinstate the former workplace participation criteria for independent youth allowance, to apply to students whose family home is located in inner regional areas as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics instrument Australian Standard Geographical Classification; and
- (b) to appropriate funds necessary to meet the additional cost of expanding the criteria for participation, with the funds to come from the Education Investment Fund; and

(2) to send a message to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and request that it concur.

Time allotted—60 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Ms Marino—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 8 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

7 MS PARKE: To move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

- (a) on 6 September 2010 the ABC's *Four Corners* program screened a story entitled 'Body Corporate', highlighting growing community and scientific concern regarding gene patents;
- (b) in particular, *Four Corners* discussed the case of five year old Liam who needed to have a genetic test to see if he had gene mutations to the SCN1A human gene linked to a specific form of epilepsy called Dravet Syndrome;
- (c) Bionomics, a South Australian company which had received a specific grant of around \$1 000 000 from AusIndustry to develop a SCN1A gene test:
 - (i) took out an Australian patent over the SCN1A human gene; and

- (ii) subsequently exclusively licensed the patent to Genetic Technologies, a Melbourne company that charges \$2000 for the SCN1A gene test in Australia;
- (d) Liam was being treated at the Westmead Hospital—a publicly funded institution that is part of NSW Health—which could not afford to pay Genetic Technologies \$2000 for each SCN1A gene test;
- (e) Liam's doctors sent a sample of his DNA to be tested in Scotland where the charge was just one third of the price charged by Genetic Technologies; and
- (f) the option to send the DNA sample overseas for testing not only took more time, leaving the young boy and his family waiting in distress, but highlights how Australian taxpayers providing research funds to (i) Australian universities to identify the SCN1A genetic mutations; and (ii) an Australian company to develop a genetic test, have been deprived of the benefits of that very research;

(2) notes that:

- (a) in July 2008, Genetic Technologies, as the exclusive licensee of Myriad Genetics, a United States company granted Australian patents over the BRCA 1 and 2 gene mutations linked to breast and ovarian cancers, demanded via a lawyer's letter sent to all Australian hospitals and clinical laboratories (including the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre) that they stop all testing for breast cancer, claiming such testing infringed Myriad Genetics' Australian BRCA patents;
- (b) in 2009 in the United States, eleven plaintiffs, including Lisbeth Ceriani, a 43 year old single mother diagnosed with breast cancer, and professional medical and clinical associations such as the American Society for Clinical Pathology, launched a legal challenge to

seven of Myriad Genetics' United States BRCA patents, where: and

- (i) Ms Ceriani found that she was unable to get a second opinion on a positive genetic test for ovarian cancer because in the United States there is only one test, owned by only one company, Myriad Genetics, which charges over US\$3000 per test;
- (ii) in March 2010 a United States Federal Court agreed with the plaintiffs and declared all seven United States patents invalid on the ground that under United States patent law, patents can only be granted over inventions, not for the discovery of natural phenomena; and
- (iii) the Court so held because, first, despite being removed from the human body and thus 'isolated', the BRCA genes were 'not markedly different from native DNA as it exists in nature' and second, the analysis of these two human genes by way of a genetic test was 'merely data gathering to obtain clinical data';

(3) notes that:

- (a) at the official commemoration of the decoding of the human genome in March 2000, United States President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that 'raw fundamental data on the human genome, including the human DNA sequence and its variations, should be made freely available to scientists everywhere', yet by 2005, according to a survey published in *Science*, more than 20 per cent (probably now much higher) of the human genome was the subject of Untied States intellectual property;
- (b) President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair also said that 'unencumbered access to this information will promote discoveries that will reduce the burden of disease, improve health around the world, and enhance the quality of life of all humankind.';

- (c) unencumbered access to genetic information cannot be achieved when patents over human genes are being used to suppress competition, innovation, research and testing;
- (d) Professor Ian Frazer, the inventor of the cervical cancer vaccine, has joined other cancer researchers in calling for a revision of Australian patent law, stating that researchers need to be able to proceed with their work without having to consult the companies whose patents the work might infringe: 'restricting the research use of a gene sequence could delay the development and testing of truly inventive and practical uses of the gene and its protein product for diagnosis and therapy.'; and
- (e) other groups opposed to the granting of gene patents include the Cancer Council Australia, the Breast Cancer Foundation of Australia, the Royal Australian College of Pathologists, the Human Genetics Society of Australia and the Australian Medical Association; and

(4) calls for amendment of the Patents Act 1990 to ensure that patents cannot be granted over any biological materials which are identical or substantially identical to what exists in nature.

Time allotted—remaining private Members' business time prior to 9.30 pm.

Speech time limits—

Ms Parke—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 8 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items selected for Main Committee (approx 11 am to 1 pm—Main Committee to be suspended at approx 1 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

1 MR MORRISON: To move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugees Convention) states that 'contracting States shall apply the provisions of this Convention to refugees without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin';
- (b) the Government suspended the processing of asylum seeker applications from Afghanistan on 9 April 2010; and
- (c) there are more than 5000 persons currently being detained by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship on the mainland and Christmas Island; and

(2) calls for the:

- (a) immediate lifting of the discriminatory suspension of processing of claims by Afghan asylum seekers; and
- (b) immediate processing of asylum claims of all Afghans held in detention; and
- (c) Minister for Immigration and Citizenship to provide subclass 449 safe haven visas to successful refugees, to accommodate potential changes in refugee status resulting from changed conditions in the country of origin.

Time allotted—40 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Mr Morrison—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

2 MS SAFFIN: To move:

That this House:

(1) notes with grave concern:

- (a) Telstra's stated proposal to close its Business Call Centre in Grafton, with the loss of 108 local jobs, and the relocation of some of these jobs to Brisbane and Melbourne;
- (b) the damaging flow on effect to a regional economy from such significant job cuts;
- (c) the perception that Telstra is abandoning regional Australia; and
- (d) Telstra's claim that it can improve customer service while carrying out a program of job cuts;

(2) acknowledges the Clarence Valley community's strong support for the campaign to save local Telstra jobs evidenced by the actions of Mayor Richie Williamson, the Grafton Chamber of Commerce and the 5559 people who signed my petition calling for Telstra to keep the Call Centre open, and not abandon regional Australia; and

(3) calls upon Telstra's Chief Executive Officer David Thodey to stop the closure of the Grafton Call Centre to demonstrate a commitment by Telstra to Regional Australia.

Time allotted—40 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Ms Saffin—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

3 MRS MOYLAN: To move:

That this House:

- (1) acknowledges the work of carers, and in particular ageing parents caring for profoundly disabled dependents;
- (2) recognises that ageing parent carers remain deeply concerned about the diminishing capacity to care for their dependent children;
- (3) appreciates the special challenges faced by families, and in particular ageing parents,

who wish to make provision for the needs of their disabled dependents;

(4) notes that:

- (a) disability trusts were established in September 2006 by the Coalition Government to assist families make provision for the future housing and care needs of dependents with severe disabilities;
- (b) despite the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs estimating that over four years, 5000 people with severe disability would benefit from Special Disability Trusts, as at 31 March 2010, 423 people have been assessed as eligible, and only 91 trusts have been established; and
- (c) since establishing Special Disability Trusts, it has become apparent that the conditions governing eligibility and management, as well as direct and wider taxation implications, have limited the workability and uptake of the trusts;

(5) acknowledges that conditions diminishing the attractiveness of the trusts include the:

- (a) complex application of taxation rules;
- (b) inflexibility in what trust funds may be used for;
- (c) inability for beneficiaries, through Special Disability Trusts, to claim the first home owners grant and other home saving initiatives;
- (d) high initial eligibility threshold requiring a beneficiary to be eligible for at least a Carer Allowance, the regulations of which state, *inter alia*, that care for a 'significant period' must be given, defined as at least 20 hours a week of care;
- (e) eligibility requirements disfavouring mental impairment disabilities; and
- (f) attribution of Capital Gains Tax to transferors where, in particular, houses are placed into Special Disability Trusts;

(6) condemns the Government for not taking seriously the recommendations outlined in the October 2008 Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs report entitled: *Building Trust, Supporting Families through Disability Trusts*; and

(7) calls on the Government to fully examine the viability of implementing the Senate Committee's recommendations with a view to assisting ageing parents to adequately address the future needs of their profoundly disabled dependents.

Time allotted—remaining private Members' business time prior to suspension at approx 1 pm.

Speech time limits—

Mrs Moylan—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items selected for Main Committee (6.30 to 9 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

4 MR SCOTT: To move:

That this House calls for:

- (1) an inquiry into the role of Australia's medical and surgical colleges in the registration process of medical graduates and overseas trained doctors; and
- (2) the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship to delay the revocation of 457 visas for those doctors who have been deregistered due to failure of the Pre Employment Structured Clinical Interview, to allow adequate time for a review of their case and reassessment of their competency.

Time allotted—60 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Mr Scott—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 8 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

5 MR ADAMS: To move:

That this House:

- (1) recognises that the forestry industry is an important part of the Australian economy but is currently in crisis;
- (2) understands that it is necessary to secure the viability of forestry dependent communities and to create well paid, high skilled jobs by value adding to our natural resource;
- (3) supports the process whereby the forestry unions, government, industry, environment and community groups working together will allow a complete restructure of the industry that will determine that any transition is fair and just for workers, their families and communities; and
- (4) calls on the House to ensure that interim payments to those facing hardships because of the transition, and those exiting the industry, can be assisted in a timely manner.

Time allotted—40 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Mr Adams—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

6 MS HALL: To move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:

- (a) National Stroke Awareness Week was 13 to 19 September;
- (b) sixty thousand people will suffer a stroke this year, that is, one stroke every 10 minutes;
- (c) stroke is the second single greatest killer after coronary and a leading cause of disability in Australia;
- (d) one in five people having a first stroke die within one month, and one in three die within one year;

- (e) twenty per cent of all strokes occur in people under fifty five years of age;
- (f) eighty eight per cent of stroke survivors live at home, and most have a disability;
- (g) stroke kills more women than breast cancer;
- (h) stroke costs Australia \$2.14 billion a year, yet is preventable; and
- (i) education plays an important role in reducing the occurrence of stroke; and

- (2) acknowledges:

- (a) the role played by the families and carers of stroke victims;
- (b) the work of the National Stroke Foundation;
- (c) the effectiveness of the FAST campaign; and
- (d) that prevention is the best cure.

Time allotted—remaining private Members' business time prior to 9 pm

Speech time limits—

Ms Hall—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 6 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

MAIN COMMITTEE

Private Members' Motions

The SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 41(g), and the determinations of the Selection Committee, I present copies of the terms of motions for which notice has been given by the members for Cook, Page, Pearce, Maranoa, Lyons and Shortland. These matters will be considered in the Main Committee later today.

COMMITTEES

Membership

The SPEAKER—I have received three messages from the Senate informing the

House of the appointment of senators to certain joint committees. As the list of appointments is a lengthy one, I do not propose to read it to the House. Details will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

REGISTRAR OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The SPEAKER (10.02 am)—I wish to inform the House that, in accordance with resolution 3 of the House of Representatives, relating to the registration of members' interests, I have appointed Mr David Elder, Deputy Clerk of the House of Representatives, as Registrar of Members' Interests in the 43rd Parliament.

DELEGATION REPORTS

Australian Parliamentary Delegation to the Republic of Korea

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (10.03 am)—I present the report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to the Republic of Korea from 28 February to 4 March 2010.

It is my privilege to present this report on the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to the Republic of Korea from 28 February 2010 to 4 March 2010. The report is very comprehensive, and I want to pay my respects and express my thanks to Jeffrey Robertson of the Parliamentary Library and to congratulate the Parliamentary Library for their assistance and information. I wish to also thank Ambassador Sam Gerovich and his staff for their outstanding professionalism and support. In addition I wish to express on behalf of the delegation our thanks to Meredith Horne, who is the Adviser to the President of the Senate, Senator John Hogg.

The representatives from the delegation were ably led by Senator the Hon. John Hogg, President of the Australian Senate. Also present on the delegation were Senator Alan Eggleston from Western Australia, a member of the Liberal Party of Australia; Mr

Steve Georganas, the member for Hindmarsh in South Australia, from the Australian Labor Party; me, the member for Blair in Queensland and a member of the Australian Labor Party; and Mr Tony Windsor, the member for New England in New South Wales, an Independent.

The delegation was warmly received by the parliament and politicians of the Republic of Korea. Our relationship with the Republic of Korea, commonly known as South Korea, was forged in war and fostered in peace. Korea is a very important trade and cultural partner for Australia. We play Korea in football—we call it soccer here in Australia; they call it football over there—which they are fanatics about. We also participate in many cultural exchanges with the Republic. We participate as middle powers in the G20 and other international fora. Korea is an extremely important trading partner for Australia. Korea's list of principal export destinations in 2009 had Australia at No. 14. Korea's list of principal sources of imports had Australia at No. 5. We are a stable and secure supplier of iron ore and coal to their wonderful industrial precinct.

I am indebted to Macquarie Investment Management, particularly for the analysis by John Walker AM, Chairman of the Macquarie Group of Companies, which was quite wise on how Korea has moved. Korea has really progressed wonderfully well from what he described as 'the perspiration economy' from 1960 to 2000 to 'the aspiration economy' from 2000 to 2008 and, from 2009 onwards, to what he terms 'the inspiration economy'. We went to the Hyundai car plant in Ulsan as well as the POSCO steelworks at Pohang. Representatives from what are now called, in the new political paradigm, the mining states—Queensland and Western Australia—were particularly interested in Australia's contribution, through the supply

of iron ore and coal, to the second largest steelmaker in the world.

We started our delegation at the appropriate place, in my respectful opinion, and that was at what is known colloquially as UNMCK—the United Nations Memorial Cemetery in Busan. A strong affinity can be felt through the mutual sacrifice evident in that cemetery, where 281 Australian servicemen are buried. It was a very moving time for all of us, and certainly when I laid a flower on the grave of a Brisbane airman who was only a teenager when he died it really moved me to tears.

We have developed a significant relationship with the Republic of Korea. We are fostering the free trade agreement, which will help us, and our security is linked with Korea. The delegation advanced Australia's interests, and I thank all those involved.

Australian Parliamentary Delegation to European Parliaments and Institutions

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (10.08 am)—I present the report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to European Parliaments and Institutions from 23 to 30 April 2010. This delegation was led by the President of the Senate, the Hon. John Hogg. I was the deputy leader and accompanying members included Senator Bilyk and Andrew Laming MP. The delegation continued the custom of biennial visits to certain parliamentary, commercial and international institutions in Europe which are of significance to us here in Australia.

The delegation was originally scheduled to depart Australia on 16 April and spend two weeks visiting parliaments and institutions in Sweden, Denmark, France, Belgium and Germany. You may remember that there was a remarkable eruption in Iceland, and that meant that much travel in Europe was not possible. The ash cloud obviously disrupted aviation and resulted in the cancella-

tion of the Scandinavian component of our program.

The delegation commenced an amended visits program in Paris on 24 April. The delegation visited the French Senate and attended various Anzac Day ceremonies, including the dawn service at Villers-Bretonneux. I must say, having previously been in Gallipoli and also at Hellfire Pass, that participating in one of the most important Anzac Day ceremonies, the dawn service at Villers-Bretonneux, was a very emotional experience.

The group moved on to Belgium, and we completed Anzac Day formalities by attending the last post ceremony at Menin Gate, in Ypres. In the following days, meetings were held at the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Belgian Senate. In Germany, the delegation met with a range of commercial and international organisations in Bonn and Cologne, with a focus on research, innovation, energy security, climate change and strategies to combat desertification.

The delegation arrived in Europe at an important time for our bilateral relationship. The expanded role for the European Parliament after the Treaty of Lisbon came into effect in late 2009 has implications for key areas such as agriculture, the impact of the global financial crisis and exchange of security information. Hopefully we were able to clarify Australia's position on some of these issues to ensure that that bilateral cooperation can be maintained. Of particular note is that the first Australia-EU parliamentary meeting was able to take place over two days, when we were guests of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand. These sessions provided a useful forum to explore a number of important issues in depth and to clarify Australia's position.

It was particularly interesting to me, and it is mentioned on page 9 of the report, that there was discussion on migration. I have to say I was disappointed by the good deal of misinformation about the way we handle these issues here in Australia, particularly as we handle them in a non-discriminatory way. I was puzzled by some of the criticism that was developed by some new members of the European Community, questioning Australia's approach to these matters, and I am glad we were able to deal with them in a comprehensive way. While delegation members also absorbed much information from our European hosts, it was a good chance to provide an Australian perspective, and so this regular exchange is an important component of our bilateral relations. The report recommends that the Scandinavian leg of the program be subject to a delegation visit in early 2011.

I commend a reading of the report, particularly the section dealing with climate change, as it may be enlightening to know that we had some rather ambitious views here about how some degree of agreement might be achieved, particularly at Copenhagen. The section on that makes it quite clear that we should have had some doubts before we made the commitments that we did. I commend the report.

**EVIDENCE AMENDMENT
(JOURNALISTS' PRIVILEGE)
BILL 2010**

First Reading

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

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (10.14 am)—I am very pleased today to be in a position to present the Evidence Amendment (Journalists' Privilege) Bill 2010. This bill amends the Evidence Act 1995 by strengthening the protection provided to journalists and their sources. It is intended to foster freedom of the press and better access to information for

the Australian public. The bill provides that if a journalist has promised an informant not to disclose his or her identity then neither the journalist nor his or her employer is compelled to answer any question or to produce any document that would disclose the identity of the informant or enable their identity to be ascertained.

The Evidence Amendment (Journalists' Privilege) Bill 2010 is based on the premise that every member of the community has the fundamental right to free speech and that sometimes the exercise of that right needs to be undertaken anonymously, especially when it comes to people speaking out about official misconduct. Moreover, the bill is based on the premise that journalists must be able to publicise such outspokenness if they are to accurately inform the Australian public about matters of interest. In other words, this bill deals with whistleblowers and the journalists they deal with.

People become whistleblowers for all sorts of reasons—for example, Toni Hoffman, the Queensland nurse who bravely lifted the lid on Dr Patel's deadly transgressions at Bundaberg Base Hospital; Lieutenant Colonel Lance Collins, who broke ranks to advise Prime Minister John Howard about the failure of institutional controls over the intelligence system; Defence official Mike Scrutton, who blew the whistle on the government continuing to claim asylum seekers had thrown their children overboard, even though it had been told repeatedly that no-one in Defence still believed that story to be true; and UN weapons inspector Rod Barton, who went to the media to reveal how information on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction had been manipulated and that Iraqi prisoners were being mistreated.

All these people served the public interest significantly by speaking up about the controversial matters that preoccupied them, yet

all were assailed by critics keen to put troublemakers in their place and to send a strong message to other officials not to step out of line. Toni Hoffman was ridiculed and was eventually forced to go outside of the Queensland health system to raise her concerns with her local member of parliament, Rob Messenger. Messenger, also facing ridicule over the matter, eventually had to rely on the *Courier Mail* to get the Queensland government to intervene in the Bundaberg Hospital tragedy. Collins's call for a royal commission was dismissed by the Prime Minister, and he was eventually forced out of the Defence Force by what he described as the 'blow-torching process'. Srafton's evidence was criticised by the government as implausible, irrational and evasive, and the timing of his claims was described as 'politically strategic'. Barton was reportedly marginalised at the insistence of Prime Minister Howard's staff and even ridiculed by the Prime Minister himself, who pushed the view that 'it is quite common for people with no understanding of the process, or little understanding of the process, to misunderstand the things they see.'

In all these examples the whistleblower decided to go public, but not in all cases can they or would they want to. This is unsurprising, considering the punishment meted out publicly to those whistleblowers who do opt to out themselves. It is no wonder that in some important instances whistleblowers will decide to try to keep their identities secret, preferring instead that journalists publicise their concerns while not attributing the exact source, as was the case in 2004 when two senior political reporters for Melbourne's *Herald Sun*, Michael Harvey and Gerard McManus, wrote stories which exposed a decision by the Howard government to reject a \$500 million increase in war veterans' entitlements. During the legal proceedings against the alleged source of the

story, the journalists refused to identify their source, thus putting them in contempt of the court and facing possible imprisonment. This was an extraordinary situation, not least because the actions of Harvey and McManus were acting entirely consistently with the Australian Journalists Association Code of Ethics, which provides that journalists should:

Aim to attribute information to its source. Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source's motives and any alternative attributable source. Where confidences are accepted, respect them in all circumstances.

As it turned out, the pair were convicted of contempt of court and fined \$7,000 each for refusing to reveal the source behind the stories they wrote, even though this was a clear example where journalists would not otherwise have been able to report on the actions of the government without their source, had he or she been revealed, suffering terrible harm.

The story of Harvey and McManus highlights as well as any the need for legislative reform to provide better protection for whistleblowers and the journalists who try to publicise their concerns. Its logical counterpart will be broader whistleblower legislation, and I look forward to working with members in this place to progress such unprecedented federal legislation during the term of this parliament.

Whistleblowers face a hard time in Australia. They are often seen as troublemakers or misfits, people letting the team down, crazies or just do-gooders ignorant of the fact that the government knows best. Most never enjoy any sustained media interest. Instead, they have their say and struggle with the subsequent professional, personal and financial consequences.

In 2002 *Time* magazine had three American whistleblowers as their cover story Peo-

ple of the Year. This would not happen in Australia, nor will it happen until the public better understands that many whistleblowers are good people doing their best to publicise misconduct. And that mind shift will not occur until politicians show leadership and pass the laws which will encourage and protect whistleblowers and those who facilitate them and which will show the community that whistleblowers are doing the right thing and should be supported.

However, this bill does recognise that there may be circumstances where the public interest in the disclosure of the identity of the source is so strong that it should be provided to the court. In such cases it will be up to those parties who want to force a journalist to reveal their source to prove that the public interest is best served in disclosing the source and that the public interest benefit of a disclosure genuinely outweighs the likely harm to the source.

This bill will replace the existing provisions in division 1A of the Evidence Act. It will include a new provision that provides clear authority for the presumption that a journalist is not required to give evidence about the identity of the source of their information. This presumption can be rebutted in circumstances where the public interest outweighs any likely adverse effect for the person who provided the information to the journalist, as well as the public interest in the communication of information to the public by the media. These amendments are based on similar provisions of the New Zealand Evidence Act 2006 and have been modified to ensure appropriate application in the context of Australian evidence law.

Australian democracy is obviously a complex combination of many elements—for example, representative bodies freely elected under universal suffrage, a balance of sorts provided by a non-elected head of state, an

independent judiciary and the rule of law, the separation of church and state, and so on. Central is freedom of both speech and press, and this in particular must never be compromised. Yet, the example of Harvey and McManus shows us that the apparent freedom of speech and press that many Australians take for granted is in fact on shaky ground. The Evidence Act in its current form rests on the premise that journalists should normally be expected to reveal their confidential sources and in doing so breach their code of ethics. That is wrong and this bill will rectify the problem. I commend the Evidence Amendment (Journalists' Privilege) Bill 2010 to the House.

Bill read a first time.

The SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 41, the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE BUILDING THE EDUCATION REVOLUTION PROGRAM BILL 2010

First Reading

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

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (10.23 am)—I present the Commission of Inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution Program Bill 2010. The Building the Education Revolution program of the 42nd Parliament, otherwise known as the school hall stimulus debacle, is one of the sorriest tales of waste and mismanagement in the history of Federation. I am sure there have been more gross examples of fraud, mismanagement or waste of themselves, but in terms of the quantum of funds nothing can surpass a \$16½ billion program of taxpayers' money, \$14.1 billion of which was the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program, which became known as the school hall stimulus debacle. In terms of the quantum of funds that have been wasted and mismanaged by the now Prime

Minister, previously the Minister for Education, nothing surpasses the Building the Education Revolution program of the 42nd Parliament.

Unfortunately the waste continues unabated, in spite of the fact that since April 2009 the opposition have raised in this House and in the media example after example of waste and mismanagement. The opposition have been supported in raising these issues by notable media identities and outlets such as Ray Hadley, the *Australian*, the *Today* show on Channel 9 as well as others. In spite of all this, the previous Minister for Education, now the Prime Minister, described those complaints as nitpicking about a \$16 billion program—in spite of the fact that we have uncovered billions of dollars of waste and mismanagement. Outlets and organisations such as the New South Wales Teachers Federation, not usually aligned or associated with the coalition, have said that there is as much as 30 to 50 per cent waste in this program, leading people to assume that there is as much as \$6 billion to \$8 billion of wasted taxpayers' money. In spite of all that, the Prime Minister, then the Minister for Education, has defended this program for 18 months. She has insisted that complaints about it are nitpicking and has gone as far as to accuse the opposition and the *Australian* of fabricating these examples. It has led to red-hot anger in the electorate. In school communities, middle-class Australians who want the best for their children in education greeted the announcement of this funding with excitement and with the apprehension of being able to achieve the right outcome for their children in terms of what their school needed. These school communities welcomed this funding and in many, many cases they have ended up disappointed, frustrated, bitter and angry at the extraordinary waste in this program.

I think the emblematic waste was the school canteen that cost \$20,000 per square metre to build, and having been built was unable to house the necessary requirements for the small primary school that it had been built for because it was smaller than a one-car garage. That is an emblematic example, but there are so many examples. Over the last 18 months, the coalition have raised concerns to do with nine areas of the program. Hundreds of schools have been forced to accept 'McSchool' hall style demountables delivered off the back of trucks, irrespective of what local communities wanted. Schools in some jurisdictions that wished to build new classrooms were told they had to have stock standard school halls or libraries, irrespective of whether they already had a school hall or a library. Schools were not allowed to use local builders or contractors and instead were forced to use enormous contractors from capital cities who rolled out these school hall demountables from hundreds of kilometres away. In some states, it has been revealed that school communities received funds for schools that were closing down at the end of the year; in others, state governments and state government contractors gouged or ripped off the Commonwealth taxpayer for administrative fees and management fees, in many cases to the tune of 22 per cent of the total cost of a project. Some schools are missing out altogether. There are no funds for distance education or campuses of multicampus schools, yet the government can find \$3½ million to spend on school plaques and \$3.8 million to spend on school signs promoting the government for its apparent greatness and insist that the then Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, be invited to open every one of the potential 9,000 school programs.

For example, under the National School Pride Program, also part of the BER, schools wishing to spend their maintenance funds on

energy efficient air-conditioning to make buildings that were perfectly usable but not without air-conditioning have been refused permission to do so. Instead, they have been told, 'Knock the building down and you can build a new building with air-conditioning.' Common sense has flown out of the window in the way the government has handled the school halls program. In the original guidelines announced by the government, principals and governing councils were effectively gagged and told not to speak to the media or to the opposition for fear of losing their funds. There was a culture of fear and intimidation, particularly in New South Wales, which was documented by numerous inquiries.

This program began on 3 February 2009. The opposition first started raising its concerns in April 2009 and, on 12 June, I wrote to the Auditor-General outlining the concerns of the coalition and asking for an inquiry into the BER. On 25 June the Senate passed a resolution asking the Auditor-General to undertake an inquiry into the BER program. By late August 2009, six months after the program had been announced, there was a cost blow-out of \$1.7 billion, followed by changes to the guidelines and, for the first time, value for money was included in the guidelines as a requirement of spending \$16.5 billion of taxpayers' money.

In October 2009 the BER national coordinator announced an interim report rephasing funds from one financial year, 2010-11, to 2011-12. So the program was already being delayed within the first 12 months of its establishment. The Audit Office handed down its inquiry findings in May 2010. It found that guidelines for the program included ambiguous definitions, operational rules that were not clearly stated, detailed levels of prescription and control over funding allocation decisions, with some features imposing an additional administrative burden on edu-

cation authorities. It showed that, where projects were in non-government schools, there was a high rate of satisfaction but in government schools there was a very low rate of satisfaction. The defining difference between the two was that non-government schools got to manage their own projects and achieve value for money whereas government schools did not get to manage their own projects. They were managed by central bureaucracies and, in most cases, were mismanaged.

The Victorian parliament initiated an inquiry in September 2010. The upper house of the New South Wales parliament handed down a scathing summation of the BER in September 2010. It is now the right of this parliament to insist that a full judicial inquiry be established into the failures of the school halls stimulus program. Taxpayers deserve to know whether a judicial inquiry finds whether value for money has been achieved in this program and taxpayers deserve to know who is responsible, from start to finish, for the failures of this program. It is not enough for the now Prime Minister, then the Minister for Education, to insist that those people who have raised concerns about this program are nitpicking or that they are fabricating examples. There is white hot anger in the community and it deserves to be given an answer as to whether value for money was achieved and who was responsible for not achieving it, if indeed that is what is found.

The opposition have been calling for a judicial inquiry from the very outset, when our concerns were announced. They have been ignored. Now is the time for the parliament to pass a private member's bill to insist upon it.

Bill read a first time.

The SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 41, the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

**BUSINESS
Rearrangement**

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (10.34 am)—I move:

That consideration of private Members' business, notice No. 3, be postponed until the next sitting.

Question agreed to.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS
Taxation**

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (10.34 am)—I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) Australia's Future Tax System Review (the 'Henry Review') made a large number of recommendations in relation to the system of taxation;
 - (b) the Government implemented very few of the recommendations;
 - (c) the Government has so far not released any of the Treasury modelling or other relevant information and advice underlying the recommendations; and
 - (d) release of that information would be in the best interests of the community by facilitating a fully informed public debate about the way forward for taxation reform;
- (2) orders the Government to release within five working days from the date of this motion, all of the relevant modelling, costings, working papers and supporting information underlying the 'Henry Review';
- (3) requires that, from the date of this motion, no existing papers, emails or other information relating to the 'Henry Review' may be destroyed; and
- (4) requires the Secretary of the Treasury to warrant to the House that all relevant documentation underlying the 'Henry Review' has been released.

I have submitted this motion to the House as part of the new paradigm, as the Prime Minister describes it, of openness and transpar-

ency. That is what we are seeking to achieve with this motion before the House. We are doing so to try to obtain publicly and openly all of the details relating to the review of Australia's future tax system, chaired by Dr Ken Henry, Secretary to the Treasury. He led a team of at least five people from Treasury. The report took two years to compile. It cost taxpayers over \$10 million. It reviewed 1,500 submissions from all walks of life around Australia. In so doing, the committee held hearings, had discussions in various parts of Australia and submitted to the government a report of over 1,300 pages, which made 138 recommendations. The government chose to accept 2½ of the recommendations. In October 2009 the Treasurer said:

We need fundamental tax reform in this country. The Henry review is the vehicle.

He also declared it the most comprehensive inquiry into our tax system in over 50 years. He also said that the report would provide the foundations for a long-term plan for reform. If that is the case then the government should release all of the costings, all of the assumptions, all of the background working papers, all of the information that will allow Australia to have an informed debate on taxation reform for the future. The opposition proposed this during the election. We said that, within a very short period of being elected into government, we would release all of the assumptions, all of the details, all of the working papers and so on relating to the Henry review of taxation.

And why did we do so? Because, if we are going to have a serious debate about tax reform in Australia—and, as the Treasurer said, this report is the foundation for that debate—then all of the members of this House, and all of the senators, and all of the people of Australia, deserve the opportunity to be properly informed in that debate. If the work has been done and has been funded by

Australian taxpayers then the work must now be revealed to the Australian taxpayers.

In the beginning of this government's term in 2007-08 it came forward with a kaleidoscope of different changes to the taxation system. It has been the case that the Labor Party in government has chosen to introduce new taxes but not to abolish taxes. I want to remind the House of the revenue raising initiatives, which include reducing the generosity of employee share schemes; removing concessions of fringe benefits taxes; reducing the depreciation benefits for computer software; reducing tax deductions for individuals; tightening the exemption for foreign employment income; introducing the alcopops levy—what a great idea that was; increasing the luxury car tax from 25 per cent to 33 per cent; raising the tobacco excise by 25 per cent; introducing version 1 and version 2—and I would imagine version 3—of the great big tax on mining; and foreshadowing the introduction of a new tax on carbon. And do you know what, Mr Speaker? It is the case that the Labor Party says it has a framework, but most of these initiatives are not even in that framework!

So let us see the details of the framework. Let us find out what the assumptions were for the mining tax. Let us find out what the assumptions were for the government's choice in rejecting outright a recommendation of the Henry committee to look at new and fairer taxation levels of superannuation. The government chose instead to increase the contribution of the superannuation levy from nine per cent to 12 per cent, which was specifically rejected by the Henry review. If we are going to offer the Australian people a better policy, we need to know whether the Henry review's policy is cost-neutral or whether it would actually cost the budget significant sums of money. Why did the government reject that particular recommendation for a fairer taxation system for superan-

nuation in preference to increasing the levy, when, according to the Treasury, the Henry review's own recommendation would raise a similar level of national savings as that of the softer option of increasing the superannuation levy?

From our perspective tax reform is something that must be about more than increasing taxes—you have to remove taxes. When we were in government and we introduced the GST, we delivered a new tax system. At that time we removed financial institutions duty and we removed a raft of taxes such as bed taxes, the insidious wholesale sales tax, with its different levels and different applications, stamp duty in a number of areas—which the states then did not deliver on, but we certainly removed stamp duty on the transfer of shares and marketable securities. We also completely changed the reporting mechanisms for individuals and for companies so that it was simplified to a BAS statement every quarter and we reduced the amount of numbers and identifiers in the taxation system from 12 to one. In doing so there was real reform.

We had high expectations with the Henry review that there would also be real reform, so we were as disappointed as the Australian people when many of the 138 recommendations, many of them contentious and many of them also applying to the states, were rejected by the government. They chose to be agnostic on others, and they accepted only 2½ of the recommendations—and, of course, those changed as well.

The government may claim that this work is confidential and should remain unreleased. It is not implemented policy. It is not even foreshadowed policy. It is a report to the government, a comprehensive report to the government. The government have not said they are going to proceed with any single additional recommendation in the report—

not one. They have not ruled out congestion taxes, but they are going to proceed with a congestion tax. Let the sunlight come in. Let the Australian people know what the government were told about tax reform, and let the Australian people be properly informed in the lead-up to the tax summit next year. It may be the case that the opposition—and I am certainly confident this will be the case—will want to go to the tax summit with an alternative policy on taxation. But we need to know what the assumptions are. We need to identify what the workings of the Treasury are that are going to assist us in providing an alternative policy for that tax summit. We intend to be constructive. Taxation at this stage is less than half of the total budget. It should be more than half of the total budget revenue, but under Labor it is less than half of the budget. But it is an area of the budget that does not receive proper attention. We spend a lot of time debating levels and areas of expenditure, but we do not necessarily, in this place or elsewhere in Australia, properly debate revenue, how it is collected and what a fair taxation system should look like. Therefore, the more we are properly informed, the better the debate will be.

So I urge the House to support this motion. I really do want this motion passed in the near future. I want the House to debate this sort of thing. It cuts to the heart of what everyone has defined this new parliament as: a parliament of transparency, a parliament of accountability, a parliament of honesty. Well, here is an issue that the government cannot hide from. It is not government policy at this stage; it is a document received—and paid for by the taxpayers. Let us get on with transparency. (*Time expired*)

The SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Mr Anthony Smith—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (10.45 am)—I am pleased to speak to this motion. We are in a new paradigm hopefully of openness but I would say also that I hope we are in a paradigm of trust of some of our public servants. I apologise to the shadow Treasurer if I misinterpret his motion to the House, but it seems to me that the implication inside this motion is that the panel putting together this report has not published all the relevant information as they see it.

Mr Hockey—As they see it.

Ms OWENS—Yet, as they see it; of course as they see it. Their role as that panel was to produce a report including the relevant information as they see it. We all might have different views, we all might want to see draft 2 and compare it with draft 3 and decide which one is better. But their job was to come up with the report and I believe we are in a world where our Public Service has served us well. The five people on this panel have incredibly high reputations and credentials and I believe that we owe it to them to trust that they did their work to the best of their ability. The idea that they might now be deleting emails because of this review is not particularly pleasant. I am sure that is not what was intended in the motion but when I read it when you ask that from this date of motion no existing papers, emails or other information relating to the Henry review may be destroyed it implies that that action may actually be taking place. Again I think we need to give these incredibly committed and skilled public servants the trust and the credit that is due to them, and also recognise the quality of their work.

I would like to point out too what the report actually is not. I am going to refer to it as the Henry review because we all do. I know it is called *Australia's future tax system* but I will shorten it to Henry review. It is not a comprehensive list of recommendations

that are ready to roll. It is part of a comprehensive ongoing review of the taxation system, part of a process that will take a considerable amount of time. The report makes absolutely clear that the AFTS panel did not seek to provide detailed policy options ready for implementation off the shelf. Rather, they aim to provide broad directions for reform. The AFTS report contains indicative fiscal impacts of some of its key policies and economic modelling of the impacts of its overall vision. But given that their recommendations were not designed to be detailed, implementation ready policies, the broad indicative costings that they included are also not designed to be budget ready—they are just not designed to be that.

The report also notes that there are not a set of budget costings for firm policy options. The report states that the estimates are indicative and not comparable to conventional budget estimates, they include recommendations that might not be implemented for many years, they exclude the fiscal implications of phasing-in some recommendations and not all recommendations have been costed. This is a broad-ranging report that includes in it as many questions in its recommendations as it does answers. Again I would hope that we would allow our Public Service and some of the extraordinary people that we engaged to do this work for us the opportunity in their process to explore things that they later reject. I would hope that we allow them to do that. We get a better answer if we actually allow people to engage some investigations quietly and privately to explore options. We get a better answer if we do that. If we actually forced every person that we engaged to release every beginning of a thought without its conclusion, we would be significantly hamstringing our public sector from doing its work.

Mr Hockey—They made the recommendations.

Ms OWENS—I see from the response that you do not agree with me. Perhaps we just have different ways of exploring questions and answers. I actually think, quite seriously, that sometimes we rush to answers too quickly and we should leave questions open for quite considerable amounts of time. Sometimes by doing that options come up that allow many people to be satisfied. Rushing to answers sometimes excludes options that may actually have worked out. I would hope that we are mature enough as a community and as a parliament to allow that flexibility and that creativity in our Public Service. I really hope that we are.

There is also an implication in the motion that the government has not released the modelling and costing as relevant. It claims that the government has not released any of the Treasury modelling or other relevant information and advice underlying the recommendations of the review. This is obviously incorrect. We have published the entire AFTS report, which is over 1,000 pages, as you have said. The final report contains discussion of different directions for policy reform, analysis of options for reform, Treasury modelling of options for reform and high-level indicative revenue impacts. The thousand final pages is the AFTS panel's view, which is what they were asked to provide. It includes the Treasury modelling and any other information that the panel thought was relevant to considering their recommendations.

But we have published more than that. As part of the review we also published a number of other documents that provide further description, discussion, analysis and modelling. They include 344 pages on the architecture of Australia's tax and transfer system, the 290-page AFTS consultation paper and the 71-page report on the retirement income system. We held conference with leading experts from around the world as part of that

and released 11 conference papers. These documents provide a guide to how the current system fits together but it also provides extensive information about how the AFTS panel's thinking developed over time and what issues they considered along the way. Take, for example, superannuation. The government has released extensive modelling of both the superannuation recommendations in the review and of its own policies.

I refer again to the issue of having trust in our public servants. I believe that these five people are worthy of our trust. I believe they have done the job they were asked to do. They were asked to come up with recommendations. They were not asked to make decisions for the government, and they have not. They have come up with recommendations and they have provided, to the best of their ability, the information that informed those recommendations. They have done their job very well. Obviously, they have probably generated other drafts of documents along the way. Again, I am sure you are not suggesting that we should see early drafts of the documents. That would be quite ridiculous to suggest that. They would have produced working documents that would have been used to inform and crystallise the panel's own thoughts. I think that we are best served when our public servants are actually allowed to explore through early working documents before they do make final recommendations. As the Treasury's blue book briefing—which the coalition received—says, much of the information for the Henry review was prepared for internal use and does not lend itself to publication in its original form. We do not do our public service credit if we require them to prepare all of their internal documents in forms suitable for publication. I would hope that the spirit of openness does not require that every internal document prepared along the way be prepared for publication. That would put an

incredible additional burden on our public service and restrict their ability to explore issues in the way we expect them to.

A comprehensive presentation of the AFTS panel's view is contained in the one thousand pages of the report. It also contains all the Treasury modelling and other information that the panel considered relevant when considering their recommendations. When the government has adopted some of the recommendations from the panel, we have released the appropriate modelling for those policies. But we have said from day 1 that this process of tax reform will be an ongoing community conversation. We have released the review in its entirety to start the process of that debate, and there is a lot there to discuss.

The panel has given us something to support us in trying to improve our tax system. I welcome the shadow Treasurer's commitment to act constructively on this. We have in front of us in this review quite a comprehensive series of recommendations, ideas and questions for us to pursue and I am looking forward to the opposition starting to talk about the actual content of that review rather than suggesting that perhaps the people who put it together were less than open in their inclusions. I believe that they were and I think our public service deserves our respect, our trust and our thanks for a job well done.

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (10.55 am)—It is my pleasure to rise in support of this important motion and to second it. As the shadow Treasurer said during his contribution, in this new parliament, with this new era of openness, there is no issue that cries out for the application of openness more than the Henry review of taxation.

This tax reform journey of the government's began two-and-a-half years ago almost to the day. It began at the 2020 summit, which recommended, amongst other things, a

comprehensive review of Australia's taxation system. In the 2008 budget, just a month after the summit, the Treasurer announced the review. In his announcement, he spoke of the spirit of the 2020 summit. What followed from there were 19 months of bravado from the Treasurer, claiming that there had not been tax reform since World War II. As the shadow Treasurer pointed out, throughout the 19 months when the Treasurer claimed that he had embarked on the most comprehensive tax reform in Australia's history, he simultaneously started putting up taxes across the board. But, during the period after the announcement and the conduct of the review, the Treasurer spoke frequently in public forums and in this House about the need to have a great tax conversation.

The motion put forward by the shadow Treasurer and I today calls for the release of the modelling, the working documents and all of the material that will inform that discussion. That is the purpose behind the motion. The reason the Treasurer, the Assistant Treasurer and, indeed, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer are not here for this debate today is that they do not want to stand in this House and argue against openness and the release of information that will inform a proper tax debate. They want to continue to do what they have done—what the Treasurer has done—since he was handed the Henry review papers last December.

I mentioned the 19 months of bravado during which the Treasurer said the Henry review was coming. As the shadow Treasurer said, the review considered countless submissions, it cost \$10 million, it reviewed 1,500 submissions and, finally, two days before Christmas last year the Treasurer was handed the report. He promised to release that report, and the government's initial response, very early in the new year. What followed was more than four months of si-

lence—19 months of bravado followed by four months of silence. Then, when the review was finally released, there was one thumping mining tax. The great discussion the Treasurer wanted to have was shut down immediately.

We are in a new parliament. The government says there is a new paradigm, a new era of openness. All of the material that will inform what the Treasurer himself said should be the most comprehensive debate on and consideration of taxation since World War II should be released so that the public can see it, so can all of those who want to participate in the tax summit can see it and so that all members of parliament can see it. As the shadow Treasurer said, the review cost \$10 million and took almost two years of consideration by five experts. The modelling papers and working papers that will inform that debate should be released. In their heart of hearts the government knows this is right. The Treasurer had the opportunity today to come into this parliament today and stand at the dispatch box and say that the government would happily comply with this motion. The fact that they have failed to do that shows that their words of openness are as hollow as their words on every other subject.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (11.00 am)—This is truly a bizarre motion, I have to say. I have never seen a shadow Treasurer sitting more sad and forlorn than the one we have right before us here today. Why such a long face, Joe? In opposition you should be rejoicing, perhaps, and looking at all these great things. It is a bizarre motion. No one should be supporting this motion in this place, because you are trying to have it both ways. On the one hand you are trying to say that the Henry report is a fantastic document: there were so many contributors to it, it is such a comprehensive document, so much time and effort went into it—and some cost, as would be expected in order to do the job properly. Yet,

on the other hand, you seem to think that there is something hidden, buried behind it—there is some ulterior motive or some other agenda. Actually, there is: it is one to keep the Australian economy strong. It is one to make sure that this government is doing its job and playing its part in keeping people in jobs. It is all those things that you actually did not do when you were in this place for 12 years.

If we really look behind this motion, what is it about? Are you actually trying to get more information? Are you trying to better understand? You are. Well, it is all there. What are you looking for? This is the question people ought to ask themselves when they read this motion. You are asking that people do not delete or destroy emails or any other related information. It is just unbelievable.

Mr Hockey—Who put you up to talk on this, Bernie? You have been set up.

Mr RIPOLL—The only person who has been set up here is you, shadow Treasurer. You are the one who is being set up. It is bizarre. This shadow Treasurer is seeking a warrant from the head of Treasury, Ken Henry, that he actually has released all information. On the one hand, they think the report is fabulous—with community contribution, great work, a thousand pages—and on the other hand he says, ‘But are you sure you have released at all?’ When Ken Henry says that yes, he has, and that all the information, all the modelling and all the work that has gone into it is all there—and there are a lot of pages and I will get to that in a moment—the shadow Treasurer, after all of those assurances, is not satisfied. He says he wants a further guarantee—a warrant—to say that it has all been released. Then he wants to go further and say that from this day forward no one in the Treasury ought to be able to destroy any papers. Why would they

be destroying any papers? Is there something you think that is contained in this report or in the production of this report that the rest of the world needs to know? What is it? What do you think is there that has not been released?

What we have done is support the independent review by the Treasury. The government does not run the Treasury. It is the same Treasury as when you were in government. Somehow they must have this bizarre thought train that goes on when they are in opposition, which they do not have when they are in government, that suddenly the public service changes. Maybe they are thinking of the way they used to run the public service. Maybe that is what he is really trying to find out. He sits back in his chair and says: ‘Hmmm. When we were in government we used to treat the public service and direct them in a particular way. Perhaps this government is doing the same thing; that is why I do not trust them.’

No, that is not the case. Whatever bizarre, strange thought patterns you have in believing that somehow there is extraneous material that exists out there and that has not been released, you are just mistaken. You are just wrong. Everything actually has been released. This is a great document. Not only has the full report—the 1,000 page document—been released, with all of the modelling, the costings and everything on the record but people in the public gallery can go and google it; go to the Treasury and download it. There will be a pile of paper so high off the ground. On top of that, 344 pages on the architecture of Australia’s tax and transfer system, a further 290-page document—the consultation paper in relation to the report—and a further 71-page report on retirement incomes have been released, along with all of the 11 conference papers as well. How much more do you need?

It would not matter, in fact, if (a) this motion were passed by this parliament and (b) everyone actually did everything. It would not matter.

Mr Hockey—It wouldn't matter? Well let's pass it!

Mr RIPOLL—It would not matter for this reason: even if we were to give the shadow Treasurer another truckload of reports and documents and other bits that are freely available and have all been released, he would still say, 'Ah, but I know there's more; you're hiding something.' It would not matter how much you actually released, because this motion is not about this. It is not about Australia's tax system. It is not about the economy. This motion is just a stunt in getting this guy on the front pages of the paper doing what he always does, which is downgrade the Australian economy and downgrade everything that this government is trying to do throughout the global financial crisis—the stimulus package, actually keeping people in jobs and keeping interest rates as low as possible. Everyone should reject this motion. It is just a stunt. *(Time expired)*

Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (11.05 am)—We have just heard from the member for Oxley, who was clearly set up by his colleagues on this occasion. It added nothing to the debate except a little bit of humour, and that was—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—Order!

Mr ROBB—Last week the Prime Minister, in a speech which mapped out or sought to map out the key principles that she and the government would take to the reform process for this term of office and that would underpin any reforms that were introduced, pointed out, amongst other things, that transparency would be central to the government's approach. One of the key planks of reform and debate and the resolution of matters in a balanced way would be the need for

transparency. Well, here is the first opportunity. Here is the first test that the Prime Minister is being given to prove that she meant what she said last week. It is the first test of the Prime Minister's very clear commitment to the principles that she said last week, unambiguously, would be the key planks of any reform by this government.

It is the first chance to prove that this government has changed its modus operandi since the first term of office. It is the first chance to contradict the observation by John Faulkner last week. He put his finger on the problem of Labor's first term. He said when he was reflecting on Labor and the perceptions of Labor in the community, 'We are very long on cunning and very short on courage.' Of course, the first term of this government was characterised by a litany of lack of transparency on very major reforms. We saw with the commitment to the national broadband network, the biggest commitment of funds for any project in Australia's history, absolutely no transparency, no acceptance of or commitment to a cost-benefit analysis and still no commitment or any attempt to reveal a business plan for a \$43 billion project. It is an absolute disgrace and a totally irresponsible position by this government. It is characterised first and foremost by the lack of any transparency about how that decision was taken, why it was taken, how it would stand up and why it is good value for money for the taxpayers who will have to fork out that \$43 billion.

On Infrastructure Australia we saw again project after project worth billions and billions of dollars, for which cost-benefit analyses were conducted by Infrastructure Australia but the board was totally frustrated by the government's refusal to release any of that information. The government made decisions again to the tune of tens of billions of dollars without any release of cost-benefit analyses, why they took those decisions, why one de-

cision was better than another or why it was value for money. We have seen it again and again. We saw the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport say that it was commercial-in-confidence. That, of course, is a total nonsense. Look at the Victorian government. Rod Eddington put up a very comprehensive infrastructure plan for that state. It had every working, every cost-benefit analysis, every piece of modelling—everything is on the state government's website.

The world has gone on. There has been no conflict of interest between commercial interests. There is no argument other than the government being 'long on cunning and very short on courage'. We saw it again with the mining taxes referred to over the weekend. We find from FOI that the government in June were advised that the superprofits tax could be found unconstitutional if just one state changed a mining royalty rate. The same argument applies to the tax's successor, the mineral resources rent tax, which means that there is \$10 billion in anticipated revenue in doubt. This bill must be passed. It is essential for good government and for transparency.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (11.10 am)—Despite some reservations, I support this motion. During the course of my election campaign I naturally encountered many people both within and outside my electorate. Apart from the key issues which have been well reported and which were relevant in the election in the federal electorate of Melbourne, the one issue which surprised me with the regularity with which people raised it voluntarily—as something they were concerned about which was affecting the way they were voting in the electorate—was the issue of tax reform and the standard of debate around it. It came hot on the heels of the government's backdown on the mining tax, and the sense that I got from people in my electorate was that many people thought the

tax was a good idea. They thought it was a good idea that we apply a tax to the most profitable of profitable projects for minerals that are owned by the Australian people and that we only get one chance to dig up and export. Instead, they saw the government back down in the face of a sophisticated campaign from very powerful interests and the big end of town. There was also a sense of disappointment that the arguments in favour of such a tax were not being properly prosecuted and the information was not being put out in the public domain in the way that it ought to have been.

It is my hope that, removed from the heat of an election campaign, we can have an informed debate about the future of taxation in this country, and the release of this material will assist in that debate. I take on board some of the comments that were raised by the member for Parramatta—I think there is an issue with releasing incomplete drafts—but on the whole the motion is worthy of support. If we are able to have a fuller and franker debate about the future of taxation in this country, we will be in a position to air arguments about, for example, putting the money raised from the mining tax into a sovereign interest fund—an idea that has much to commend it but which has not been aired in the way that it ought to have been. That revenue could then be used to plan for the future of this country. It could particularly be used for infrastructure instead of being subject to potential pork-barrelling in election after election.

On the mining tax, if we as Australians are not able to find a way to efficiently and fairly tax the minerals that the public owns and that we only have one chance to dig up and sell, and to use for the benefit of all of the public, that says something about the relationship between democracy and the big end of town in this country and the willingness to show true political leadership. I hope that release

of the modelling assists in the debate about how to properly prepare for our future and moves us towards a tax system that returns to the public a fair share of the natural resources that they own.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Food Labelling

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (11.14 am)—I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes significant community concern regarding the clarity, simplicity and accuracy of food labelling, including labelling identifying the:
 - (a) origin of the food;
 - (b) nutritional value of the food; and
 - (c) food production methods used, including the use of food technologies;
- (2) recognises that:
 - (a) adequate food labelling laws should aim foremost to protect the health and safety of consumers and eliminate deceitful or misleading labelling information;
 - (b) having clear, simple and accurate labelling on food empowers consumers and enables them to make informed food choices; and
 - (c) for food labelling laws to be effective, they need to be rigorously and consistently enforced;
- (3) supports the Australian and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council's establishment of an independent review into food labelling; and
- (4) encourages the Government and State and Territory governments to examine the results of this review, and work together to ensure that our food labelling laws deliver the outcomes our community desires.

I am very pleased to move and speak to this motion about the inadequacy of food labelling. We are spoiled for choice when it comes to food. When you walk through your local supermarket you will see many types of food packaged in so many ways from all over the world. While this variety is something that we can all enjoy, without simple, accurate and clear labelling it is extremely difficult for consumers to make informed choices about what they are eating and where it comes from. Australians are entitled to know what is in their food and how and where their food is made. While I recognise that there is limited space on labels, the limited space that is available should display information that allows consumers to have the confidence to make an informed choice.

There can be no question that there is a wide-ranging number of issues relating to food labelling; however, today I propose to highlight just a few of the key issues. Country of origin is one area that there is significant consumer interest in. While country of origin information is available on a number of food products it is not consistently applied on all processed and unprocessed food or for all key ingredients. Many consumers tell me that they want to buy Australian grown and manufactured food. Consumers want to buy Australian food not only to support Australian farmers, although this is often a big motivation, but for health and safety reasons. Consumers have confidence in Australian farming practices, including things such as the chemicals used and the type of environment the food is grown in. But they are not equally confident about the standards and environment for growing food in other countries.

Therefore, it is no wonder that there is significant frustration in the community when labels that read 'made in Australia from local and imported ingredients' are often seen on the shelves. If a claim is qualifi-

fied by adding the ‘and imported ingredients’ tag there seem to be no criteria to measure it against. As a result, a consumer buying this product has no idea how much or what part of the food is processed in Australia or, indeed, what part is processed overseas. I have been contacted by many constituents who have looked into this and after investigation have found that food that claims to be made from Australian and import ingredients contains up to 95 per cent imported ingredients.

Furthermore, consumers who read a label that states ‘from imported ingredients’ have no idea where the imported ingredients come from, making it very hard for them to make informed choices. Providing a geographic origin of all food and major ingredients will go a significant way in helping consumers make informed choices about what they are buying. In addition, there are many labelling slogans that are used to market how Australian these products are. Statements such as ‘manufactured in Australia’, ‘Australian owned’ and ‘product of Australia’ are all often seen on labels. These claims are confusing to consumers when they are trying to determine how much of the food product actually comes from Australia.

Even when there are criteria for labels such as ‘made in Australia’, many consumers do not realise that those criteria mean that the product must have been substantially transformed in Australia and that 50 per cent or more of the cost of producing or manufacturing the product occurred in Australia. Many consumers, even if they knew about the criteria, would find it hard to determine what this actually means when it comes to food. The reason for this is that the criteria for the label ‘made in Australia’ does not apply just to food; it also applies to white-goods and clothing.

Food is different from other goods and this was recently recognised through the Australian Made, Australian Grown campaign which provides the ‘Australian grown’ certification. Products that display an ‘Australian made’ logo or an ‘Australian grown’ logo must meet the compliance test set out in the Trade Practices Act and the campaign’s own code of practice. The code of practice clearly defines what is meant by ‘made in Australia’ but also what is meant by ‘grown in Australia’. The development of this logo is very important and encouraging. It will be very important to encourage food producers to use the logo and for consumers to be educated to look for this logo.

In addition to the claims about the origin of food, there are many other claims made on food labels that are confusing for consumers. Often these claims are used as a marketing tool—slogans such as ‘natural’, ‘pure’, ‘fresh’ or ‘free range’, just to name a few. For many of these descriptors there is no definition or guidelines for use within the Food Standards Code, effectively making these terms meaningless to the consumer. It is therefore not surprising that a *Choice* investigation demonstrated that claims such as these on labels did not come close to meeting consumer expectations. And while the ACCC has established industry guidelines for these terms, ensuring that there is a shared definition that both industry and consumers understand could significantly help consumers make an informed decision. Some progress has been made—for example, an Australian standard has been decided on organic and biodynamic products, which can guide the ACCC. However, this standard does not contain mandatory criteria in relation to such claims.

Health experts are becoming more and more alarmed about the impact that obesity is having on our health, especially with chronic diseases. There is an increase in the

incidence of diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and reducing our intake of fats, salt and sugar does help prevent such diseases. However, with so much choice in packaged and pre-prepared food it can difficult for consumers to determine how much fat, salt and sugar they are eating. While packaged food does display nutritional tables on the back of packets, the tables are often difficult to read, are in very small print and, if you have been able to read them, are difficult to understand.

Competing with these nutritional tables on food labels are the many marketing claims proclaiming health benefits. These are much more prominent—they are usually on the front of the package—but they rarely provide an overall rating of how healthy a product is. I, like many others in this chamber I am sure, have been caught out by this. For example, I once opted for a yoghurt that was labelled '96 per cent fat free' only to realise some time later, and after a little weight gain, that while the manufacturers had reduced the fat they had also increased the sugar content.

Clear and consistent food labelling against objective criteria, providing an overall nutritional value, is really important. Not only is it important for the consumer; it also has huge potential in supporting preventative health strategies and improving the overall health of our community. There have been a number of submissions made to the food labelling review that have argued that simple front-of-package labelling such as traffic light labelling would significantly assist consumers in making healthier choices. In particular, it would help consumers who might not have as much knowledge or be as literate as others. While traffic light labelling on the front of the packet is just one example of how we can better provide nutritional information, I do believe that we need to seriously consider how better to present nutritional information on food to help consumers make

healthy choices. Ensuring consumers have accurate and consistent simple information on labels is an issue that many in our community are concerned about. It is an area which many in our community believe can be improved.

In part of this motion I have specified the importance of enforcement. Enforcing the presentation of clear and accurate information is really important. I have often used, in this place, olive oil as an example. Many people have come to see me with a belief that some of the imported olive oils, labelled extra virgin olive oil, are not accurately labelled. After investigation, the ACCC has indeed found that some of the imported olive oils that proclaim to be extra virgin olive oil actually contain canola oil and are not the purest form of olive oil. So enforcement is very critical. There is some division on the issue of enforcement between the states and territories and the ACCC. I hope that better coordination arises on the issue of enforcement so that we can make sure that what is on the label is actually what people are eating.

I would like to take this opportunity to note that there is a formal review into the issue of food labelling currently being undertaken, headed by Dr Neal Blewett. This is a very important review and I am very pleased that it is happening. I look forward to examining the review's recommendations when it is released early next year. Australian consumers want to be confident in the food choices they make and the information needs to be easily accessible. I therefore commend the motion to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—Is the motion seconded?

Mr Georganas—I second the motion.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (11.26 am)—While I was only given the option to speak on this motion on food labelling a couple of

hours ago, I do welcome the opportunity because, whether it is in the supermarkets in my electorate of Cowan or in shops across the whole country, members would be aware that people picking up products from the shelves now tend to read the labels. It is something that people are doing more and more. The question, though—and it has been properly brought out as well—is: how accurate is that information?

One of the first things I always look for is where a product was made but, as we have heard, the accuracy of that information is questionable; the information given on production locations is unreliable. Wherever Australians are shopping—whether in IGA supermarkets, or at Coles, Woolworths or Action—people want certainty. More and more people are taking that sense of personal responsibility for their diets to heart. That is not meant to be a pun, but we must think about what we are putting into our bodies and what effect it has on us. It is true to say that we do not ultimately control our physical health by just what we eat. We must make efforts on the streets or in the gyms. The idea of everything in moderation and more exercise is always a good thing. Nevertheless, the idea of personal responsibility is being more and more embraced by people looking at the labels of products on the supermarket shelves.

The IGAs are importers of food, and in my area I see food, such as prawns, that has come from the Bay of Bengal or China and such places. There are stories about the somewhat questionable way in which that food might have been grown. So we look to food labelling for assurance that it is good and safe. It is the expectation of the majority of people in this country that what you see on the label is actually accurate. If the figures look okay, and if the label mentions Australia, there is a great sense of confidence. Unfortunately, though, such confi-

dence has to be questioned. That is why I am very happy to see that the independent review will report just a couple of months down the track. Following its presentation to government, that report will be made available, in February 2011, to the Council of Australian Governments. We certainly look forward to seeing some good recommendations out of that independent review.

It is a complicated business. There is no doubt about it. I have read some of the submissions so far. There have been around 6,000 submissions, as I understand it. When you look at some of the very practical suggestions that have been made or even questions raised by various organisations you realise that this is a complicated business. It would be nice to have full disclosure and full information on nutritional value, country of origin, method of growing and everything else like that, but we cannot have a book attached to the food either. I think when you get down to it a lot of the submissions are going to come from people who really know what they are talking about and who are going to be able to provide practical solutions. You need to have a label on food that people understand is standardised so that everybody knows that we are all singing off the same sheet of music and people can pick a product off the shelf and look at it and know exactly what they are getting.

Of course, that is always complicated. There are variances between the processing and manufacturing in different places and there is the need for continual testing. It is an expensive process and a complicated one. But that is why we have these independent reviews. They give people with real knowledge and experience in these matters the opportunity to really make a difference. The reality is—and there is no doubt about this—that what the Australian people want is confidence. They want the labelling of food to be standardised. They do not want states to

get in the way either. When people pick up a bottle of Vegemite—not that I would ever pick up a bottle of Vegemite—or any other sort of food, whether they are in New South Wales, Western Australia, Victoria or South Australia, they want to be able to see that there is a standard and that they can have confidence in what they are reading and looking at. This is important to the Australian people.

We do not want the states getting in the way, as I said before. So when this report is tabled we obviously will expect the government and the Council of Australian Governments—all the state and territory governments—to come to the party and make sure that we get something in place which is going to have a real benefit for people. As I said, whether it is in the IGAs in Cowan or in the Woolworths of Sydney or Melbourne, the system should be standardised so that people know exactly what they are getting. It is going to be difficult, of course. There is no doubt about that. But that is what is expected. Food labelling is what provides people with information. It provides them with information at the moment when they make a choice: 'Do I want to go for something that is made in Indonesia or do I want to go for something that is made in Australia, and was it actually made in Australia?' These things are important. This is what people look for.

The reality is that this should never be looked upon as some sort of opportunity to reduce free trade and to reimpose trade restrictions, because that is not the way the world has gone with the global economy and the many free trade agreements and bilateral agreements that we are entering into. This needs to be kept open. Food labelling should not get in the way of that. But, in any case, there is still a necessity to protect consumers. Australians want to know that what they are eating is safe and they want to know what they are actually eating. Clearly I am no ex-

pert on these matters, but we look to the independent review to provide the mechanism for this issue to be moved forward so we can get that standardisation. I certainly welcome that and look forward to that being produced.

What is also required is enforcement. Ultimately you can have every rule and law that there is to control everything but until there is someone there on the ground who is actually going to enforce them and stop people from doing the wrong thing it is pointless having them. So as part of this independent review it would be good to see consideration of whether the ACCC has enough powers to act and look after this issue or whether we need another organisation to look at this and be the watchdog out there on the ground, whether it is on the borders or generally testing across this country, to make sure that the laws are maintained, upheld and enforced. I look forward to the final submission from the independent review. I look forward to hearing what the government has to say about it and how each of the governments across the country react. There must be standardisation. The people of Australia expect it. People want confidence when they are buying and eating their food.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (11.36 am)—I am pleased to rise and speak in support of the motion from the member for Kingston, and I congratulate her on raising this important issue here in the House. I also congratulate her on her stunning election result, as I do you, Mr Deputy Speaker Adams, and my other colleagues in the House, and to new members I extend a welcome as well. My region of Tasmania has been prominent in raising the issue of farm and food labelling in particular for some time, with many Braddon farmers and their supporters bringing their tractors to parliament, as you might remember, in 2005. This was an attempt to highlight the plight of farmers who felt they were getting the raw end of the

deal through unclear, confusing and, dare I say, even deceptive food labelling. I do not think that would be disagreed with by just about any member of this House.

Unfortunately, despite such a well-publicised and visual campaign, the case for better labelling still exists and another, independent, review—which has been mentioned by my colleagues—is now underway. I might be able to comment on that in a moment. While my colleague the member for Kingston has outlined the broader case, let me concentrate on the need for better labelling of vegetables. It is my contention that many people would buy more Australian food products if they could quickly and easily see that they were ‘Made in Australia’. By that I do not mean food products whose packaging was made here and then filled with an imported or partly imported product; I am talking about food products that were grown, harvested, processed and packed here. That should be ‘Made in Australia’. At present, it is difficult for even the experts to differentiate between the two, so how much more of a problem would it be for the average shopper?

Under the Trade Practices Act and food standards code, ‘Made in Australia’ can be used in the labelling of processed vegetables if more than 50 per cent of the value of the product is added in Australia, regardless of where the vegetables come from. The cost of the container or labelling can amount to up to 50 per cent of the product’s value, while the vegetables inside can come from almost anywhere. My own region has recently felt the impact of the vagaries in the international processed vegetable market with McCain Foods shutting down its vegetable factory in Smithton with the loss of 200 jobs and cutting the crops for about 100 growers. This, by the way, came out of the blue and without notice. It is a tough business, but Australians have a right to know exactly what they are buying.

I know the growers in my region are amongst the best in the world, and often they are required to meet numerous standards and regulations at home, while imported vegetables can fly under the radar; so real, accurate labelling would make the choice easier for people. Opponents argue that this is a disguised form of protectionism designed to impose a trade barrier on imported products. Obviously I would prefer people to be eating peas from Penguin and beans from Beulah—it supports the local economy and jobs—but I also believe that people should not have to try to work out which ‘Aussie’ vegetables are really grown, and not just packed, here. Current labelling standards are just not up to scratch. If people are given the chance to buy real Australian products, then the quality will win them over—I am confident of that.

Vegetable growing and processing is vital to my region and a number of other regions in this country. This was demonstrated at the recent election, when I was happy to stand alongside the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator Carr, at the Simplot vegetable plant in Ulverstone. The Labor government pledged \$3 million to help Simplot upgrade the Ulverstone plant to enable it to use natural gas, so securing 600 jobs and the future of this industry. Providing accurate labelling will also help to sustain this industry, and I note that it is in an area where Simplot has been taking a leadership role in the promotion of its own locally produced vegetables.

We should not be forcing people to buy Australian, but we should be giving them accurate and easy-to-read information which will allow them to make the choice. True labelling will be a vital part of helping farmers and the community to make healthy and informed choices, and I commend the motion to the House. I judge that all those opposite and on this side want something done, and we will have the opportunity to do something

when that independent report is handed down. Perhaps then this House will do something of substance on this matter.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (11.41 am)—I thank the member for Kingston for bringing this important motion on food labelling before the House. Anyone who watched the story *Fight of Their Lives* on Channel 7's *Sunday Night* program would be in no doubt of the need for clarity in food labelling. The program graphically detailed the destruction of pygmy elephant and orangutan habitats in Borneo for the production of palm oil, which under current Australian laws needs only to be labelled as vegetable oil. Following the program many constituents contacted my office worried that they have no way of determining whether the products they are purchasing in their supermarkets contain the oil originating from these destructive plantations. One constituent even said that they would no longer purchase any product they suspected of having ingredients—which could include vegetable oil, margarine, emulsifiers, coca butter substitute or palm stearine—from such plantations.

The palm oil controversy reinforces my long-held belief that consumers should be empowered with clear information so that they can make an informed choice about both the content of their food and its production origins. In recent years we have seen the Chinese milk melamine scare, which hospitalised 53,000 children and tragically caused four deaths in China. Then there was the worry that vegetables imported from China to Australia were also contaminated with melamine and a separate episode involving an E. coli scare. In fact, E. coli bacteria were found in salad leaves being imported to Australia. Consumers would be rightly horrified to learn that such tainted overseas products could make their way to Australian shelves, in some cases bearing the mark 'Made in Australia'. As long as more than 50 per cent

of the cost of production or manufacture of a product is incurred in Australia, the current laws allow the use of the 'Made in Australia' or 'Produced in Australia' label.

As I pointed out to this House in 2008 and 2009, gherkins, for example, could be grown overseas and only bottled in Australia but still bear the tag 'Made in Australia'. In bringing the issue to the attention of the House on 10 February 2009 I called on the government to act immediately to implement not only truth in labelling but also a trace forward-trace back system, similar to the system in force in the United States, on food products. It is important that we be able to trace the origin of food and that the government move quickly to ensure that all food products be correctly labelled and retailers comply with the rules. Today I reiterate that call. Increasing concern not only about sustainable practices but also and even more importantly about the health and viability of the food industry and Australia's food security makes addressing food labelling an extremely important issue. It goes to the health of our nation's children as well as to all who consume food. So it is a critical issue.

As part of its terms of reference, outlined in the consultation paper released in March this year, the review to be undertaken by the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council speaks of investigating what role government should play in food labelling policy. With rising rates of obesity, diabetes, allergies and disorders related to food—not to mention the five million Australians who get a food related illness every year—the government should foremost promote healthy food options, and that means supporting locally grown, fresh produce, governed by Australia's high health and hygiene standards.

The terms of reference also note—almost cautioning against giving too much assis-

tance to Australian producers—that one policy reason for labelling is to ‘provide a fair playing field to competitors in the food industry’. I think we ought to be fair to our local producers and give them an even chance. As the member for Braddon said, if consumers have an option in the supermarket and at the markets, they will choose fresh over imports. We can see this through the proliferation of local growers markets all over Australia. I think it is high time that the government took note of the public enthusiasm in this regard. It is now up to the government to show leadership and political will and to make good on this very significant issue to implement truth in labelling on all food products imported into this country.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (11.46 am)—I too rise to speak in support of the motion on food labelling and to congratulate the member for Kingston for bringing the motion before the House. I know how passionate she is about this subject, being the member for a region where growers produce some of the best extra virgin olive oil in the world and knowing how important it is to safeguard the good name of the olive oil and other produce which comes from the region south of the metropolitan area.

Few topics arouse as much passion within my electorate of Hindmarsh and beyond as the subject of food, be it the jobs that food production provides or, in this case, the nature—for lack of a better term—of the food which we eat. Few topics incubate fear like a food scare, substantiated or otherwise, and the sickness and even death that are feared to be knocking on the inside of the refrigerator door. The nature of what we consume, the food we ingest, should be our choice.

We have heard all the speakers on this motion say how important it is that we have that choice, that we know where a particular product is produced and what ingredients it

contains and that that information is easily accessible. In a society based on political equality, a market economy and the freedoms that these features give, the consumer’s right to choose what he or she eats is important. This right is common sense. It is self-evident. This is at the heart of the community’s passion for food labelling and at the heart of its interest in the current independent review of labelling laws.

The review’s first round of public consultation commenced on 26 October 2009 and was open for about one month, in which time interested stakeholders were invited to make brief written submissions on food labelling issues. Over 6,600 submissions were received. In excess of 6,000 of these were from consumers and more than 5,000 were from coordinated campaigns focused on GM, nanotechnology, additives and allergens. The submissions were used to prepare an issues paper, which received further submissions and which will be used to prepare a report to COAG in December this year. The review is important for re-establishing what people want in our nation’s laws, what we as a people need in our laws and how all of this can be done effectively and fairly. The greatest consideration is, I believe, public confidence in the laws and the labels that industry prepares for the consumer’s benefit as a result of the laws. It is this public confidence in food labelling that all of us hope the overall review process will be able to increase.

Naturally, people want numerous things from any one label—information on health safety; health benefits; and details of ingredients, their composition, their origin and their path to the table—all in a succinct and easy to digest spread. There is clear demand for what could, in total, amount to potentially vast amounts of information on labels. I am sure we are all frustrated by the ‘Made in Australia’ and ‘Product of Australia’ tags and the ability to dilute the true meaning of these

labels. If no other matter were constructively resolved by this review and the resultant legislation, I would hope that this would be.

I would like to draw your attention to some of the submissions to the review. Each is interesting in its own way. One person, Pamela Williams, who has been fighting chronic kidney disease, wrote of the difficulty in finding information on potassium and especially the phosphorus content of food products—elements best avoided to maintain what health kidney disease sufferers are able to maintain. She submits that there is no phosphorus information on labels. While some products' contents can be researched online, others are not even that transparent. This is one area where a current omission in labelling laws may well have a very real impact on a person's health. While fat and salt content can be labelled, perhaps phosphorous and other elements can be also. How many other chemicals or compounds could be a very real issue to people with any one of myriad chronic diseases in our society? Can we realistically demand that industry list them all? *(Time expired)*

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (11.51 am)—I join with the House in commending the member for Kingston for raising this issue, which is of significant concern not only to consumers but to industry groups and, of course, governments. The concern is widespread and I freely acknowledge that there are no easy solutions to the problem of food labelling. I think the labels themselves are confusing at best and deceptive at worst. As the member for Kingston rightly pointed out in her presentation, there is strong emotional support within our community for a 'buy Australian' promotion. Consumers are keen to support Australian made products and Australian grown products, but it is difficult to do that under the current food labelling arrangements. Even with the best will in the world it is almost impossible to track down

with great confidence the country of origin of many of our food products.

What our constituents are looking for is a simple, accurate and clear labelling system. When you go to the supermarket on a daily basis you are looking for clear labelling to provide you with confidence in the products you are purchasing. I think today's debate is something that most Australians can relate to. Unlike some of the debates we have in this chamber, this is certainly not an abstract debate; this is something that affects people on a day-to-day basis. I commend the member for Kingston on that. As I think both sides of the House have acknowledged in today's debate, the current system is broken and we simply need to do better. The Australian public are expecting us to do better in the future. It is in the interests of consumers and it is also in the interests of our local agricultural industry.

In my seat of Gippsland, where we have a strong reputation for clean and green food products, there is a great deal of angst among the farming sector. They are frustrated by the current labelling laws. They believe that if Australian consumers knew more about where their food was being produced they would be more likely to support Australian farmers and the farmers would be more likely to be able to command a premium price for their goods in the future. People want to buy Australian products and support our farmers because they quite rightly believe that they can be more confident about the quality of the product, the production techniques and how the product is being brought to the marketplace. So I believe it is very important from that particular perspective.

I want to touch on the comments made by the member for Pearce in relation to truth in labelling. The motion refers to having clear labelling to protect the health and safety of

consumers and eliminate deceitful or misleading labelling information. I want to briefly broaden the debate to cover the seafood industry in Lakes Entrance. I have received correspondence from the Lakes Entrance Fishermen's Cooperative in relation to the food labelling and country of origin laws as they relate to cooked seafood. This is a major concern for the fishing industry. I want to quote from a letter from the general manager of the cooperative, Mr Dale Sumner. He said:

Of continued major concern to our members is that of cheap imported seafood, as a net importer of seafood the concern is not about the imports themselves but how they have an unfair advantage on the market as a result of the Country of Origin labeling laws failing to inform the Australian consumer on all occasions.

...

The major failure of the laws is in regard to cooked seafood, the Australian consumer is being misled on an increasing basis, even in a town like Lakes Entrance which is built on and depends upon a thriving fishing industry we find many of the Restaurants, Clubs, Pubs & Fish & Chip shops using cheap imports and selling them to the consumer under local names ...

This practice must be stopped, If a venue which is to use imported product good luck to them but the consumer purchasing it should not be misled and tricked into thinking its local or Australian, the consumer must be informed and be given the choice which is the case in a fresh Seafood shop, Country of Origin Labeling Laws must be extended to include cooked seafood.

I mention this because I believe consumers in Australia are being ripped off when they go to a restaurant, a club or a fish and chip shop which does not declare country of origin. I think it is only fair to Australian consumers that, if they purchase a product they believe to have been harvested from Australian waters, the product has been harvested from Australian waters in the sustainable way in which Australian fisheries are man-

aged. I share the fear of the Lakes Entrance fishing industry that Australian consumers are being deliberately misled by the many operators who do not declare where the product has come from.

I encourage the new minister to take a closer look at this issue as part of the broader review which is underway in relation to food labelling laws. I have written to the minister and also to the state minister in Victoria on this issue. I have made representations on behalf of the fishing sector and the broader community asking them provide greater clarity for the Australian public when it comes to food labelling.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (11.56 am)—I thank the member for Kingston for bringing this motion before the House. We have been trying to come to grips with this very important issue for many, many years. For some time I have been keeping an eye on food labels to give me some idea of where processed foods originate. There seems to be a whole series of codes. If you are a simple shopper trying to work out the nutritional value of the food, and where it comes from, it is a very difficult task indeed. The codes relate to food values. But if the product says 'made in Australia', there is also a code for the country of origin—because often the original ingredients are actually sourced from overseas and brought together to be made into a product here in Australia. Some things we just do not grow, so I can understand that there is a need to source some things from overseas. But, by the same token, there are sometimes things that are grown here, and we need to know that. We need to know who is putting home-grown product into processed goods.

There is also the problem of a product's nutritional value. If you go to the doctor and he gives you a list of food types you should avoid—and, as a person with type 2 diabetes, I have looked at this myself—you will strug-

gle to find the details. The information that is given by doctors and dietitians to their patients and clients has no relationship to the food labels that an individual consumer sees when they walk into a supermarket. There is very little relation between the information on those labels and the medical system and medical processes we use to try and help people with these issues. There is a great deal of need to do that, especially when, as the member for Kingston has identified in her motion, we are talking about preventive health issues in our great country. There is a great issue there that we need to deal with and come to grips with. It is all about the labelling of food.

I asked one of my staff how I could help consumers choose the right stuff. It has been an interesting exercise. There is so much information, but not very much in simple form, and it is not very easy for consumers. New Zealanders always seem to be well ahead of us in understanding consumers' needs with regard to food. New Zealand has put out a guide which shows where you can find information on a product, such as date marking, a list of ingredients et cetera.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! It being 12 noon, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate is interrupted. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The honourable member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed from 30 September, on the proposed address-in-reply to the speech of Her Excellency the Governor-General—

May it please Your Excellency:

We, the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Australia, in Parliament assembled, express our loyalty to the Sovereign, and thank

Your Excellency for the speech which you have been pleased to address to the Parliament—

on motion by Ms O'Neill:

That the Address be agreed to.

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (12.00 pm)—I take this opportunity, Mr Deputy Speaker Slipper, to congratulate you on your election to high office. I know that you will acquit yourself very well in the new role as Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives. I wish you all the best. I note that the speaker who will follow me this morning is the new member for Throsby. I wish him well in his representation of the people of Throsby. But I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge his predecessor, my very good friend the former member for Throsby, Ms Jennie George, who retired at the last election. Ms George will be very much missed in this place. She was a great local member and a great representative of her people. In fact, she was outstanding in the work that she did for the people of Throsby. I am very pleased to see that the new member for Throsby has just joined us here in the chamber. I want to mention the former member for Throsby's leadership of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts. I was a member of that committee and her leadership of the inquiry and the report were one of her truly greatest achievements in this place.

Ms George was chair of the committee. The report *Managing our coastal zone in a changing climate* received both national and international acclaim. I like to refer to it as the 'George report.' During that inquiry there were about 28 public hearings. We received more than 100 written submissions. A clear message emerged from the report that arose out of that inquiry: a need for national leadership to manage our precious coastal zone in the light of climate change. Importantly, the report also outlined in its recommenda-

tions the way forward by providing a collaborative framework with state and local governments. It also outlined in its recommendations ways in which we can better engage our community in this endeavour.

I exhort every member of this place to read the George report, as we commit ourselves to tackling climate change. I take this opportunity, again, to welcome the newly elected member for Throsby, Stephen Jones. He is the former secretary of my union. I wish him all the best. He will certainly do a good job and he has big shoes to fill in following Jennie George.

I take this opportunity to recommit to my electorate of Reid that I will be prosecuting the need for our government to show leadership on climate change during this parliament. We must address this issue. We have to provide certainty for business and help build on the long-term competitiveness and growth of our economy. I look forward to continuing my contribution to an informed debate on this vital issue which affects everyone.

In speaking with many of my constituents there was a strong call for reforms that improve social inclusion and offer compassion to those most in need. That is very appropriate in the light of the canonisation yesterday in Rome of Australia's first saint, Mary MacKillop of the Cross. It was a wonderful occasion and I am sure she would expect us to also attend to the needs of those most in need.

I would like to reflect on the comments of Her Excellency the Governor-General in her speech in relation to social inclusion. Our government will implement policies that make Australia not only stronger but also more inclusive. For my electorate of Reid this will include measures for those living with a disability. I look forward to the delivery of improvements in support for those who live with disability. My electorate hosts

schools and organisations that assist with services for people living with physical and mental disabilities. Those families will be heartened that the Labor government will continue to improve those services. In particular, the government have committed to increasing the number of supported accommodation places. We also provide funding for early intervention services to assist children diagnosed with sight and hearing impairments, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome or fragile X syndrome.

In addition, the government will also give the Productivity Commission's forthcoming report on the National Disability Insurance Scheme careful consideration. Many constituents will be awaiting this review with great interest. After visiting local schools catering for students with special needs and discussing the ways we can make their lives better with their teachers and families, I am very pleased that the Gillard government will make the long-term care and support needs of people with disability a national priority. The government will also finalise the National Disability Strategy through the Council of Australian Governments.

I know that the former Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services worked extremely hard in this role. In fact, during the election campaign I had the privilege of hosting the then Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, the Hon. Bill Shorten. The parliamentary secretary helped launch Disabilities Awareness Week in my electorate and visited Lucas Gardens School. Lucas Gardens School provides an invaluable learning environment for children with severe mental and physical disabilities. Following a visit to the school Bill Shorten joined me at Livvi's Place, which is a playground where Lucas Gardens students travel to enjoy the all-abilities facilities. Livvi's Place is the result of the vision of Canada Bay Council, com-

munity leaders and the Touched by Olivia Foundation. John and Justine Perkins established the foundation in memory of their daughter Olivia, who died in infancy. They wanted to create a special place where children of all abilities could play together, and I congratulate them on their valuable work in the local community, which has brought so much joy to so many. It is incredible to think that this is the first all-abilities playground in my electorate, and it is considered one of the best in Australia. I hope that the model can be used in other electorates for the benefit of children with a disability and impress that it is such a wonderful concept and an even better reality for the community.

The social inclusion agenda will also include funding a package to help reduce the incidence of suicide, and other measures to improve the lives of Australians living with mental illness. Many of my constituents contacted me about their support for increased prevention and support services, and I look forward to the implementation of these services.

Another focus for the Labor government, as raised by Her Excellency, is education. Education lies at the heart of the government's agenda to strengthen workforce participation and enhance our nation's fairness and prosperity. Education is a cornerstone of our egalitarian society and is crucial to breaking down social divides, reducing crime and guiding our future leaders and innovators. For the benefit of my electorate I am particularly pleased that the government will build on the trade training centres program with a new national cadetship initiative to help young people develop trade skills and remain at school. The electorate of Reid boasts one of the largest trades training centres in Australia, made possible by an \$11 million grant from the Labor government under the Trades Training Centres in Schools Program, combined with a further \$12 mil-

lion investment by the Catholic Education Office. The college currently hosts 135 students. Courses at the college include children's services, furniture making, health services, information technology and construction and business services, to name but a few. The facilities match industry standards and student courses lead to nationally recognised vocational qualifications. At full capacity the college is expected to enrol 500 students.

Needless to say, I was alarmed and dismayed with the opposition's announcement prior to the federal election that, if elected, they would cease trades training in schools. Thankfully, this did not occur. It is little wonder, however, that this would be an area of funding cuts for the opposition. In three years the Labor government have provided three times the number of trades training centres compared with the Howard government's record over 11½ years. On average, the Howard government built only three technical colleges per state and territory. The Labor government have invested record amounts in skills training, and I am pleased that our vision remains firmly committed to trades training in the second term of the Labor government.

I assure my constituents, particularly the students enrolled and hoping to enrol at our local trades training centre, that our government will continue to invest in and support skills training in our country. Further, my electorate is known for its many fine government and non-government schools. It is an exciting time for education in Australia indeed. The government is committed to improving standards and quality, increasing transparency and modernising infrastructure. After meeting with school P&Cs and principals, I know that the possibilities created by our reforms provide new opportunities that many are eager to explore and I will endeavour

our to be a strong voice for my school communities during this time of transition.

I also note that the government will move to ensure that students have access to the Australian Baccalaureate. Some schools in my electorate already offer this to their senior students, as it provides a national educational credential of international standing. I am sure that the schools currently offering the Australian Baccalaureate will be pleased with this commitment, despite the introduction of a national curriculum.

In my capacity as the federal member for Lowe for 12 years I believe my community knows the value of working together for a common good. Through many local campaigns we achieved improvements to health services in the form of equipment, beds and an Medicare MRI licence for Concord Hospital and PBS listing of cancer treatments; an Aircraft Noise Ombudsman; we have saved local jobs from going offshore and established the Bernie Banton Centre, which is a centre of excellence for investigation and research into the causes of asbestos related diseases, particularly mesothelioma. It is a great monument to the late Bernie Banton, and I was very privileged last Friday night to be at the second annual dinner of the Bernie Banton Foundation. The CEO, Bernie's widow, Karen Banton, has done an outstanding job in promoting the foundation, and much private money is being raised for such an excellent cause. I invite all members of this chamber to visit the Bernie Banton Centre at some future time. *(Time expired)*

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call Mr Ewen Jones, I remind honourable members that this is his first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (12.13 pm)—I was eight years old and we were travelling on our annual Christmas pilgrimage from my home town of Texas, in the

south of Queensland, to my mother's home town of Broadford, in Victoria, and back. I am the middle of three boys. We sat along the bench seat of the HR Holden sedan while mum and dad sat up front, mum dutifully telling my father how fast he was travelling and dad, doing 65 miles an hour, driving with his knees, constantly lighting and smoking cigarettes. The car was fully fitted with 460 air conditioning—that is, four windows down and 60 miles an hour. We were forced to detour through Sydney, as floods had cut inland roads. In our family a stop for fuel was like a pit stop at Bathurst. Dad got out and spoke to the attendant as the car was filled and the windscreen cleaned. Mum made sandwiches or cut cake from the boot. Meanwhile the three boys were told to go to the toilet, as we would not be making any more stops until we needed more fuel. On this day, on Parramatta Road, it was nearing 5 pm and the service station was about to close—yes, there was a time when service stations closed! I took longer than the others, and when I came to the door I found that it was locked. My immediate thoughts were that my brothers, Graham and Stuart, were responsible, so I made the usual threats about taking revenge or telling dad and mum. There was no answer.

I soon became desperate. I was truly locked in there and the service station had closed. Dad had bundled everyone into the car and took off into the Parramatta Road traffic. 'Dad,' called my brother. 'Hang on, mate, I'm driving here,' said my father. 'Dad,' was the call from the back seat, repeated as my father's tone darkened at my brothers' constant refrain. 'Dad, Ewen's not here.' I had been left behind at the service station. I was only there for a short time; my family returned before the owners had left the site. This story is now a play in five parts played by my family for all who visit us. But this event has affected me in ways I am only

now coming to understand. It has been a driving force of my life and has helped me to find what I believe is important and helped me formulate the way I have lived my life. No-one will be left behind while I have the ability to help. I can only imagine what it is like for someone who has fallen completely through the cracks. I have the advantage here over others in that at all times during my life I have known that, above all else, my family loves me, no matter what.

I have always played team sports and believe in the team dynamic. From the 4st 7lb Texas State School Rugby League side through to my last game as a 30-year-old for the mighty Westpac Rugby Club, I have made the team my highest priority. In a team, if the weakest player has a great game, you will win. It is not important that you have star players. Even Bradman had to have someone at the other end so he could score. A team is the sum, and in many cases greater than the sum, of all its parts. And every part matters. That, in essence, is what I bring to this House and what I hope to provide for my electorate of Herbert in the truly great city of Townsville, and to the whole of North Queensland. What I hope to do is provide a helping hand to those who need it. But a key belief of mine is that it is those very people who need the assistance who already have the answers for which we seek.

To the people of Townsville I say the biggest thankyou. The people of Townsville walk with a straight back and look the world in the eye. They are proud, quiet people. They are a can-do people who get things done. Townsville people are innovative and hard working. They are prepared to have a go. The people of Townsville do not live in fear of the future because they know that they will play a major role in shaping that future. I promise Townsville that I will work for you and the betterment of all without fear or favour. I will do the right thing by my

community. When I got to Townsville, we were two cities, divided by an act of state parliament. We are now one combined city of some 180,000 people, and growing. We have a truly diversified economy and we are home to the Crocs NBL and Fire WNBL teams. We are home to the Fury in the A-League and we are home to the mighty North Queensland Cowboys NRL side.

We are proud of our university and we are a proud garrison city. Our university is an exciting place to be. We are producing great people and research. We have green energy projects which could transform our society and the way we deal with climate change in a positive and direct way. But my mission will not be complete if we do not secure the Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine for all the people in the world who live and work in a tropical environment. We must ensure that this vital research facility, which will deal with drug-resistant tuberculosis and dengue fever along with issues of Indigenous health and food production, is placed in the most significant tropical university in the world—James Cook University. If North Queensland is not going to be left behind when it comes to development of our resources and the protection of our first Australians, this must happen.

Our men and women of the Australian Defence Force do our city proud. We have taken them into the heart of our culture and they have reciprocated by making us the preferred transfer option for just about every branch of the service. You should come to Townsville for Anzac Day. After you have done the dawn parade on Magnetic Island, it is back to the mainland. You will see half the city line our beautiful Strand as the other half marches past proudly. We as a city look forward to welcoming the men and women of 3RAR and the new LHD vessels in the very near future. But we must never take the ADF's presence in Townsville for granted.

Townsville knows very well the inherent risks faced by our service men and women, whether they be on the battlefield in Afghanistan or when they drive through the gates at Lavarack Barracks and the RAAF base in Garbutt, because ours are the troops who are on constant alert, deployment trained and ready. And we must never assume that the men and women from the services are being looked after properly when they have retired. These people have served their nation with distinction and those who qualify for the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme, or DFRDB, pension should have it applied to the same indices as other retirement pensions offered by the government. It is only right and fair that these brave men and women are not left behind.

Mr Speaker, I found the election campaign truly exciting. I found the effort to get elected the most engaging thing I have ever done professionally. On a day-to-day basis I came to realise that, although I had been a contributing member of my city for some 16 years, there were so many layers to our society, the work that really goes on, and the people who are doing a mighty job for us all. It is here where my belief that the answers are in front of us, in the community, took a key hold on my platform. From the team at North Queensland Community Transport to the residents of Palm Island, I came to see people who have the answers to what needs to be done but struggle with the red tape. There are people who want to develop business opportunities but need support with compliance and start-up capital. There are people like Randal Ross from Red Dust Healing who want to get people off welfare payments by helping them understand from where they have come so that they can find a starting point to get their lives back on track.

When I started this campaign I sought out Gracelyn Smallwood. Gracelyn is a midwife

at the Townsville General Hospital. She is a lecturer at James Cook University. She is a PhD student. She is a mother, grandmother, and auntie to most of Townsville. She is an Aboriginal elder. I had never met her prior to my preselection. I said to her that I needed perspective. I have come from a family where my parents have always worked. I have always worked and my children have watched me get up, shave, and go to work every day of their lives. In our Indigenous communities, there are generations of people who have never seen a parent go to work. I said to Gracelyn, 'How can I possibly know what it is like on the other side of that fence?' To her credit, we spoke, and we will continue to speak, and I will continue to learn from her and others in my community.

There is a belief in my community that there is enough money in the system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, that there is enough money in the system to house them and that there is enough money for the education of their children but it is just that it does not get through to the people who need it the most. My community is telling me that there is a consultant class of government and non-government people taking too much on the way through. They need two things: the opportunity to do it themselves and the understanding that some will fail. My community is no different to any other and I take it as my solemn pledge that I will not leave anyone behind. We are one team. If you spend time with the people on Palm Island or with the people of BARK, Brothers Act of Random Kindness, you will see a genuine belief that real outcomes are there to be had. They need a hand and they need us to give them the whip handle.

We need to give Indigenous people opportunities to decide their own destinies. To that end, we must be supportive of their exploring of small business opportunities—not enterprises that are meaningless, but real busi-

nesses employing real people and providing real futures. Again, as with all new businesses, there are dangers lurking, especially where inexperience plays a part. In my community, the North Queensland Small Business Development Centre offers a path to follow for all those who have as little as a good idea. They can help out with cash flow predictions, business plans and with banks and solicitors. But more than that, they can provide ongoing support with compliance and help to avoid other pitfalls that cause small businesses to fail everywhere. The NQSBDC is proactive and entrepreneurial in its outlook and I will be doing everything I can to support its growth in my region. It is important that, if we are to be helpful, we are there for the long run. We must ensure that no-one gets left behind.

I stand here and proclaim my support for small business. It is a cliche but it is true that small business is the engine room of our economy and it is what makes us a great nation. But we are strangling this sector. From all levels of government, this sector is being abused as a cash cow and de facto tax collector. It must stop. Too many businesses have made the decision not to expand or simply cannot afford to expand because the cost of compliance and regulation is just too great. Good government should provide a simple format and rules under which all can prosper—not hobble them out of existence.

During my campaign the people to whom I spoke in my community told me that if the amount of tax being paid is about right—and I do reiterate, if—then the collection must be simplified. We are too small a country to have small business paying tax to three levels of government. Where the accountant and solicitor should be real business partners giving guidance to the business owner toward growth and opportunity, they have had their roles reduced to that of compliance officers and tax collectors. We need a system that

will allow small business to pay its fair share and then government should get out of its way so it can go about its business. Too often, opportunities have been missed to provide real reform for this most valuable section of our economy, and they must be supported. They will not be left behind.

We are facing difficult times in my community. We keep on hearing about how well we are going and how proud we should be. I am here to tell you that people in my community are feeling real pain. They are the reason I cannot support, and actively campaigned against, an emissions trading scheme. What the government would have you believe is that the big mining companies will be paying the tax. In truth, it is always those least able to afford it who will have to pay, as this is a great big tax on everything. It is not the big end of town, such as BHP, Rio Tinto, and Xstrata, that feels the pain of this great big tax on everything. It will be the owners of the engineering works who provide employment to boilermakers and fitters in my community. It will be the charter airlines who provide employment for ground and support staff in my community. It is the local real estate agent who provides employment to the property managers who look after the rent roll in my community. It will be the sole trader who drives the pie van up and down Enterprise Street at the Bohle who feels this tax. It will be ordinary families—working class families—who are already struggling now to make ends meet. At every turn my community is being asked to pay more tax, all the while being told how good they have it. I will hold the government to account for every measure that will damage the fabric of my community. No one and no small business will be left behind while I have a say.

We must look at ways to get the very best possible value for every public dollar. An example of this would be the positron emis-

sion tomography, or PET, scanner for Townsville. Both sides of this House promised this vital piece of equipment during the campaign, but it was in the delivery method that the difference lay. I was proud to campaign for a scanner to be placed at Queensland X-Ray's site in Hyde Park, some 10 minutes from the Townsville General Hospital. Here we have a private entity prepared to pay half the purchase cost of the scanner and all the installation cost of the scanner and bulk bill every public patient needing this treatment. They would be able to do 17 scans per day as opposed to Queensland Health's expectation of three per day. Currently, around 500 PET scans per year are done on people from North Queensland alone. These individuals are being flown to Brisbane and put up in accommodation 1,400 kilometres away from home and family while they wait for their turn. This is the time at which the need for family is at its highest.

The cost of the government's plan is somewhere between \$6 million and \$9 million. The cost to the taxpayer under the Qld X-Ray plan is \$2.5million. The government's plan was originally to install one at the Townsville General Hospital sometime after 2014. To their credit that has now been brought forward to the end of 2012. However, Qld X-Ray can have theirs up and running within six months of getting the go-ahead. So, if the government had chosen on 22 August to support this method, it would mean that this vital piece of equipment could have been operating by January 2011. So, with our program, we have lower cost to the taxpayer, better service and it will be operating sooner. With the government's program, we have higher cost to the taxpayer, less service delivery and it will be operational later. Which one would you choose?

I congratulate the government on following the coalition's commitment to the Copperstring Project. This vital project will see

my city, my region, my state and my country tap into the most significant renewable energy development in our history. From solar to geothermal, from ethanol to wind and hydrogeneration, this project is capable of providing huge benefits to the whole country. We will also develop and maximise the return on arable land and mining projects. I urge all in this House to ensure that this project is given every chance of success.

Everyone who helped me since I was pre-selected has my deep personal thanks. I would like to make special mention of a few people. To Senator Ian Macdonald: I thank you for your unwavering support and your confidence in me as a candidate. To the retired member for Herbert, Peter Lindsay: the example you have shown in holding a marginal seat across five elections and retiring at a time of your choosing does not pass me without notice. To have had you as campaign director was of great benefit to me and the team. To Clayton Hinds: thank you for coming on board when you did. You made a crucial difference in the early days. To David Kippin, Max Tomlinson, Russell Bugler, John Hathaway, Matthew Crossley and Marty, I say: thank you for your support and all the work you did.

To the leadership of the LNP, particularly Bruce McIver and James McGrath, I say thank you. To the parliamentary leadership, especially Tony Abbott, Julie Bishop, Joe Hockey, Ian Macfarlane, Steve Ciobo, Peter Dutton, Greg Hunt, David Johnson and Nigel Scullion, I say, thank you so much. The effort you people put into my campaign with return visits and the interest you took in me personally will never be forgotten.

To the membership of Townsville's LNP branches, the Young LNP and all those volunteers, I say thank you. To my mate Frank Probert, who stood every day for me at pre-poll as well as at very information booth

possible: you are a champion. To John Dwyer: I am working every day and one day hope to be half as good as you think I am. To Peg and Melinda, a special thank you. To my mates Richo, Pat, John, Russell, Pauly, PC, Bill, Luke, Jeff, Tim and Tony, I say: thank you for never allowing me the luxury of getting a big head.

To my children—Emma, Abbie and Andrew—I love you very much. Your efforts for me will never be repaid—and good job, as I gave you the gift of life itself, so I win.

To my wife, Linda: I owe you so much. You have made me a happy person and you have had the courage and passion to push me to achieve.

To Benny and Carmen and all my Italian connection, I say: thank you for welcoming my daughters and me into your family.

To my parents, Allen and Hilary: thank you for all you have done for me all your life and will do into the future. Your example of doing without so that others can have will stay with me always.

To my brothers, Graeme and Stewart, and their families: I am a long way away from you living in Townsville, but I know that I have your love and support. I would also like to state for the *Hansard* that I am the best golfer in the family.

Mr Speaker, I stand here ready to do the right thing by my electorate, my city, my region, my state and my country. I am here for my people and my community, and I promise that no one will be left behind.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call Ms Brodtmann, I remind honourable members that this is her first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to her.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (12.34 pm)—Thank you, Mr Speaker, and congratulations on your recent appointment.

Without Canberra there would be no Australia. To borrow the words of Sir Henry Parkes: ‘The crimson thread of kinship runs through us all.’ Those threads are drawn together in this city. They run from every corner of this nation, and the knot that binds them is this House. But it could have been very different: 112 years ago, a four-state referendum on federation foundered in New South Wales. Although a majority said yes, support in New South Wales fell below the votes necessary for a mandate. Six months later, George Reid won amendments to the Constitution that dragged his state over the line. One was that the federal capital would be in New South Wales, no closer than 100 miles from Sydney. Many years and many more arguments would pass before the new federation settled on a capital, and a city to house a nation was built on Limestone Plains—a land that had been home to the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people for thousands of generations. Today I acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

All of us are proud to be Australian. I hope that in my time here I might convince more Australians to be proud of our national capital, because without it, we would still be a collection of quaint, inward-looking colonies bickering over what divides us, not a federation focusing on what unites us.

Like so many of my constituents, I was not born here. More than 20 years ago I chose to live in Canberra, and I am a fierce defender of my home. As a city built to house a government, it has many critics. But Canberra is as Australian as the bushland that surrounds and intertwines it. Australians know and love the bush and know its dangers. The 2003 bushfires that tore through the suburbs of my electorate, killed four people and destroyed 500 homes showed the courage and strength of our community and

reminded Australia that the bush capital was their capital and that we are part of them.

My electorate is home to people from every part of Australia and every part of the world, who directly or indirectly work to serve the nation. Canberra is home to the most highly educated population in the country, but it is also home to people battling disadvantage and disability. Canberra is home to a community with a heart that provides shelter to refugees and the homeless, food to women seeking refuge and support to the infirm.

Canberra is home to the Prime Minister, the Governor-General and diplomats from every part of the globe. Canberra is home to children who love learning and love to sing, such as the boys and girls of Charles Conder and Gordon Primary, Malkara School, Holy Family and Canberra Girls Grammar—children liberated by state-of-the-art buildings and technology that will help them gain new skills and make better music thanks to the Gillard government. Canberra is home to places that preserve and share our history and culture, and it is home to this Parliament House—this people's house. I want to thank the people of Canberra—in the Tuggeranong Valley, Weston Creek, Woden, the inner south, Oaks Estate and Tharwa—for putting your faith in me. As long as I am here I will listen to you and I will advocate for you. I will strive to represent you well, as Annette Ellis did.

Many of the people in my electorate are public servants. Some here like to join the chorus of those who ridicule Canberra and denigrate bureaucrats, but why would you scorn people who dedicate their lives to public service? I was a public servant once and was honoured to work for my country. Let me tell you of another public servant: my friend Liz O'Neill. Liz worked for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. She

worked to help keep the peace in Bougainville and to provide some comfort to the families in the morgues of Bali in 2002 and again in 2005. In 2004 she was blown off her feet by the bomb that exploded outside the Australian embassy in Jakarta. In 2007 she died in the service of her country when her plane ran off the runway at Yogyakarta.

Some credit George Orwell with saying that 'we sleep soundly in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm'. It is a tribute to those public servants called soldiers. But we also sleep soundly in our beds because invisible heroes ensure our national interests are protected abroad. Others protect our borders. Some make sure our cities and towns are safe. Others make sure our food is clean and keep our lights on. Some help the sick, the aged, the disadvantaged and the disabled. Others ensure our children's toys are safe and our story is kept alive. Public service should be lauded, not derided. And as long as I am in this place I will defend the women and men in the Australian Public Service, because public servants are, after all, servants of democracy.

But Canberra today is more than what has been dubbed a 'government theme park'. About half of its workforce is in the private sector in small, medium and microbusinesses; light industries; animation and the arts; law; and advocacy. I want to see business and industry continue to grow and thrive in Canberra, liberated by broadband.

This year is the 100th anniversary of the drawing of the borders of the ACT, and in many ways Canberra is far from complete. I hope to live to see this territory's horizons expand beyond anything the surveyors could have imagined. I hope to help Canberra grow and flourish so we have the skills and population we need to maintain the lifestyle we love, while still providing the services and

infrastructure for tomorrow. I hope to play a role in helping to draw those future borders that live now only in our dreams and aspirations.

Many of you probably do not know that the borders of my electorate stretch to Norfolk Island. We are all familiar with the island's rich and unique history and patois, but most would not know it is in need of reform, and I welcome the Gillard government's reform to its governance and financial management to improve economic stability and equity. I hope that the best years for Norfolk Island and Canberra lie ahead and I am honoured to have been chosen to represent these very different parts of our nation here in this House.

But I have not come alone. I carry the dreams, the work and the sacrifice of others, and I will never forget them. There is my grandmother, Enid Anderson, and my great-grandmother, Ada Huggins. In the language of the day, both were in service. My great-grandmother worked as a domestic in Victoria's Western District. She supported 13 children, on her own, in a house with dirt floors. I never met Ada, but I will never forget her. My grandmother worked three jobs and her abiding fear was that the state would take her children because she was poor. My grandmother died nine months after I was born. She was just 54. I was too young to know Enid, but I will never forget her. I was 11 when my father left my mother, and then my own future did not look that bright. My mother, Faye Anderson, also worked hard. Her sacrifice and love would see all three of her daughters go to university, but her hard work alone would not have got us there. She needed the help of giants—and she got it. My sisters and I went through a world-class public school system, and when I got to university it was free. The giants that built that system were people like you and, above all, the women and men of the Labor Party. They

had been building it since my great-grandmother was a child. I never met most of them, but I will never forget them.

Because of the Labor Party I escaped a cycle of disadvantage, and there are millions more like me. My life is testimony to the truth that education is the great transformer. That is why we desperately need the Gillard government's education revolution; without it, the opportunities, choices and options of future generations and our future are diminished. My sisters and I had a great public education that set us up for life. That is why I am a strong defender of government schools and a staunch advocate of access to education and support through it, whatever your background. Education is the great empowerer, particularly when it encourages a quest for broad and continuous learning. Education builds self-esteem and confidence, and a great education cannot happen without great teachers—teachers like Chris Mithen, who at Springview Primary sowed my love of learning, a love that flourished at Donvale High through teachers who encouraged us to be bold, to believe in ourselves and to strive for excellence.

But a quality secondary education is not one that only prepares a person for university. A quality education is multidimensional. It lays the foundation for a successful future in a vocation or trade. It lays the foundation for a quality life and a better quality of life. I want to see a return to an understanding of the dignity of work that values every job well done, because each job, no matter what it is, adds to the common good.

History shows us that if work is to be dignified workers need advocates, because workers rights did not fall from the sky. History shows that, without unions, workers were broken in what William Blake called dark satanic mills. He understood that change would not come without a fight, and

the best weapon in the fight for workers rights is the trade union. This is why I am proud that the Labor Party was born in the fires of the union movement and fashioned on its anvils. It is something we should never seek to hide and something we should be proud of. Since I left high school, unions have protected me at work and this year worked to get me into this House. I am particularly grateful to the CFMEU, the NUW, the USU, the SDA and the CPSU.

I will never forget what the unions have done for this country and as long as I am here I will staunchly defend your right to defend your members. But, as a former small business owner, I will also remind my union friends that getting the balance right is extremely important. Australia is a wealthy country. It has room to pay its workers a decent wage and to provide them with decent conditions while at the same time rewarding risk and enterprise. So I will also strive to continue to make it simpler and easier for people to operate and succeed in business. That means continuing with the Gillard government's improvements to the tax system. That means continuing with the Gillard government's improvements to the superannuation system to make it simpler and more flexible so people are genuinely empowered to choose what is best for their retirement and to reap the rewards of their years of hard work. To me, Labor values mean that hard work should be fairly rewarded and that good government sets sensible boundaries for the rogues, not an obstacle course for the decent.

There is a proper role for government and a proper role for the private sector and there is such a thing as too much government. I saw it in my year in India when I was posted there in the mid-nineties. India then was very different from the emerging powerhouse of today. Then, I saw an economy hampered by too much government intervention and pro-

tectionism and an economy hampered by not enough social service, infrastructure and innovation. The India of the mid-nineties also exposed me to incredibly confronting poverty. But that also proved the truth of Victor Frankl's words: 'everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's own attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.' Despite their poverty, beggars wrapped in loincloths still prayed thanks when they showered under a train station water pump. India reminded me like nothing before or since that no life is cheap and that everyone has hopes and dreams and deserves to be treated with dignity and humanity. It also showed me that, without innovation and decent social services and infrastructure, a society can operate at only a fraction of its capacity. India is rising, and Australia should do everything in its power to engage, collaborate and cooperate in its rise. It is a great nation and will be a greater one.

My time as a diplomat confirmed my belief that if we are to flourish as a nation we need to be outward looking and generous. We must be committed to free trade and engage in dialogue with all nations. In an interconnected world we cannot be indifferent to what happens beyond our borders. A peaceful, prosperous Australian future hangs on a peaceful and prosperous future for our region and our world. That will not happen by accident. It will be built on good governance—an agreed set of enforceable rules—on trade, on self-determination and on defence. That starts with diplomacy, and hopefully dialogue will always triumph. But diplomacy also demands a strong and modern defence force because sometimes we have to defend our freedom and that of our friends.

That said, our generosity should also focus inwards. But we can only afford to be generous if we are strong, stable, growing economy, an economy with the right level of

regulation, the right level of support and assistance and the right level of freedom. We can only afford to improve our environment and maintain biodiversity if people have jobs and pay tax. We can only afford to provide better social, health and education services if we are prosperous, because a prosperous economy allows us to be generous in every way. As a former board member of the Gift of Life Foundation, I would like to thank the government for introducing major reforms to lift the rate of organ and tissue donation in Australia. The government's reforms now strongly encourage Australians to be generous with that most precious of gifts, the gift of life.

While on donations, I cannot finish today without mentioning the names of just a few of the people who have given me so much. Thank you to my campaign team, particularly to my rock Gail Morgan, Narelle Luchetti and Simon Tatz. Thank you to my Labor Party family and to my friends who worked hard in so many ways in the freezing Canberra winter to secure my election. Thank you to the Uhlmann family for always cheering from the sidelines, particularly Kate Foy. Thank you to Heather and Alwyn Henman and to Viv and Ray Waterford for being there during the tough times. Thank you to my sisters, Meg and Amy, for their merciless honesty and boundless loyalty. Thank you to my mum, Faye Anderson, for her tenacity and love that liberated me to this life. Finally, thank you to my husband, Chris Uhlmann. Thank you for introducing me to the shades of grey in life, for broadening and deepening my spiritual and moral understanding and for reminding me each day that decency must prevail, whatever the circumstances.

I would like to dedicate this speech to the women and men who have shaped my life but could not be here today, particularly Mary Uhlmann, who died during the cam-

paign after a long battle with pain and suffering. May you all rest in peace. I would not be here today without you and I will strive to make you proud.

Words can only stretch so far and they fail when I try to express the honour and the terror of being here today. I have dreamed of being here. I admire anyone who takes up the challenge of politics and who honestly tries to improve the lives of his or her people, no matter what political lights they follow. Although it is not fashionable to say it, I believe politics is, or should be, an honourable profession. In the end, it is about improving people's lives. And at its best politics is about building a better community and a better nation.

I am not a blind partisan and have many friends of all political dispositions. But I am Labor to my bootstraps. We are in a battle of ideas and I believe it is desperately important that we win. When we win our prosperity is shared. When we win children get the chance of a world-class education. When we win Australia gets a country that supports the weak; a nation that uses its wealth to help the poor. When we win individuals are encouraged to excel but never at the expense of the common good. When we win workers get a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. When we win we fight for jobs and the environment. When we win our nation is outward looking and engaged with our allies and the forums of the world. When we win we demand from each the best they are able to give and offer to each the chance to be the best they can be.

The Labor Party is great because of the strength of its ideas and the courage of the giants who have filled its ranks through the ages. We should be proud of all that Labor has achieved and never be timid about our beliefs, no matter how slim the margin, no matter how fraught the fight. As long as I am here, I will fight for all Canberrans and I

fight in solidarity with my party, because as long as Labor is strong Australia will be a great nation.

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (12.53 pm)—Can I commence my remarks in response to the Governor-General's speech by congratulating the members for Canberra and Herbert for their first contributions. It is interesting for those of us who have been here a little longer than they have to think about how we felt when we first arrived in this place. I remember standing here on behalf of the nearly 100,000 constituents in my electorate and feeling great honour in being their voice in this great chamber. Congratulations to them both. As the Governor-General made her speech in the other place, I was thinking about how, even after my seventh occasion of winning the confidence of the people of the division of Mallee, that sense of honour and privilege at the opportunity to speak on behalf of such a large number of people still remains.

I was impressed that the Governor-General's first remarks went towards parliamentary reform. I was thrilled, Mr Speaker, to hear those words spoken on the subject of the reform that is needed in this place, and especially in reference to question time. I congratulate you, sir, on your first week of question time. I did note that without being prompted by the member for Mallee or anybody else you actually drew the attention of somebody who was not addressing their remarks to the chair. I know you understand how I feel about that because, as you would know, it is the only point of order I have ever raised in this place. And there was a reason for that point of order: in any proper meeting you might be at, remarks are addressed through the chair because it is less confrontational, less provocative and less rancorous.

I will be looking forward to the new rules being applied because the hardest thing I

have found in all the time I have been here is trying to justify to the school groups that I have invited to the gallery the behaviour that they witness in this place, particularly in regard to question time. There is no explanation for it. In meeting them afterwards or a few weeks later in their classroom they say to me, 'Mr Forrest, I am not allowed to behave like that in the classroom.' Neither should they. I usually respond to them by saying, 'When you see me do it, it is time for you to write me a letter and tell me I have been here too long.' So in that first week of question time when the foreign minister responded to a question and sat down after four minutes I turned to Mr Oakeshott, the member for Lyne, and said, 'Well done!' I will be gratefully encouraged, Mr Speaker, if you continue to enforce that because it will be the single most important measure in making the chamber less disorderly and will therefore enhance its stature. The member for Canberra already made reference to the need for members in this place to be well regarded. Improvement in behaviour will contribute more than anything else towards that.

I was particularly overwhelmed on the evening of 21 August to find such a massive endorsement of me in the division of Mallee. I was greatly humbled. I was amazed that even more votes could be gleaned in the strongly conservative electorate that is Mallee, but people said to me throughout the campaign that they respected my position because I did not play any of the silly games. Brinkmanship and partisanship is so much wasted energy. I might not like the party who has enough members to make a government. I might not like their policy approach on a whole range of issues—and in fact some of those issues are adversely impacting upon my constituency—but I have to accept the reality that they are an elected government. Even in this case where there is such a frag-

ile margin I have to accept the reality that those ministers of the Crown are now appointed and that I will need their cooperation in order to deliver the aspirations I have for my constituency.

The Governor-General also focused very much on the need for a stronger economy, and she made the point that this was to be achieved by government actions. To be frank, that may well be true, and governments set the overarching fiscal parameters. But the pleasant reality I notice in my own constituency is that the greatest contributor to our regional economy will be the profits generated from rainfall outcomes. To stand, as I have, in canola crops up to my chin in the northern Mallee is something I have not seen in the nearly 18 years I have been the member. What we now need is arrangements in place whereby the farming community can take advantage of this—so that they are not disadvantaged by taxation pressure and so that whatever dividends return to them after seven or eight years of very meagre incomes do not adversely impact their future viability. The determined resilience of the people in my electorate makes me proud to be in this place in order to represent them.

The Governor-General then went on to the need for infrastructure investment, particularly in regard to the parlous state of the water supply we have seen right around the nation. The irrigators in my constituency are currently beside themselves in regard to the implications of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's plan. I just hope that the water minister, the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, the Hon. Tony Burke, and the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, the Hon. Simon Crean, will listen to my remarks here. As the only civil engineer in the whole place, I have spent most of my time arguing for the need to invest in the plumbing of Australia's

antiquated irrigation arrangements. Some of them are as old as 150 years. Most of them were instigated by the governments of the day after the first big war and the second big war. They are already obsolete and inefficient.

I championed the cause of one particular water supply scheme—the need to pipe the Wimmera-Mallee. It is a huge part of western Victoria, covering one-third of the state's supply from storages in the Grampian Mountains by open channel all the way north to Ouyen in the northern Mallee. Although an engineering achievement of its time before the turn of the century—it took 67 years to build the Wimmera-Mallee, including all the storages and supply—to now have it completely piped with a partnership funding arrangement between the Commonwealth government, state government and the local community is an achievement that I am immensely proud of. It serves the purpose of demonstrating what the nation has to do. To say we are purchasing water from alleged voluntary sellers is just a misnomer. The great bulk of my irrigators have got to the stage where they may be considered voluntary but it is the only option they have in order to redeem some of their equity in their lives' investment. Often it is a second- or third-generation life investment. It is not fair to describe them as willing sellers.

As I have said constantly, fix the plumbing and there will be real water savings achieved on a massive scale. For example, the piping of the Wimmera-Mallee, both in the north and right across the south, all completed saves enough water every year to fill Olympic swimming pools placed end to end from Melbourne all the way to Darwin and back again. It is a huge amount of water that is saved. There are irrigation systems in place right through New South Wales and the Victorian side of the Murray Valley that supply hundreds of kilometres of earthen chan-

nel with massive evaporation, massive seepage, and creating additional salinisation to boot that deserve investment. That is a big challenge. I am just hoping that with the status of the numbers in the chamber today we will get some real attention to an engineering fix.

When the Romans built a new city the first thing they secured was their water supply to give them security of supply in the event of siege from any of Rome's enemies of the day but also to secure the viability of that city. The first thing they did was to provide an assured water supply. Their engineering achievements are still visible today. Huge aqueducts were built by military engineers in those days. They did not become civil engineers until the end of the Roman Empire when instead of working for the military they moved towards working in the civic areas. They became civil engineers. Tunnels through the rock to supply water is a staple of virtually the whole of the Murray-Darling Basin.

The second thing I would like to say is that my growers—and some of this is because they have a suspicious view of the agenda—to some extent resent the criticism they often hear that they are the problem. They are not. In the past 20 years irrigators along the Murray Valley, particularly in regard to horticulture, have already made a huge sacrificial contribution. When I was a young graduate the issue was salinity. I was born and raised in the soldier settlement district of Red Cliffs where my father and uncles could not spray their citrus in the daytime. They had to wait until the evening because of the high salinity of the water being supplied to them through the river. That is where I have come from. I have seen immense, positive changes, but that contribution has come because irrigators have been prepared to sacrifice some of the surplus wa-

ter they do not need and all they are asking for is some consideration.

They also say to me that they are part of the solution and they are not the issue. I say to the Australian nation and those ministers who now will be responsible for making a decision on whether the authority's plan is acceptable in its current form that new cities and provincial communities were created because of government investment. Swan Hill and Tresco were First World War soldier settlement districts. Robinvale was a First World War and Second World War soldier settlement district. Red Cliffs, the hometown of my youth, was too. They were all created by government investment. Governments have a responsibility to ensure that the prosperity that has been created continues so that we have inland provincial centres of great economic strength.

I will say how disappointed I was when I read a copy of the authority's report to find the economic impacts of their proposals completely underdone. I do not accept their defence that their focus was on the environment because that was the way the legislation directed them. I expect an independent authority to do its homework, and to say that the removal of 3,000 gigalitres of water from the Murray-Darling Basin would result in only 800 jobs lost is completely unacceptable. A rough guide would be that every gigalitre of water lost to irrigation represents approximately 30 jobs spread across the whole local economy. Therefore the figure for that level of water is more like 80,000 jobs, not 800. I will be looking forward to seeing the authority do its homework better. In fact, I am pleased to see that the government has accepted this point. I heard the honourable minister for regional Australia on my local radio last week. To paraphrase, he said he had got the message on that matter.

One thing that irrigators in my electorate resent is the assumption that they do not care about the environment of the Murray River. That is completely unfair. Many of us live on it. In fact, I live on the river, and when I have visitors from Melbourne or other places around Australia they look out at the river and say, 'We thought it was dry.' It is the most carefully and judiciously managed river in the whole world, and people travel internationally to find out how we achieve such good management of the Murray-Darling river system. It once boasted the most secure water supply system in the world, and the events of the last five or six years have proved just how callous and misguided that assumption is.

Another thing irrigators in my electorate say to me is that they resent governments—any government of any colour—purchasing water in what is supposed to be a commercial water market. I am not on any particular government's case here, because the government that I was part of engaged in this activity. It is a complete distortion of the market when governments move in to buy water in that way with the huge cheque-book that they have. It distorts the market, and it is not fair. It is done by both sides of politics, and I am alarmed at the current circumstances out on the southern end of the Mallee division around the Horsham district with the piping of the Wimmera-Mallee supply system and the lack of water people there have had in the last seven or eight years. The Wimmera irrigation district has not had any water at all, and there are about 30,000 megalitres of water available, but either the irrigators in those areas who have that allocation have to sell it on for the benefit of the environment or we need another \$30 million or \$40 million to rehabilitate the irrigation district.

Those irrigators who are associated with the Horsham irrigation district have come to

the point where they decided that perhaps their best option is to redeem this asset and put the capital to better use. So they offered it to the federal government. They started at \$1,800 per megalitre and they were refused; the department said that this was not considered value for money. So they rejigged their offer and progressively came down. The last offer was \$1,100, and they are now considering coming down to \$900 per megalitre. This is completely unfair. There is no buyer except the federal government. It is not a market at all. A sum of \$950 million went into the piping of the Wimmera-Mallee to save the amount of water that has been saved. It was an investment that two governments—the state and the federal governments—and a community were prepared to make and they put the value of that water at \$7,000 to \$8,000 per megalitre. That is what a community, including the federal government in Canberra, local governments and local water authorities considered was the value of having environmental water for the Wimmera River, the Glenelg River and those very dry terminal lakes all the way up to Lake Hindmarsh and Albacutya, yet here is a government saying that compensation of \$1,100 per megalitre to irrigators does not represent value for money. I find that argument completely obtuse.

I am pleased to see that the authority has scheduled one of its consultation meetings in Horsham on, I think, 11 November. I will be pleased to see that issue brought to the authority's attention by the large number of irrigators associated with that supply system. There is a lot of work to be done, and I am saying to the Hon. Simon Crean and the Hon. Tony Burke: for goodness sake listen to the engineers, because there are viable and realistic and economic engineering solutions to the challenges of the Murray-Darling Basin, even to the extent of flooding wetlands. This can be done in an engineering way, and

to some extent that has been experimented with in the last three or four years in the Hat-tah Lakes by pumping the lower level of the river water and supplying the lakes that way. But that would not be a substitute for the big flood, which we may or may not get, that is needed once in a hundred years so that the wetlands get the drink they so desperately need. So there are engineering solutions. I was pleased to see that the Governor-General's speech highlighted that as a major area of government activity. I will be looking forward to having some say in that, and I argue that irrigators are not, as alleged, the problem but very much an important part of the solution.

I finish my remarks by going back to where I started—that is, the behaviour of this chamber. I hope that this week and next week we see much the same behaviour as we saw in our first week after the swearing-in, because we are on display. Even as I speak, there are schoolchildren in the gallery, and we need to consider what they will think of adults if this place erupts and they see adults behaving in the same way that I have seen members behave all throughout the time that I have been here. I will be looking forward to that reform being implemented, and I place that responsibility in your hands, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (1.13 pm)—Firstly, I congratulate the Speaker on his re-election to the position, the Deputy Speaker on his election to that position and, of course, you, Mr Second Deputy Speaker Scott, on your re-election to your position. You always undertake that role with great dignity, a great sense of purpose and an understanding of the importance of the parliament. The member for Mallee, another person who always takes his role very seriously, put very well his concerns about his own electorate. His was a very well-considered speech on the concerns about that river system, a large part of

which—along with its people, who have to tackle the very large tasks ahead of them—he represents. I have also enjoyed being reinstated to the Speaker's panel, a role I held in the last parliament. I enjoyed being in the chair this morning for the first time in this parliament. I first held a Deputy Speaker's position when I was elected to the Tasmanian house of assembly many years ago.

The parliament is now undertaking some reform, and it is good that experienced members can play a role in that regard. In this parliament we need to make sure that we have good mediators and good people in the chair to keep the parliament in order. As the member for Mallee has said, the way in which we operate reflects on the parliament and on the members of parliament. He uses the analogy of the children in the galleries seeing how the parliament is performing, and rightfully so. I hope the reform of the parliament works very well. I am very pleased to see extra money going into the committee system and to see committees being properly funded and resourced. That will be a great asset for them and for the work that many members are involved in.

I take the opportunity to thank the member for Chisholm for the work that she did as the Deputy Speaker in the last parliament. She always held a high standard and kept the direction of parliament. Of course, the reason she was not chosen to undertake this role again did not have anything to do with the way that she carried out her work in the last parliament. Other arrangements were made in the way that parties play a role in the Speaker's position. I thank her for the work that she has done and recognise it.

I was very honoured to be returned to the seat of Lyons for another term, with an increased majority. That is always a pleasurable thing to have occur. Three colleagues from the Labor Party and an Independent

were also successful in Tasmania and I congratulate them on their return or their new role in this chamber. I thank the people of Lyons for renewing my contract and giving me the impetus to go on and work for regional Tasmania and, indeed, regional Australia, on which I focus a lot of the work that I do here through my committee membership. I believe that regional Australia is the poor cousin of urban areas and has been so for a long time, under various governments.

These new arrangements, with Independents keeping an eye on the bottom line as such, may allow the regions to properly benefit from mainstream programs, where before they had to rely on government organisations like Telstra and on Australia Post's community service obligations to get equivalent services. In a sense those organisations have been corporatised and privatised and those obligations no longer apply, and the regions have become a lot poorer for it, with services dropping back. The last government had started to push to provide better and more equal services to rural and regional areas. It built up school infrastructure, gave local government funds to improve sports and community facilities and remodelled health programs. I think those who hold the balance of power are looking to Labor to continue this trend and deliver those programs further.

I believe that the coalition got things very wrong, especially in Tasmania during the last election campaign. They were unable to convince voters that they would be able to improve their standard of living or help them in times of hardship. The coalition took the electors for granted. They ran a negative campaign and really gave no credit for the work that had been done in communities right around the state. In the process they lost ground in every House of Representatives seat and they also lost a senator.

We live in interesting times. We have a completely new parliament and I guess its make-up reflects the changing views of the Australian people. We have to take this on board and work with other elected members and their communities to build on our system of democracy. It will be different. It will be a change of practice. It certainly will test us in many ways. We started by continuing the 'welcome to country' at the opening of each session of parliament. I am glad that the Speaker has chosen to take that one step further by having it at the beginning of each morning's proceedings in the chamber. I think that represents a modernising of the Australian parliament.

There is much to achieve. I believe the bones are within the agreement, with the Prime Minister having negotiated with the Independents to establish a basis for stable and efficient government. We now have a binding commitment to regional Australia and within that there is a promise to complete the National Broadband Network extensions, to deliver on regional health investment, to implement regional educational investment and to continue the upgrade and redevelopment of regional infrastructure.

Tasmania as a whole is considered a region of Australia. It is isolated from mainland Australia, and all of its infrastructure, by a stretch of water. This was recognised in earlier times by the Freight Equalisation Scheme. We are deprived of many other programs because of the difficulties of transport and distance. The tyranny of distance still survives and, although we tend to dismiss it somewhat in Tasmania, it is still a very real disincentive for investment to settle with us and stay with us for a long time. There seem to be times when the businesses and the jobs go elsewhere. We need incentives for capital to stay in the state so that we can provide decent services, proper infra-

structure and access to first-class health and education schemes.

I guess we in Tasmania have had to be unique to be competitive—and we have certainly done that in many ways. We have had to address niche markets in innovative ways to keep our industries and products to the fore. For a small state we have a pretty big roar. If Tasmania decides to exercise its roar, it can have a bit of clout. But it needs to be for the betterment of the state, not for the indulgence of a few. The broadband rollout can help us with the question of distance—as it can with regions all around Australia. It will allow people to access the expertise of the cities in whatever field it is required. The fact that the rollout started in Tasmania has given us an opportunity to test out its promise first. The opportunities include providing access to whole new approaches in health and education using the resources of the internet and other communications. Tasmania is known for its resources—whether it be forestry, mining, agriculture, fishing or viticulture—its history and, of course, its tourism industry. Its magnificent scenery is a great asset for us. Yet many areas are struggling at the moment because of the changes in the world economy. To keep Tasmania working we need to restructure many of our traditional industries and encourage new ones to replace the old practices and the old uses.

Forestry is one industry that has had to reinvent itself several times since the 1970s. Forestry is an important part of the Australian economy but it is currently in the process of change. We must understand that it is necessary to secure the viability of forestry-dependent communities and to create well-paid, highly-skilled jobs that value-add to this natural resource. So I believe we should be supporting the efforts of the forestry unions, the federal and state governments and the industry, environment and community

groups that are working to restructure an industry that has been much maligned in the past. We realise there are many points of view but, providing there is a basic understanding of the worth of the industry, there should be some common goals to be found. I believe the common goals should include a restructure or transition process that is fair and just for workers, their families, their communities and thus all Tasmanians.

Health is another area that has been the subject of many a discussion and argument in Tasmania. Tasmania has a small population of half a million people who are scattered right over the state; we are completely decentralised. As technology improves to deliver better health outcomes, its costs have restricted it to fewer and fewer regional areas. In the old days we had primary-care providers with a fair amount of equipment in many of our small towns. But, because of diagnostic processes and specialised treatment, we now rely on very expensive machines which we can only hope to provide in one or two areas. Our regional communities are therefore feeling very vulnerable and they believe they are missing out by not having a regional hospital nearby as was the case in the past.

Of course, the whole concept of health delivery has changed enormously. I believe that the new approach of providing regional health infrastructure by supporting groups of general practitioners to come together and work in superclinics or in large centres with other health professionals, and the upgrading of our main regional hospitals, will be a great help for our scattered communities. What we need is for primary care upfront to be well resourced and to have electronic access to all the innovation we see going on in major hospitals. I hope the National Broadband Network will be of great significance in delivering much of the technology for primary health outcomes in those areas.

We need the help of medical practitioners to undertake these reforms and to assist in making them happen. We need to make their jobs easier by providing infrastructure, by giving them help in running their practices and by giving them opportunities to find locums and other assistance so that they can attend conferences and additional training as well as take some leave from time to time. Most doctors find the move to a regional area difficult, especially if they are married with a young family. If their job becomes a 24/7 job it is very difficult; there is very little backup and they feel that they cannot get away. This is a very big disincentive to work in a regional setting.

We need to provide more flexible arrangements. Allowing for nurse practitioners to provide backup and to undertake some of the basic work of doctors would allow more freedom and give the profession a chance to reap the benefits of being in a regional and rural lifestyle with a better living environment and access to education, which should be on a par with any city. However, we have to make sure that Tasmania's education system is up to the same standard as every other state on the mainland. We need to work very hard in that area.

We are indeed living in very different times, but I see change as positive and that we can have a better life if we can make our processes work for us and not be barriers to change. We need to work hard at that. I have lived most of my life in the country and I know what country people have faced and will face in the future. We are seeing some of that in Australia today. Primary industries have kept Australia moving forward and they still play that massive role in providing for the needs of all Australians so that they can prosper. Land management becomes a big issue and resolving some of those issues will be an important process as we go forward in working out which way we want to use our

land and for what: how far urban infringement encroaches and what land we want to use for growing our food.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my staff Jess, Craig, Leeann, Eve, Marg and Dee for their help in the last parliament and for keeping me sane during the campaign. I would like to thank all my campaign workers and my campaign manager, Peter Kearney, and his wife Di, who managed to spend most of the campaign in Fiji because of the election timing, but who nevertheless contributed to the planning and effectiveness of the campaign. I would also like to thank those other tireless campaigners Richard Bolst, Chris Hinds, Grant Courtney, Marty Clifford, Blinky, Brian Harper and his wife, Anne, and their friend Ron. I want also to thank my old friend Danial Rochford, who appeared in the state at a timely moment and offered his help; he has a great skill base. There were others who came in when asked to help and my thanks to Jason Campbell and Kerry Armstrong, who had no hesitation in giving their time and effort.

I would also like to take the opportunity to remember my old friend and campaigner Tom Greenwood, who was with me during the last few campaigns but, sadly, not at this one as he passed away last year. We missed him very much this time as he put much humour into the campaigns. He used to drive me and certainly he was my sounding board. Tom, campaigning without you was just not the same. My thanks to all the people in Lyons who trusted me with their vote. I will continue to strive to give the service that I have given in the past and will endeavour to do what I can within this parliament to give representation to that broad cross-section of people who make up the Lyons electorate.

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (1.33 pm)—I wish to discuss a number of issues that are impacting my electorate and the wider Aus-

tralian nation. The member for Lyons might be interested to know that health care and GPs are factors that I will also deal with in my speech. In fact, firstly, I will turn to the availability of doctors and GPs in my electorate and issues relating to medical treatment and dentistry more generally. Over the past two years eight medical clinics have closed in Tangney, leaving a massive gap in vital primary healthcare services for my local community. My office is regularly approached by constituents struggling to find a GP close to home. Medical clinics that are open for business are often full and no longer able to take new patients. Ironically, some have found my office because of signage which reads 'Dr Dennis Jensen'. Here they are able to convey their concerns to a good doctor but one who, unfortunately for them, is without medical expertise. The clinics that have closed are both fully private and bulk-billing clinics. Bulk-billing practitioners that I have spoken to say that they love practising in Tangney and do not wish to close but the rising cost of providing healthcare services means that current Medicare funding no longer allows them to remain viable. My electorate has the world-class Fiona Stanley Hospital under construction, and this should address some of the long-term healthcare needs of the electorate. But Fiona Stanley Hospital is still a number of years away from completion and, in the near future, many people will struggle to find good local health care.

I believe the problem is the rising cost of doing business in Western Australia. Bulk-bill payments no longer cover rising rent, labour and running costs facing clinics. The situation needs to be addressed either with a funding increase for bulk-billing clinics or with a tax exemption for clinics that offer bulk-billed services. This will only be a stopgap measure, though. Governments of both persuasions have presented well-

meaning increases to health funding, but asking the government to continue to subsidise health care in greater and greater amounts is not a long-term solution. As the American situation demonstrates, simply pumping more money into health is a race to the bottom unless service access and service prices are addressed.

One solution that must be considered is creating greater competition in the primary health services industry. Removing impediments to the number of new graduates in medicine and dentistry will increase competition in the health marketplace. It has come to my attention that members of the Australian Dental Association and the Australian Medical Association also hold positions on university entrance boards. I have been informed these organisations, and prominent members within these organisations, influence the number of students offered university places in medicine and dentistry. The serious restraint of trade must be rectified. Operating in a similar manner to that of medieval guilds centuries ago, looking after the best interests of their members alone, ignores the far greater social obligation of medical practitioners. How can competitive market forces put downward pressure on prices if the major medical associations are running a monopolistic chop shop which dictates how many graduates can qualify and serve the community as practitioners?

The information that has come to me is specific to the University of Western Australia and certain course convenors who restrict the number of graduates to enter the course as a way of not flooding the market and keeping profits at reasonably high levels. I also spoke with a dentist from the UK who was earning as much in two days in Australia as she was in a week in the UK. She told me that what dentists charge in Australia is both exorbitant and opportunistic with established dentists not having to compete with new

graduates as a well-organised ‘professional understanding.’

I understand that there are real socioeconomic factors that make the price of medical and dental care significantly cheaper in most of South-East Asia than in Australia, but in the UK these socioeconomic factors are not significantly different. In the *West Australian* on Wednesday, 29 September a dentist wrote in expressing his concerns over the monopoly situation in health care, calling the AMA a powerful professional body whose opinion is not challenged often. He went on to describe the situation in dentistry, saying:

The same thing is happening in dentistry.

It is the most tightly protected monopoly of all professions with dentists continuing to refuse any reform which may lessen their position of power, despite the fact that on their watch dental disease has remained the most prevalent health problem in Australia today, even though 90 percent could easily be prevented.

If dentists themselves recognise a lack of competition, it is obviously up to the parliament to legislate against the measures of monopolistic behaviour. Restraint of trade in this instance is different to a traditional monopoly, but the outcome is the same—rising costs and a greater market share.

While members of these university entrance committees might not be acting illegally, restricting competition has a much greater flow-on effect. Rising prices are a sure sign that a lack of competition exists in the marketplace. In this instance, if members of the ADA are protecting their privileged position by restricting competition to keep profits high, this situation needs to be addressed by parliament. We may have the highest quality dentists in the world, but what good is that if the majority cannot afford medical treatment, resulting in a low standard of oral hygiene in the Australian community? Neither the AMA nor the ADA or their members should be determining the

final number of graduates in their chosen field.

I also wish to speak about the government’s climate change committee or, rather, the committee for predetermined outcomes. Firstly, where is my invitation? In this ‘new paradigm’ parliament, surely all members should be given the opportunity to participate. Obviously, it will depend on our leadership team as to whether we attend, but that is a moot point. We have not even been invited to join unless we completely agree with the predetermined outcome. I think my views on climate change are fairly well known and I have a great interest in the way that Australia goes about abating emissions.

Again I ask: why wasn’t I invited to this bipartisan commission? Since I am not invited I have a few comments for those about to enter the commission. Do you even know what you are signing up for? You want a commission whose members are committed to a price on carbon to build consensus on a carbon price. Isn’t that a self-defeating purpose? Sounds like you are just preaching to the converted. But wait, I thought you were trying to convince people who are not yet members of the church of global warming about the benefits of a price on carbon—so-called consensus building—or is this commission, as I suspect, being used to tread water for political expediency until the Senate changes its make-up next year? I make this statement to the commission: you want Australia to be a leader on carbon abatement but what do you call a leader with no followers? Just a guy taking a walk.

It is clear you are not going to be examining all the options. It has been stated that only two options will be investigated. An ETS is not considered viable by Labor given their position of abandoning their CPRS. There is no impetus for a scheme that lacks a globally adopted framework for implementa-

tion and accountability. That leaves the fore-gone conclusion of a tax on carbon. The simple fact is that the markets are actually, in a global sense, now factoring a price on carbon dioxide out. Take the Chicago Carbon Exchange, the premier trading place for carbon. After peaking at about US\$7.50 a tonne, it is now down to US\$5c, hardly a ringing endorsement of the argument that the market has factored in a price for carbon. Rather, the global market is factoring it out.

Why have a commission? You have the consensus you need: everyone on your commission believes in a price on carbon. Just go ahead and legislate it now, I dare you. Or you could step back and consider all the options. Invite someone like me to the commission, someone who actually understands scientifically the best way to abate emissions. Even the IPCC's own authors are now changing their minds on a carbon price approach. IPCC author Richard Tol—an IPCC convening, principal, lead and contributing author—in his work *An analysis of mitigation as a response to climate change* wrote:

The impact of climate change is rather uncertain. Available estimates suggest that the welfare loss induced by Climate Change in the year 2100 is in the same order as losing a few percent of income. That is, a century worth of climate change is about as bad as losing two years of economic growth. The impact on climate policy is better understood. A clever and gradual abatement policy can substantially reduce emissions.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour. The member for Tangney will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Mornington Peninsula Beaches

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (1.45 pm)—This season, before summer, it is time for a peninsula beach recovery plan. What we have seen over the last year and a half is the erosion, damage and destruction of many of the great beaches of the peninsula. First, over many years now we have been battling to ensure that there has been a full remediation plan for Mount Martha North Beach. The beach boxes, the owners and the visitors have all suffered as a consequence of inaction by the state government. Finally there was an act of beach replenishment but, without the proper maintenance work and remediation, so much of that replenishment has been simply wasted. We need a remediation plan. We need that work to commence this summer and we need it to be in place soon. The government has had ample notice. Second, we need work on Rosebud and Blairgowrie beaches and above all else, as part of the peninsula beach recovery plan, a plan to replenish, remediate and protect the great national icon that is Portsea Front Beach. That beach has been degraded substantially. It coincides with the channel deepening process. It coincides with the warnings. It coincides with the completion of work and there has been relative inaction by the state. That must finish. Action must be taken. We need this peninsula beach recovery plan in place before the election.

Building the Education Revolution Program

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (1.46 pm)—On 8 September I attended the official opening of the new multipurpose hall and resource centre at the Kilcoy State School in the Somerset region. On 15 September I was at the Mount Kilcoy State School. Mount Kilcoy received \$925,000 and Kilcoy State School \$2.65 million under Building the Education Revolu-

tion. The acting principal at Mount Kilcoy, Carolyn Ervin, and the principal at Kilcoy State School, Ray Maddison, both wished to pass on to the Prime Minister the appreciation of the whole school community for the contribution the BER has made in this region. I picked up the Kilcoy Shire area in the redistribution at the last election. Over \$21 million is being poured into nearly 20 schools in the Somerset region. They have never seen this sort of contribution. The coalition has today put forward a private member's motion in relation to this matter, taking no notice of what the Auditor-General said in his audit report No.33 in respect of this matter. He said:

There are some positive early indicators that the program is making progress toward achieving its intended outcomes.

The people in my region, particularly in the Somerset region, warmly welcome this contribution and wish to thank the Prime Minister and the federal Labor government for this investment in schools in the Somerset region.

Cowan Electorate: Kingsway Christian College

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (1.48 pm)—I would like to mention Kingsway Christian College today. During the election campaign I had the honour of attending a couple of sessions with their senior students to talk about their responsibilities as potential college captains and deputy college captains. I was fortunate enough to hear them make a number of speeches that I could give them a little bit of feedback on. They then made speeches to the whole school and four students were voted into the highest positions. I would just like to mention that the college captains for 2011 are Tarbie van Tonder and Paul Jones, and the vice-captains are Kelsey Hall and Ross Conradie. I know Tim and Annette Jones, who are Paul Jones's parents. I know them from church and I am sure that

they are very proud, as are all the parents of the Kingsway Christian College captains and vice-captains. That school is a very positive organisation. They do great things in education and within the community. So I wish the 2011 college captains and vice-captains all the best for their terms next year.

Liu Xiaobo

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (1.49 pm)—Today I want to put on the record my delight at the Nobel committee's decision to award the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo for his non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China. Liu participated in the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, for which he was jailed and then sent to a labour camp for three years. He was a leading author of Charter 08, an open letter signed by 300 Chinese citizens calling for, among other things, freedom of speech, of the press and of association, an independent judiciary and direct elections. The charter was published on 10 December 2008, the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Liu has been jailed for 11 years for his part in Charter 08.

In announcing the prize, the Nobel committee noted that China has achieved enormous economic advances, lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, but that its new status entails increased responsibility. Liu himself has pointed out that many of the principles set out in Charter 08 are enshrined in China's own constitution. As George Walden wrote in Bloomberg:

Liu isn't preaching violent revolt. On the contrary, he insists that the road to democracy must be "gradual, peaceful, well ordered and controlled."

Walden considers that perhaps it is the 'dangerous reasonableness' of Liu's approach that riles the Chinese leadership most. Liu, who was told about the award by his wife when visiting him in prison, said he would

dedicate the award to the victims of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. I pay tribute to the courage and the struggle for freedom of Liu Xiaobo and his fellow pro-democracy protesters—*(Time expired)*

Taxation

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (1.51 pm)—It has been for almost a year that the coalition has been calling on the Labor government to be clear about its intentions regarding more than two million independent contractors. These self-employed people have been beavering away, creating wealth and opportunity for our nation, while the Labor Party has been threatening a tax assault on these very hardworking Australians. Prior to the 2007 election the Labor Party came out and said, in clear, simple, plain language, there will be no change to the tax laws. Since that time we have heard some of the most weasel words that we have heard in this parliament as the government flips and flops around, while plotting an attack on these self-employed people, with meetings of those from its highest levels—ministers and the Prime Minister herself—with union representatives on how to assault the commercial affairs of these legitimate independent contractors while all along they have never been able to re-utter those simple words that there will be no change. Last Wednesday, in a very targeted, selective briefing, Bill Shorten, the Assistant Treasurer, said:

... “Let me be clear to *AFR* readers—we have no desire to change those laws, or make life difficult for self-employed working people.

Why did he simply say there will be no change? Why did he not simply make it absolutely clear there will be no transformation and no assault on these people? Are these slick-billy words or are these assurances we can take to the bank? People want to know. I call on the government to be simple, frank

and straightforward and say there will be no change to these laws—*(Time expired)*

Liu Xiaobo

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (1.52 pm)—I join the member for Fremantle in congratulating the great Chinese intellectual, Professor of Literature Liu Xiaobo, on his award of the Nobel Peace Prize. The Nobel committee has given this award to this professor in China, the first Chinese intellectual to win a Nobel Prize. As the member for Fremantle pointed out, this was for advocating peaceful, civil and constitutional change as expected in the Chinese constitution. The award of the Peace Prize to this imprisoned Chinese human rights activist is reminiscent of the case of Carl von Ossietzky, the German peace activist who was awarded the same prize in 1936. Carl von Ossietzky was arrested by the Gestapo in 1933 and, although very ill, was detained in concentration camps. When he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the German government demanded that he should decline it, which he refused to do. He was prevented from travelling to Oslo to receive the prize and the Nazi press was forbidden to comment on the granting of the prize. In addition, they decreed that in future no German should accept any Nobel Prize. Carl von Ossietzky died of tuberculosis in 1938. This parliament, all people of good will and all people who support civil and constitutional rights all over the world should support—*(Time expired)*

Swan Electorate: Millen Primary School

Mr IRONS (Swan) (1.54 pm)—On 22 September 2010, I attended the Millen Primary School, in my electorate of Swan. The purpose of the visit was to present a certificate to the school as it is in the running to be named the WA Super Site. The Super Site award recognises the outstanding contribution that schools and after-school care centres make towards getting children and the

community active through the Active After School Communities program. The Australian Sports Commission's AASC program is run successfully at around 3,200 sites across the country, including Swan. In term 3, awards are presented to outstanding coaches and to primary schools and after-school care centres to recognise and celebrate their achievements in delivering the AASC program. The AASC program is a free Australian government initiative delivered nationally by the Australian Sports Commission. The program was initiated by the Howard government and I congratulate the current government for continuing the program. The program provides primary school children with the opportunity to experience more than 70 different sports and up to 20 other structured physical activities. Within the electorate of Swan the AASC program has encouraged more than 900 children to be engaged in sport and other structured physical activity, engaged 18 primary schools and after-school care centres in the AASC program and trained more than 80 community coaches including teachers, volunteers and local club personnel. Importantly, this program initiated during the Howard government is increasing the community's capacity to deliver sport and other structured physical activity. I congratulate Millen Primary School on being named as one of the schools in the running to be named WA's Super Site. *(Time expired)*

Toongabbie Legal Centre

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (1.56 pm)—I rise to commend to the House the excellent work of the Toongabbie Legal Centre. The Toongabbie Legal Centre is an outstanding organisation, with deep roots in the community and run to the highest professional standards, providing free legal advice to constituents in my electorate and surrounding areas when they most need it. The Toongabbie Legal Centre is the idea of a man I count

as my friend, Mr Susai Benjamin, and is focused on helping those who may not meet the criteria for free legal advice from New South Wales Legal Aid. As well as free legal advice, the Toongabbie Legal Centre also delivers community legal education through presentations to a wide range of community groups. The service is kept going by a fabulous group of volunteers whom I cannot commend highly enough. For members of the community who would like advice on a legal issue, the Toongabbie Legal Centre operates from St Anthony's Catholic Church in Toongabbie from six to nine o'clock on Thursday nights and also on Saturday mornings. Unfortunately, I missed last Friday night's annual fundraising dinner, although I have been to several in the past, as I was attending a performance of the Sydney Chinese Dance Group but I hear from all accounts that the night was a great success. I want to take this opportunity to thank Susai Benjamin and all the volunteer staff who make the Toongabbie Legal Centre a fantastic service for our community. They do good work, and I thank them.

Grey Electorate: Cancer Project

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (1.57 pm)—I take this opportunity to inform the House about a small community in my electorate called Blyth, just 15 minutes to the west of the Clare Valley. Blyth is a small town with an enormous heart. With only 300 residents, the town has just completed a fundraiser in support of the Cancer Foundation which raised between \$42,000 and \$44,000. Initiated by champion local shearer Daryl Andriske, who was sick of the spectre of cancer in our lives and wanted to do something to help, Daryl volunteered to shear for 24 hours in support of the cause. With the assistance of an enthusiastic local committee led by Graeme Wandel, the program was put together with an aim to raise \$10,000. Local sponsors—and on the day sponsorship from members in the

crowd paying for individual sheep to be shorn—catering and late night entertainment saw the total pushed to between \$42,000 and \$44,000. People were exhorted to support by enthusiastic SA identity Michael Pratt. Daryl shore for nine two-hour shifts interspersed by normal alternating half-hour and one-hour breaks through the 24 hours—a total of 469 sheep. One mathematician calculated Daryl dragged 22 tonnes of sheep across the board during the event. A crowd estimated as in excess of 1,000 attended throughout the course of the event, showing the widespread interest and support that this event generated in the larger community. Daryl's mates were rostered on to make sure he never had less than about 50 people in the crowd urging him on, even in the wee hours of the morning. Despite intensive training including consulting a sports psychologist, Daryl was pretty much spent by the end of it. My congratulations go to Blyth and Daryl. (*Time expired*)

Petrie Electorate: Arethusa College

Mrs D'ATH (Petrie) (1.59 pm)—I rise to talk about the NAB Schools First Awards program. The awards have just been announced for 2010 and this is the second year that the program has been running. I am pleased that Arethusa College, in the electorate of Petrie, has been one of the Impact Award winners for 2010, receiving \$50,000. These awards are about trying to encourage schools to work in partnership with community organisations. Arethusa College has joined with Rotary International (Bribie Island) to implement a special initiative that sees students participating in farm management and animal care with pedigree beef cattle in order to provide free meat to local charities that work with homeless people and low-income families. It is fantastic that this college has been able to receive this funding to help this program to continue.

The SPEAKER—Order! In accordance with standing order 43, the time for members' statements has concluded.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—I inform the House that the Minister for Foreign Affairs will be absent from question time today and tomorrow as he is attending the canonisation of St Mary MacKillop at the Vatican. He is accompanied by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The Minister for Trade will answer questions on his behalf. The Minister for Human Services and Minister for Social Inclusion will be absent from question time for the remainder of this year as she is on maternity leave, having given birth to her third child—so congratulations are due.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

Ms GILLARD—The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship will answer questions on her behalf.

ST MARY OF THE CROSS

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (2.01 pm)—On indulgence: this is a great opportunity to remark in this House about the events of yesterday in Rome where Mary MacKillop was made a saint by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. The Pope's gesture simply formalises what Australian Catholics have known for generations and completes a century-long journey of hope and aspiration for the Australian Catholic community and the Josephite order. The canonisation of our first saint is an historic event for our nation and I think a moment of joy for every Australian.

For the five million Australians of Catholic heritage, it affirms that Mary's life of self-sacrifice has been deemed worthy of emulation and respect across the globe. For those of us who are not Catholic but respect the place of the church in our nation's life it is

also a moment of great pride, and I got the opportunity to share in that in Melbourne yesterday.

For most people, I suspect, saints are seen as remote figures from ancient times and from very far off lands. Yet Mary was one of us. She inhabited the places we call home: Fitzroy, Penola, Adelaide, North Sydney. She was born in this land, she served in this land and she died in this land. Now her remarkable life has become a gift to the whole world.

A less likely account could hardly be imagined. Here was a young woman with relatively little formal education, few resources and no connections and yet through sheer vision and strength of will she was able to write an amazing chapter in our nation's history. When she died in 1909 the sisters of St Joseph felt immediately that they had lost a saint and the Australian community knew it had lost a national treasure of rare brilliance.

A century later Mary stands alongside all the great saints of history. Her story of bush schools and fights with clerical bureaucracy are the equal of theirs. Her wisdom and fearless integrity shine clearly across the decades, along with her good-humoured practically and egalitarian decency that so distinctively proclaim that she could have only come from one place, and that is our very own home, Australia, land of the world's newest saint; a nation today and yesterday united in pride and joy and celebration.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (2.03 pm)—On indulgence: I rise to echo the words of the Prime Minister and to acknowledge that yesterday in Rome the canonisation of a remarkable Australian woman is important for Catholics, for Australians and for the wider world.

From the humblest of beginnings at a time when women were expected to defer, Mary

MacKillop began a teaching order that, by the time of her death in 1909, had more than 700 members teaching more than 12,000 Australian pupils in 117 schools around Australia but mostly in the bush and mostly catering to people who would otherwise not have had an education.

She was a remarkably determined woman. She was undoubtedly a great educator. Therefore she is quite appropriately a role model for women and for teachers today.

She performed this prodigious work because she felt called to it by God. In an era when the church and its representatives are often thought to have failed people, her canonisation is a timely reminder of the good that has been done in this country and elsewhere under the influence of Christian faith.

I think it is appropriate to acknowledge, even in the parliament of a secular democracy, that Australia has indeed been shaped by Christian faith, even though many of us as individuals may not share it. Therefore all Australians are entitled to share in the pride that Australian Catholics feel today.

DAME JOAN SUTHERLAND

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (2.05 pm)—On indulgence: I ask leave of the House to make some remarks on the passing of Dame Joan Sutherland. She was of course *La Stupenda*, the ‘voice of the century’, ‘our Joan’, and she helped define Australia’s post war cultural landscape like few others.

Joan Sutherland’s magnificent career began with victory in the two leading musical competitions of the day, the Sun Aria Competition in Sydney in 1949, and the Mobil Quest in Melbourne in 1950. In fact the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 7 September 1950 reported that Joan had a four-leaf clover in her glove when she stepped onto the stage for the Mobil Quest Competition.

From that day on, over four extraordinary decades, that four-leaf clover never let her down. She sang all the great roles on all the great stages of the world. She made recordings that will be treasured and studied for decades to come. She provided indelible memories in the minds and hearts of all who were privileged to hear her sing. Now, after a long and brilliant life, her matchless voice has finally come to a rest.

Today, of course, our thoughts are with her family—her husband and musical collaborator, Richard; her son, Adam; her daughter-in-law, Helen; and her two grandchildren—and a wide circle of friends that lay beyond that immediate family circle. With them, we remember a grand and gracious lady who was a prima donna on the stage but never off it. We remember Dame Joan's easy dignity, her earthy sense of humour and her immense stamina and strength of will that carried her through the 40 years of her demanding performances. We recall also the boldness and self-knowledge that saw her tackle the hardest roles in the 1950s and 1960s but that also told her it was time to leave the stage, her voice and reputation intact.

It is truly extraordinary that our country, this small country, gave the world two of the greatest opera singers of the 20th century, Melba and Sutherland. I do not know why that is; I think that is for others to try and explain, but we should all be very proud of it. With the whole Australian community, I celebrate the extraordinary life and works of Dame Joan. I honour her greatness, the greatness of her voice and the greatness of her spirit and character. I mourn her passing, and I take this opportunity to convey my and I am sure the parliament's condolences to her family and friends on her loss.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (2.08 pm)—On indulgence: in this place, where people are so fond of the sound of their own voices, it is appropriate to reflect on the passing of the most extraordinary voice our country has produced. Dame Joan Sutherland was one of the greatest singers of the 20th century. As the Prime Minister has just reminded us, a generation of music critics fought to outdo each other finding superlatives in praise of the woman the Italians called 'La Stupenda'. And yet, for all the praise she received, she was a remarkably down-to-earth woman. The former secretary from Sydney took on the world of music and triumphed while retaining that down-to-earth quality which we like to think is part of our Australian national character.

It is important to remember that Dame Joan's career was the product of a great partnership. Dame Joan and her husband, Richard Bonynge, have had a remarkable impact on Australian music. They were devoted partners who worked together at what they loved and strived to create an environment where opera could flourish in their native land. From the heights of international stardom, Sutherland and Bonynge returned to Australia in the mid-1970s to develop what is now Opera Australia. They helped to develop not just an opera company but an audience and a place for opera here in this country. Thanks to their work, audiences in this country lost their belief that Australian art and music had to be second-rate.

Dame Joan's voice lives on in her magnificent recordings, and her influence lives on in the work of Opera Australia. We rejoice in her life, we mourn her passing and we send our sympathies and condolences to her husband and family.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

MAIN COMMITTEE**St Mary of the Cross
Reference**

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (2.11 pm)—by leave—I move:

That further statements by leave on the canonisation of Saint Mary MacKillop be referred to the Main Committee.

Question agreed to.

**Dame Joan Sutherland
Reference**

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (2.11 pm)—by leave—I move:

That further statements by leave on the death of Dame Joan Sutherland be referred to the Main Committee.

Question agreed to.

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE
Asylum Seekers**

Mr ABBOTT (2.11 pm)—This question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the 106 illegal boats that have so far arrived this year. I further refer the Prime Minister to today's announcement of an additional 2,300 detention places on top of the 1,000 detention places announced earlier. I ask the Prime Minister: isn't this proof that the government's border protection policies have comprehensively failed? How will opening more beds stop more boats?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I say to the Leader of the Opposition that the government made the announcement today to be transparent with the Australian people about our long-term plans for detention centres. That was why the government today made the statement that I made with the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. In part, we made that statement—and I made it clear in the remarks that I made at the start of the statement—because the opposition loves to run around with spurious claims of secret

plans, obviously raising fear and concern in communities about what is going to happen next, so we preferred the path of transparency.

To take just one example of that, the opposition have continued to insist that there is some secret plan to expand Curtin. Let me take the opportunity to say that they are wrong. The federal budget of 2010 funded a detention centre at Curtin with a capacity of 1,200 places. Less than 1,200 persons were initially moved in there. However, of course the relevant department took the prudent steps in designing the centre and putting the infrastructure in place so that the centre could reach its full capacity efficiently. When Minister Bowen became minister, he reviewed the work that had occurred at Curtin and decided to increase the numbers at Curtin to 1,200. That was the first time the department had been instructed to make the arrangements for staffing—and the detention centre manager, Serco, to move more people into the Curtin site. Minister Bowen made it clear in the announcement on 17 September that work had been underway to enable the decision for the extra 600 people to be moved in.

I note all of this became the subject of opposition interest because I was asked during the election campaign about plans to take Curtin to 3,000. There were never any such plans, and today's announcement puts the matter beyond doubt. The reason we have been transparent and made the announcement today is that obviously these matters do become the subject of community concern. We want to make sure that they get the right information.

On the question of unauthorised arrivals in this country: as the opposition leader well knows, this is a matter that will not be solved by a three-word slogan. He had a three-word slogan during the election campaign; what he

lacked was anything that looked like a policy or plan. The government has a policy and a plan. We have a policy for a regional protection framework, we have a policy for a regional processing centre, and the minister for immigration as recently as last week was involved in discussions on those questions in Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and Dili, and we will pursue that dialogue. It is not correct for the opposition to pretend that brandishing a three-word slogan is a solution. It is not. We will continue to work on the regional protection framework and regional processing centre and in the meantime we will be as transparent as we have been today about the government's policies and plans.

Mr ABBOTT—I ask the Prime Minister a supplementary question under the new standing orders. Given the urgent need for more detention places due to the failure of the government's border protection policies, why won't the Prime Minister pick up the phone to the President of Nauru and reopen the detention centre that was established before with Australian taxpayers' money?

Ms GILLARD—Once again, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question because it shows the trouble you can get into when you sloganise rather than doing the careful work which leads to long-term solutions. The Leader of the Opposition has sloganised about this, where the government have taken a consistent position and we take the consistent position still, which is: we believe there should be a regional protection framework, we believe there should be a regional processing centre, we believe that that regional processing centre—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will resume her seat. When the House comes to order we will continue. I think we are operating on the basis that if a question is asked and it is being responded to then peo-

ple should listen. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—We will pursue a regional protection framework. We will pursue a regional processing centre. We have said that the regional processing centre should be located in a country that is a signatory to the refugee convention. It is central to these arrangements that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees be involved. That is a proper process. We are in dialogue with East Timor, which is a signatory to the convention. We obviously said to Nauru, when it indicated that it may choose as a nation to become a signatory to the convention, that that would be terrific and if it needed any assistance with the technical questions in doing that then we would provide that assistance, but we will keep working, being transparent about these questions as we have today.

Of course, I expect that the Leader of the Opposition will continue with his campaigns about secret plans and his campaigns about fear in the local communities and more generally around the nation—the kind of fear we saw him engage in during the election campaign—and I presume we will see him continue with absurd policies like 'boat phone', where he thought that perhaps if he were the Prime Minister, sitting in Kirribilli, he might be in a better position to make an operational decision than a commander on the spot on one of our border patrol vessels and he would take it upon himself to pick up the phone and tell them what to do. Well, we will not engage in absurdities like that.

Economy

Mr SYMON (2.19 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the state of the global economy and what it means for the government's reform agenda?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Deakin for his very important question about the global economy and plans the government has to broaden and strengthen our economy.

Last weekend I attended the IMF-World Bank meetings in Washington. It was a good opportunity to take the temperature of the global economy, to talk to fellow finance ministers about the economic outlook and of course to share the Australian economic story. It is incredible to think where we were in the global economy just two years ago. Just two years ago last weekend, in Washington, there was a G20 finance ministers meeting, an emergency meeting, which was attended by then President George Bush. What the global economy was contemplating at that time was a collapse of global financial and stock markets and a drop in global demand, and it is pretty incredible to see how far the global economy has come in those two years.

Of course, two years ago last week we moved decisively to put in place our bank guarantees to secure the flow of credit to the Australian economy and we announced our stimulus package phase 1. In two years the global economy has come a long way and, of course, so too has the Australian economy. But I guess the message that came out of this meeting over the weekend was that there is still risk in the global economy and, whilst it is recovering, the global recovery is fragile and uncertain. Indeed, the IMF has concluded that the risk has intensified, particularly when you look at what is going on in the European economy and in the United States economy. In those economies you are looking at near-double-digit unemployment and in some countries even more.

This is how the chief economist of the IMF summed up the situation:

The result is a recovery that is neither strong nor balanced and runs the risk of not being sustained ... in most advanced economies, weak consumption and investment, together with little improvement in net exports, are leading to low growth. Unemployment is high and barely decreasing.

There could not be a sharper contrast with the Australian situation: strong employment growth and strong economic growth, compared with all other countries in the OECD. What they are saying in Washington is that what Australia has done is truly something special. Part of the success here is that, while we put in place the stimulus, we also put in place our plans for recovery—the fastest fiscal consolidation that we have seen since the 1960s. Bringing the budget back to surplus, making the investments in infrastructure and putting in place a tax system which is competitive, to broaden and to strengthen our economy—this is the way forward for Australia, and the contrast with all of those other countries at the IMF could not have been more stark.

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr ABBOTT (2.22 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister stand by her pre-election commitment to adopt the Murray-Darling Basin plan, sight unseen, in its entirety and without regard to costs or impact? Why did the Prime Minister say during the election campaign:

I am determined we will do what is necessary to implement the Murray-Darling Authority Plan—without considering its impact on regional communities and consumers?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, though it has caused me to laugh, because the Leader of the Opposition knows, in constructing that question, that what he is saying is absolutely wrong. Let me quote some words to the Leader of the Opposition which I think are

very relevant on this point, about the role of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. It was obviously implemented by a bill in the parliament. The words I seek to quote are:

This is an enormous step forward from the current governance model, which has remained largely unchanged since 1915 and requires the agreement of all basin jurisdictions before anything can be done. Through this bill, for the first time in the basin's history, one basin-wide institution accountable to the government will be responsible for planning the basin's water resources. It will be expert and it will be independent.

They were wise words, and people may be amazed to hear that they came from the member for Wentworth. I am certainly not going to make a habit of it, but on this occasion I would adopt the words of the member for Wentworth. Everything has a first, and possibly a last moment—and that is my last moment adopting his words.

What was set up under the Howard government, when the Leader of the Opposition was sitting at the cabinet table, presumably reading his cabinet papers and absorbing what was in them, was a process where the Murray-Darling Basin Authority—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order with respect to relevance. The Prime Minister was asked about her commitment on 10 August, not about ancient history to do with the member for Wentworth.

Government members interjecting—

Mr Pyne—I would ask you to bring her back to the question about her commitment of 10 August.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Sturt will resume his place.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Those on my right!

Mr Albanese—He's the one you lost, Malcolm!

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the House! The Prime Minister knows that, under the new standing orders, she needs to make her response directly relevant. It may be a long build-up—I hope—but she will make sure that she is directly relevant to the question.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I understand that. I am a little bit concerned that the member for Wentworth is now showing the Leader of the Opposition the true meaning of the word 'ancient' and denying that that fits the bill.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will get back to the question.

Ms GILLARD—The point of describing the legislation, and what the Murray-Darling Basin Authority does, is to indicate how the authority is working and where the plan comes in. What has been published is a guide. It is subject to consultation. Then the Murray-Darling Basin Authority will publish a draft plan. It will be the subject of consultation. Then, of course, the minister will sign off a plan and bring it to this parliament. I am determined that, as we work through those stages, as we get to a final plan, the plan is implemented—because that will get the balance right between the environmental needs of the river, the needs of farmers and food producers and the needs of regional communities.

I would counsel the Leader of the Opposition in the following terms. I understand this is difficult reform. I understand that it has inflamed community passion. But it is not in anybody's interests—not in the interests of any Australian, any farmer, any regional community—for the Leader of the Opposition to use his status to wreck this process. This is a process—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister is digressing.

Ms GILLARD—This is a process that was started by the Howard government. It is a process that needs to be worked through with complete and full community consultation. That is occurring now through the consultations of the authority and will occur through the parliamentary committee led by the member for New England, and I thank him for doing that work.

Economy

Ms ROWLAND (2.28 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. How is the government building a modern, prosperous economy? How have these reforms been received?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Greenway for what I believe is her first question. Last week I took the opportunity, when in Queensland, to outline my vision for the Australian economy. As the Treasurer has already outlined to the House, we have emerged from the global financial crisis strong. We have emerged with opportunities in the global world. We should be congratulating ourselves as a nation for having worked together to emerge so strong and consequently with such opportunities for the future. But we cannot rest on our laurels. In order to harness those opportunities we need to continue economic reform. That requires fiscal consolidation, and the government has been involved, the Treasurer has outlined—

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—The shadow Treasurer is interjecting—a man who could not even be bothered looking at the opposition's costings before election day. If he ever gets round to looking at the budget papers, he will see that the government is engaged in the biggest fiscal consolidation since the 1960s in order to make sure the budget comes to surplus in 2012-13, and it will.

Beyond fiscal consolidation, we need to work to expand the supply side of the econ-

omy. Obviously what we do with human capital is vital to that. Our taxation system and particularly the reforms we have promised to company tax are vital. Growing the pool of national savings is vital, as is having the infrastructure we need for the future, and the National Broadband Network is pivotal to that so that we do not end up as a nation exporting jobs to other economies that have infrastructure like the National Broadband Network whilst we do not. The National Broadband Network is pivotal to the future. And we need to continue reform in education and health. As I outlined last week, we will be bringing market principles to those reforms. They are vital to the nation's future, to ensuring that we have the skills and capacities that our society needs. They are vital to ensuring that our health system is high-quality and sustainable for all Australians.

Last week when I spoke in Brisbane I said we would be walking the journey of reform, the road of reform, every day, and we will.

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr TRUSS (2.31 pm)—My question is also to the Prime Minister. I ask the Prime Minister why the government did not require the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to undertake a proper social and economic study as a part of its basin guide. Since a study is now to be undertaken, will the government ensure that the study is comprehensive, including a rigorous analysis of the impact of water cuts on communities and on the prices of food to Australian householders?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. He may want to converse at length with the member for Wentworth about the thinking that went into the legislation and conceptualising the task of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority.

Mr Albanese—Warren was in the cabinet.

Ms GILLARD—As the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport so rightly points

out, he could have read his cabinet papers when he was at the cabinet table. That would have been another way of becoming fully informed about the matter. I am not optimistic that that was occurring, but there we have it. The member may choose to talk to the member for Wentworth now. He appears to be searching his great speeches of the past in order to get the edited highlights for the member.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will go to the question.

Ms GILLARD—Of course the government is concerned about the social and economic impacts of this reform. This is why we have consistently said—I have said and the minister for water has said—that it is vital that we get the balance right between the environment and food production, the balance right for regional communities. But the member asking me the question knows that no change is not an option, no change is not in the interests of regional communities, no change is not in the interests of Australian farmers. He knows that. He also knows that we are committed to water purchases from willing sellers. He knows that we have already embarked on water purchases which have made a difference already in terms of water entitlements. He knows that that process has been engaged in.

As we go through the balance of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority process and of course the process of the parliamentary committee, yes, we want all possible information to be brought to bear on the task so that the judgments that are finally made do get this all-important balance right.

Climate Change

Mr MURPHY (2.34 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. Minister, would you update the House on any implications of the release of the Carbon Disclosure Project's

annual report and of progress towards the establishment of a carbon price in the economy?

Mr COMBET—I thank the member for Reid for his question. The Carbon Disclosure Project is an initiative comprising no less than 534 international institutional investors collectively representing over \$64 trillion under management. In Australia the project's membership comprises 43 partners representing over \$420 billion worth of funds under management. Today the annual report of the Carbon Disclosure Project has been released in relation to Australia and New Zealand and the report provides a number of important insights into contemporary business thinking about the issue of climate change and carbon pricing. It indicates that of those companies surveyed 76 per cent of the top companies in the ASX200 see action to combat climate change as representing greater business opportunities than risks to their business. Sixty-seven per cent of the ASX200 companies surveyed saw regulatory uncertainty as a key business risk and 64 per cent of those companies surveyed see significant business risks from physical impacts of climate change. In other words, three-quarters of the companies surveyed see significant business opportunities in the establishment of a carbon price and about two-thirds believe that the lack of a policy on carbon pricing is an inherent business risk.

It is no surprise therefore that many of the business leadership in Australia accept and recognise that the establishment of a carbon price in our economy is a necessary economic reform. The Treasurer and I have indicated that a number of the business leadership from across very important sectors of the Australian economy have agreed to join the government's business round table for the purpose of consultation over this important economic reform.

The companies represented on the government's round table represent a workforce of around 380,000 people in our economy and collectively generate revenues of around \$225 billion. So this will be a very important consultative forum for the government to discuss the issues concerning carbon pricing. This is a very important economic reform to provide certainty to the business community, particularly in sectors such as the energy industry, where we know that billions of dollars of investment are backed up awaiting certainty over the issue of carbon pricing and how such a policy would operate in the marketplace for that investment to proceed. That is why the business community is supporting an economic reform of this nature, and it stands in stark contrast to the policy position of the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition is out of step with mainstream business thinking—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will return to the question.

Mr COMBET—and many on the other side in this House understand that issue well.

An opposition member—You are out of step with the community on climate change, Greg.

The SPEAKER—If we can get the member for Hume back in step with the House, we will be right.

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr BRIGGS (2.38 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Why is the expenditure on major water-saving infrastructure and on-farm efficiency \$400 million behind the original schedule? When will the minister release a timetable for the implementation of the \$5.8 billion of investment infrastructure allocated to the Murray-Darling Basin by the Howard government in 2007?

Mr BURKE—I thank the member for Mayo for the question. As the member for Mayo's question acknowledges, we are talking about reforms that began under the Howard government, and I am very pleased to hear that being acknowledged. The level of bipartisanship sometimes gets forgotten in moments in here but on water it has been there.

The \$5.8 billion that was referred to refers beyond the on-farm irrigation to actual centralised irrigation infrastructure—that is the \$5.8 billion that was referred to in the question. Those applications have come in from the states and there is a process of due diligence that the department quite properly is going through in making the assessment on those individual state applications for that money. If there is a call for the due diligence not to occur, I would be surprised by that. It is a large amount of money and the due diligence work that is going on is appropriate.

An opposition member—It is a real howdy doody show.

The SPEAKER—I'll give you howdy doody, Member for North Sydney.

Murray-Darling Basin

Ms RISHWORTH (2.40 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Why is reform needed to move towards a more sustainable future in the Murray-Darling Basin?

Mr BURKE—I thank the member for Kingston for the question, which is broad ranging and allows me to deal with some of the broader issues around the Murray-Darling Basin, in particular the concept of just how bipartisan this issue has been. On 11 August, three members of the opposition released the following words:

The coalition will release a draft basin plan within two weeks of coming to office and proceed with

its implementation without delay. Labor's delays must come to an end.

The three members of the opposition who released that statement on 11 August were Senator Birmingham, Senator Joyce and the Leader of the Opposition. So, for all the criticism that we hear about the government in terms of a guide to a draft of a plan, the opposition actually were not going to wait for the final plan. The opposition were going to implement the draft without delay within two weeks. In a media release in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, which I table, they had committed to implement the draft plan.

There are three priorities that this parliament is going to have to get right in water reform. They are about having a healthy river, the importance of food production and the importance and sustainability of regional communities.

There has been a lot of misinformation over the last week, which I would like to clear up here in the chamber. There has been an argument that the guide to the draft of a plan released by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority represents government policy. It does not. There is a belief in many communities that the government will forcibly acquire water from people. We will not. There is a belief that the plan, whatever it ends up being at the end of next year, will not take account of the good work already done in many communities. It will. There is a long process to go with this reform, but there is a huge cost in doing nothing. There is not only the impact of acid sulphate soils that we have seen in the Lower Lakes, as the member for Kingston would know all too well. There is not only the impact that we have seen from an unhealthy river system over the last decade, with algae going up and down in many parts of it. There is not only the impact on 16 Ramsar-listed wetlands. But I would remind the House that in the Lower Lakes area not

that many years ago there were 23 dairy operations. As salinity started to take over the Lower Lakes, the count went from 23 down to three. Let us not pretend that this is somehow a simple old-style battle of environment versus production. Everybody up and down the Murray-Darling Basin has an interest in having a healthy river system. There was a good deal more bipartisanship across the years on this issue than might have been reflected over the last couple of days. But let me remind the House that it is important and it is incumbent on this parliament to get that balance right. It is important that this parliament gets the balance right across those three issues: a healthy river system, the importance of food production and sustainable regional communities.

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (2.44 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Is the Treasurer aware of the advice provided to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority by an independent banking consultant that the mere release of the *Guide to the proposed basin plan* could cause a write-down in farm asset values, triggering a breach of loan covenants and providing banks with a reason to call in their loans? What discussions have you had personally with the banks to dissuade them from penalising farmers in this way?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for his question. It is a very important question. I can tell him that the Australian Bankers Association has said that banks are not foreclosing on customers due to the release of the guide. So, if he has some further information that he would like to give to me, I would be very happy to follow up on that. This is a serious question. I do take it seriously, so if there is further information that would, if you like, add an extra view to what the Australian Bankers Association is saying I would certainly be pleased to hear that.

The government does have a commitment to the security of people who live in the basin. We have a commitment to the security of families and we have a commitment to environmental sustainability, because the two are linked, and to pull the two apart is simply not possible. Everybody knows how difficult an issue this is—whether you come from Queensland or whether you are living in South Australia or any point in between. The government takes these issues seriously and I would be happy to follow them up if there was any further information.

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr ZAPPIA (2.46 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts. How will the parliament inform the government's consideration of measures to deliver sustainable outcomes in the Murray-Darling Basin?

Mr CREAN—I thank the member for his question. I know the long interest he has taken in water sustainability in his state—his municipality—and I was pleased that he was involved in the Murray-Darling Basin consultation sessions in Renmark last Friday. I congratulate him for his interest.

The question is the significance of the engagement of the parliamentary committee which is to be established. It has a threefold purpose. Firstly, the plan that the government brings to the parliament has to be approved by the parliament. It is therefore terribly important that we engage the parliament in the process. The cabinet had a discussion about this almost two weeks ago. We discussed how we could engage the parliamentary process. It was as a result of that that I spoke to the member for New England, and the terms of reference were developed in consultation. I am looking forward to the work of that committee. I think the committee has an important role to play.

The second reason it is important for parliament to be engaged is so that it can help us get the balance that is being talked about and which gets derision from time to time on the other side. The fact is that we have been presented with a guide from the Murray-Darling Basin Commission that goes to the flows necessary—in their view, based on the science—to get sustainability of the water system. What we also need is sustainability of the economies and of the communities. We need to ensure that we are getting the human factor involved. The socioeconomic consequences are vital. The truth is that there have been important advances made in many of the communities down the Murray-Darling Basin. What we want is the engagement of parliament to help get that balance and to complement the guide that has been put forward by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority.

The third reason the parliamentary committee will be important is that it will help us focus on the local involvement. It is important to look at the terms of reference that we have circulated in relation to it, requiring consideration of valley-by-valley initiatives, recognising the effect of initiatives already taken and looking at where water buybacks and infrastructure have worked—in other words, to help us develop best practice in coming to grips with the solutions. We as a government believe that it is terribly important in facing up to these issues of diversity that are consequent upon our geography and our environment that we engage localism in arriving at those decisions.

There is no difficulty in facing up to the local communities. What we want to do, though, is make sure that those local communities do not just get angry but channel their interest in this issue to constructive solutions. I hope that members on the other side of the House understand the opportunity that this parliamentary committee presents, that they get behind it, that they get involved

and that they come forward with constructive solutions. That is what we are prepared to do on this side of the House, and I look forward to working with the member for New England in achieving that outcome.

Murray-Darling Basin

Ms LEY (2.50 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. There are 19 community briefings on the Murray-Darling Basin plan in the next three weeks. I note that to date no minister has attended any such briefing. Which of the 19 meetings yet to be held will the minister be attending?

Mr BURKE—I thank the member for Farrer for the question. As I have said publicly, I as minister will not be looking over the shoulder of and watching an independent authority consult on its own document. Quite properly, I as minister did not have a role—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will resume his seat until the House comes to order. The question has been asked, and the minister was responding to the question. The minister has the call.

Mr BURKE—Quite properly, the independent authority developed the guide as an independent authority without ministerial interference. They will then go and conduct their consultation on that document, on their own. I have, as members opposite know from their own electorates and their visits to their own electorates, over the past three years constantly been in and out of irrigation communities and continue to be so.

Mr Truss interjecting—

Mr BURKE—That is the reason why last Friday I was in one of the irrigation communities in the electorate of the member for Parkes. But I am not going to meetings looking over the shoulder of an independent authority. I notice the Leader of the Nationals.

The Leader of the Nationals says, ‘When are you going to go to Griffith?’ When he was minister for agriculture, the front page of the local paper there, the Griffith *Area News*, ran the heading ‘Where’s Warren?’ because he never visited.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The minister will resume his seat. I advise the minister to ignore the interjections and that the interjections cease. If you want to have a debate, find other avenues throughout the parliamentary day. Question time is not the time.

Mr BURKE—An independent authority has put forward an independent guide and is conducting its own consultation with reference to one thing: legislation that was carried under the Howard government and carried through by the member for Wentworth—legislation which has been bipartisan the whole way through. I will be visiting, as I always have, each and every one of those irrigation districts, but when we refer to Griffith let us not forget that it is known as the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area and that newspaper report I mentioned referred to the Leader of the Nationals as MIA in the MIA.

Delhi Commonwealth Games

Mr LYONS (2.54 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare and Minister for the Status of Women, representing the Minister for Sport. Will the minister update the House on the efforts of our Australian athletes at the Delhi 2010 Commonwealth Games?

Ms KATE ELLIS—I thank the member for Bass for his question. It is my great pleasure, on behalf of the Australian government but particularly on behalf of the Minister for Sport, Senator Arbib, to commend the organisers, to commend Perry Crosswhite and the Australian Commonwealth Games Association and particularly to commend the Australian Commonwealth

Games team on what were some tremendous endeavours in India recently. Whilst there were some bumpy roads in anticipation in the lead-up to the games, what we actually saw in Delhi were some truly remarkable feats by Australians. We saw that the Delhi Commonwealth Games provided a stage for true superstars like Anna Meares and Matt Cowdrey or superstars like Sally Pearson to show that they are truly gifted not just in athletic abilities but also in attitude. Whilst sports stars have enjoyed many of these events and many of the games' results, I think that all Australians can appreciate that our team has now arrived home safely and securely. I think it is appropriate that we pay tribute to the organisers and to those who worked so hard to make sure that there were not any security incidents at this event; that this did run smoothly; and that all of the Australian team is now home, is now looking to get back into training and is now looking to represent Australia proudly in London in 2012.

Murray-Darling Basin

Mrs MIRABELLA (2.56 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. I refer to the Murray-Darling Basin plan, which suggests effective cuts of 71 per cent to irrigators in the Ovens catchment in my electorate. Given the fact that about 95 per cent of catchment water already flows back into the basin, how can the government justify gutting this irrigation entitlement by such a devastating amount when it represents less than one per cent of total inflows?

Mr BURKE—I thank the member for Indi for the question. She was referring to a copy of the draft plan. The draft plan has not been produced. The draft plan comes out next year. It is a statutory document that gets followed by 16 weeks of consultation. What is happening in advance of that is a guide to

what they think they might put in the draft of the plan. That is the way the independent authority have chosen to do it. There is a long period of consultation that goes through in all of this, and I will not be telling an independent authority from the sidelines what they should and should not do. What people need to understand with all of this is that, if the option is that people want to argue that somehow the river system is healthy and water reform is not required, they would find very few people willing to say that that was a sensible position. Reform is never easy; reform is difficult. But what we have to deal with here is a situation where, first of all, any reductions that happen through purchases happen only from willing sellers. If you do not want to sell your water, the government does not want to buy it. We have the extra addition to what is being done with efficiencies, whether it is centralised irrigation efficiency, on-farm irrigation efficiency or all the works and measures to more effectively manage the environmental resources up and down the basin. There is a long period of consultation between now and then, and the government will not adjudicate point by point on the work that is being done properly by the independent authority.

Health

Ms BIRD (2.58 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. What is the government doing to ensure we have an adequate number of highly trained health professionals well distributed across the country?

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for Cunningham for her question. I know that she was particularly keen to follow this issue, because she, as well as many other members in the House, knows that if we are to deliver properly on health reform we need to have enough doctors, enough nurses, enough allied health professionals not only

coming through our universities but also getting good clinical training experience in communities where they are needed.

That is why the Prime Minister and I were so delighted to announce last week the allocation of nearly half a billion dollars worth of Commonwealth investment in clinical training places for undergraduates. There are 22 professions including not just doctors and nurses—although nurses and midwives account for the lion's share of this investment, as they need to—but also allied health professionals of all types. In the seat of Cunningham, the University of Wollongong, for example, is getting supported places for more psychology students and nursing places. I know that the member for Lingiari, as another example, would be very pleased that in Central Australia there are going to be supported places in nursing, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. I have not heard the member for Cowper, who was here before, comment on this, but I know that the member for Lyne has. The investments on the mid-North Coast, for example, are supporting more medical students, speech pathology students, physiotherapy students and nursing students across all of the mid-North Coast.

It is really important to emphasise here in this House why this investment is so significant. For the first time there has been a proper planning process about the need in the future for doctors, nurses and allied health professionals. For the first time we have invested money to ensure that students get training in places where there are shortages. Thirty-seven per cent of this money is going to support students in rural and regional Australia. Sixty per cent of the money is going to private and non-government organisations because this is to expand capacity; work that has been done well in our public hospitals needs to also be done in private settings. Forty-one per cent of this funding is going to

priority areas where there are serious workforce issues. I know that the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing will be very pleased that 41 per cent is going into those areas like mental health, aged care and primary care where there has not been enough training in the past.

This is good news. Of course, it is in stark contrast to the approach taken by the Leader of the Opposition when he was the health minister. We are very proud that this multi-million-dollar investment is now turning into supported places for real nursing students, real doctors and real allied health professionals across the country.

Afghanistan

Mr BANDT (3.01 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Defence. Given that one of the oft-stated rationales for our involvement in Afghanistan is the propping up of the Karzai government, is the government concerned about the reported level of corruption, to the highest levels of the Karzai government, and does the government agree with US General David Petraeus's reported comment that the Afghan government is a 'criminal syndicate'?

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—I thank the member for his question. The very clear rationale for Australia's involvement in Afghanistan is that it is in our national interest to be so involved. It is in our national interest to support a United Nations mandated International Security Assistance Force—a coalition of 47 countries mandated by the United Nations. That coalition, including our alliance partner the United States, seeks to stare down international terrorism. These issues will no doubt be very broadly and widely debated by parliament in the days ahead.

Let me come precisely to the question that the member has raised in respect of the Karzai government. As members of the House might recall, both before and after the recent

presidential election which saw President Karzai re-elected, I said very clearly on a number of occasions that Australia, the Australian government, the International Security Assistance Force and the international community expected to see considerable and substantive improvement from whatever Afghan government emerged from that presidential election process, whether it was a re-elected Karzai government or some other government. We expected to see substantial improvement on corruption, on governance and on human rights issues, in particular the treatment of women and girls, especially when it came to matters like education. I said that on behalf of the Australian government and on behalf of Australia, both domestically and internationally. I said that before President Karzai faced the election and after his re-election. The position of Australia and the position of the Australian government have not changed one iota in that respect.

Infrastructure

Mr CHAMPION (3.04 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. How are the major nation-building infrastructure projects progressing, particularly those in South Australia and Western Australia?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Wakefield for his question. He of course was very proud to be at the opening of the Northern Expressway in Adelaide in September. The expressway was opened three months ahead of schedule, thanks to the government's economic stimulus plan. This will cut travel times by up to 20 minutes. More than 3,300 Australians were put into work as a direct result of that project. I congratulate the contractors, because 14 per cent of the people who worked on site and got training were young or Indigenous—well above the 10 per cent target that they had. They showed that the target can be achieved.

Those young people and Indigenous workers who I met the four times that I visited the project were very proud, as were their families. They can be proud of the fact that they can see the product of their work.

Just this month, the \$155 million Mandurah Entrance Road in Western Australia was also opened, again almost three months ahead of schedule as a result of the government's economic stimulus plan. This project had 200 people working on it. It is part of a broader commitment to the region because it provides a link from the new Perth-Bunbury highway, completed last year, into the Mandurah town centre. These road and rail projects that we brought forward as a result of the economic stimulus plan were critical in creating employment during the global financial crisis. They are also critical in building nation-building infrastructure for many years to come.

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr ABBOTT (3.06 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Is water reform the responsibility of the government or is it the responsibility of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority? If it is the responsibility of the government, why will he not lead the debate and actually visit the affected communities? If it is the responsibility of the authority, does he stand by its recommendations and its work so far?

Mr BURKE—In terms of visiting basin communities, last Friday I was meeting with Trangie Nevertire in the electorate of the member for Parkes within the basin. I will be spending a whole lot of time in basin communities, not only speaking with irrigators but also meeting with the townspeople, because we cannot pretend that this issue only affects irrigators. Certainly the irrigators have the option as to whether or not they choose to be willing sellers. Those options

are not necessarily available to those people in the town who suffer the economic challenge when a number of irrigators decide to get out and when you have the downstream impacts. Those issues are all worthy of consultation and I will be out there as I have been constantly.

In terms of the final issue for the plan, the order of events on this is simple and ultimately the one document that is called the plan is the document that I sign. Up until that point there is a process conducted by the independent authority, and let me tell you just what level of support there has been for that independent authority. I quote:

Important elements of this bill which give effect to the National Plan for Water Security include an independent Murray-Darling Basin Authority with enforcement powers; a basin plan which sets a cap on water systems ...

Speaking in support of the bill when it went through, that was the member for Indi. So please do not come in with the shock and outrage. You support a piece of legislation, you support an independent authority—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister is commencing a debate here. He will answer the question in a directly relevant manner.

Mr BURKE—You support an independent authority which is charged with conducting consultation and charged with eventually bringing forward a proposal. But the final responsibility for the plan itself rests with me as minister and then, to survive, it has to survive disallowance in each house of the parliament, and therefore none of us in this chamber will avoid responsibility. No-one in this chamber should think they are going to be able to walk away from what needs to happen in the Murray-Darling Basin. Anybody is capable of being a wrecker and anybody is capable of doing what has been done for the last hundred years in the Murray-Darling Basin and saying, ‘Rather than ad-

dress the reform we would rather just throw our hands up in the air and do nothing.’ The responsibility, once I sign that plan, rests with the parliament, and the bipartisan approach which has existed from the day the member for Wentworth first introduced this legislation will come back to the parliament in 2011 when the plan is introduced.

Military Discipline

Mr MELHAM (3.10 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Defence. Will the minister advise the House on the creation of the position of Director of Military Prosecutions? Why is the independence of the Director of Military Prosecutions essential and what role does the government have to play in these matters?

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—I thank the member for Banks for his question. He has a longstanding interest in matters related to justice. He asks me about the creation of the position of Director of Military Prosecutions. He asks me for the rationale for the independence of the prosecutor and he asks me what role, if any, there is for government in this matter.

The position of the Director of Military Prosecutions was of course created by legislation introduced by the Howard government, of which the Leader of the Opposition was a cabinet member, and it was passed by the parliament with bipartisan support including the support in the Senate of the now shadow minister for defence, Senator Johnston, in 2005. It had bipartisan support, as it should. The first and current Director of Military Prosecutions was appointed by the Howard government in July 2006. The creation of the position of Director of Military Prosecutions followed consideration of a number of reports including, importantly, a seminal Senate report in June or July 2005. When the report was received on 16 June 2005 in the Senate, Senator Johnston, the

now shadow minister for defence, said—and he was referring to two reports:

The most crucial and telling aspect of both of those inquiries was that the reports handed down were unanimous. There was no party politics and no point scoring involved in this exercise.

That is a very good analysis for the House to take. It is a very good analysis for Senator Johnston himself to follow. It is a very good analysis for the Leader of the Opposition. It is an analysis which I know the member for Fadden has been following.

On 20 June 2008, again in committee, Senator Johnston, when considering some of the reforms proposed to Australia's military justice system, said, 'These statutory officers have to be completely independent.' They are statutory officers, so the notions of complete independence and of no point scoring or partisan politics in these matters are referred to us as advice in analysis by Senator Johnston and we should follow that.

We have seen in recent times the first illustration of the Director of Military Prosecutions bringing charges against three Australian defence personnel, as a result of an incident in Afghanistan in February 2009 which saw the tragic death of six civilians. I make no comment on the incident itself; that would be inappropriate. I make no comment on the processes other than to say that they are properly independent of government, as they should be, and that we allow the military justice system to take its course.

The one fundamental change that we are dealing with here has been the creation of the position of Director of Military Prosecutions, presented to the parliament by the Howard government and supported by legislation during its time. It is the provision of that legislation that in the course of consideration of the Director of Military Prosecutions bringing a charge or charges that defence service chiefs, the Chief of the Defence Force or his

representatives, can make representations under section 5A of the legislation to the military prosecutor about general defence matters, not about guilt or innocence or whether charges should be preferred or not. Indeed, in this case when asking for such representations the Director of Military Prosecutions expressly advised the CDF not to make comments about preferring of charges or not because that would impact upon her independence.

It is of course clearly inappropriate for the government of the day to seek to inveigle itself into these matters. Where there is a role for government, of course, is to ensure, as I, the Chief of Army and the CDF have made clear, that the three personnel concerned have access to whatever legal resources and advice they require to properly defend themselves as well as other appropriate support and advice from the defence forces so far as their families are concerned as they go through a very difficult process. We have no alternative, as a result of legislation passed by the House and the Senate, other than to respect that independent process.

Home Insulation Program

Mr HUNT (3.14 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. On Friday the Prime Minister conceded that the government's insulation scheme had become 'a mess'. In that context, why did the government ignore the paramount advice of the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts that it needed five years to safely roll out the Home Insulation Program, instead putting greater priority on stimulus over safety? Who was responsible for the decision to reject the department's advice?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. Yes, I used that terminology last Friday. As the member may recall, I used that terminology in the House on, I believe, the very first day I was Prime Minister. I

have used it consistently since. So there is nothing new in that. I have said to the Australian people consistently—before the election, during the election and now—that this program did become a mess, and the government brought it to an end. Having brought it to an end, obviously the government is working through compensation and inspection questions. We had the Hawke review and then of course we had the Auditor-General's report. What members of parliament would see from the Auditor-General's report and I think what they would conclude as a simple matter of common sense is that a lot has been learned through this process. It has been learned by government and the relevant department. They are important lessons.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order under the new requirement for being directly relevant. The whole import of that question was, 'Who was it? Who was responsible for signing off on the rejection of the advice given by the department?' The question is clearly directed—

The SPEAKER—The member will resume her seat. We got the point of order. The Prime Minister is responding to the question. The Prime Minister understands the necessity to be directly relevant to questions.

Ms GILLARD—The question started with a reference to my statement last Friday, drafted in by whoever drafted the question, and I am responding to that part of it. Having responded to that part of it, I will respond to the other part of it. The other part of it goes to the question of government processes about economic stimulus. The government acted on economic stimulus through cabinet processes, through particularly the strategic policy and budget committee. Decisions were made to roll out economic stimulus in the face of the global financial crisis because

we were not prepared to sit idly by and watch hundreds of thousands of Australians be robbed of the benefits and dignity of work, with all that that implies for them and their families' futures.

I presume the member's question gets to the issue of responsibility, and I am very happy to say yes, the government take responsibility for the Home Insulation Program. We are absorbing the lessons from the Auditor-General's report.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will resume her seat. The Manager of Opposition Business continually prattles—that is the only way I can describe it—through the whole of question time. That is outside the standing orders. There are many in this House who would ask me to take action against him. I would just ask him to recognise that it would assist if he sat there quietly.

Ms GILLARD—Can I conclude by saying the government do take responsibility here. We brought the Home Insulation Program to an end. We had the Hawke review. We have the compensation issues. We have the inspections which are rolling out. Could I suggest to members of the opposition that if they truly want to deal with these questions then at some point they should honestly reflect in the parliament what was said in the Auditor-General's report and the lessons that can be learned from it. I would refer particularly to the statements in the Auditor-General's report about the role of the department and the question of advice.

Mr Hunt—And the paramount advice that was avoided.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Flinders has asked his question.

Ms GILLARD—I would indicate to the member that in his public statement he may also choose to be more accurate about those things.

Carers

Mr ADAMS (3.20 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing. What is the government doing to recognise, support and celebrate the work of Australia's carers?

Mr BUTLER—I thank the member for Lyons for his question. This morning I had the honour of helping to launch Carers Week down at Old Parliament House with the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers, the shadow minister for carers—both from the other place—a number of carers, carer ambassadors and the incomparable Noeline Brown, the Ambassador for Ageing. Carers Week is a week for celebration of the achievements of carers and the work that informal carers do all around Australia every day. Today Carers Australia released a report commissioned from Access Economics that tells us that now 2.9 million Australians provide informal care. Some 500,000 of them work as the primary carer or sole carer for those for whom they care.

The theme of Carers Week this year—‘Anyone, anytime’—reflects the diversity of our carer population. There is no stereotypical carer. With that diversity comes a range of very different needs. For example, the ageing parents of an adult child with a mental illness or disability have caring needs of their own as they grow older. Thousands of young carers, many of whom are still adolescents, need help to reconcile their caring responsibilities with their ongoing education and training.

Across the board, though, we know that the work of carers is almost invariably stressful and physically draining. That is why the government supported the 2008 parliamen-

tary inquiry into better support for carers, an inquiry that resulted in a bipartisan report, *Who cares...?* In response to that report, the government committed to the development of a national carers recognition framework which would include both legislation and the development of a national carers strategy. To that end, the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs introduced the Carer Recognition Bill back into the parliament in the last sitting week, and today the government has launched a discussion paper towards a national carers strategy. Consultation around that paper will be driven by Carers Australia and Children with Disability Australia who will be conducting workshops around the country with individual carers themselves to ensure that they have input into the final shape of the strategy.

This framework will build on a range of important initiatives already undertaken by the first-term Labor government. Most obviously, these initiatives improve financial security for carers through increasing by more than \$100 per fortnight the maximum single rate of the carer payment, through introducing an annual and ongoing carer supplement of \$600 per year paid to almost 500,000 carers around Australia and through introducing new rules to make it easier for carers of children with a disability to get income support. Last year more than 143,000 carers accessed respite care through the National Respite for Carers Program, and that is funded to the tune of more than \$200 million in the 2010-11 financial year. The consumer directed care trials that were initiated by my predecessor include 200 respite care packages with individual budgets being paid to carers for them to spend on respite options that they choose. Carers Week has become an important part of the national calendar. To all Australian carers out there, I say that your caring is not just appreciated by those you care for—your

loved ones—but also acknowledged, admired and appreciated by all Australians.

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

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS

Report No. 12 of 2010-11

The SPEAKER (3.24 pm)—I present the Auditor-General's Audit report No. 12 of 2010-11 entitled *Home Insulation Program*.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.25 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:

Attorney-General's Department—Report for 2009-10.

Australian Federal Police—Report for 2009-10.

Australian Human Rights Commission—Report No. 42—Mr KL v State of NSW (Department of Education).

Australian Law Reform Commission—Report No. 113—Report for 2009-10.

Australian Postal Corporation (Australia Post)—Report for 2009-10.

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)—Report for 2009-10.

Customs Act 1901—Conduct of Customs officers—Report for 2009-10.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry—Report for 2009-10.

Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy—Report for 2009-10.

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

Department of Human Services—Report, incorporating reports of the Child Support Agency and CRS Australia for 2009-10.

Family Law Council—Report for 2009-10.

Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security—Report for 2009-10.

National Native Title Tribunal—Report for 2009-10.

Office of Parliamentary Counsel—Report for 2009-10.

Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act—Report—Independent review of the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Scheme, 30 June 2010.

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

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.25 pm)—I move:

That leave of absence from 18 October to 25 November 2010 be given to Ms Plibersek for purposes of maternity leave.

On behalf of all members, I congratulate her on the birth of her son, Louis.

Question agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Economy

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Treasurer) (3.27 pm)—by leave—I make this ministerial statement relating to the global and domestic economies.

International Update

Two years ago this government participated in a historic crisis meeting of the G20 group of leading economies in Washington DC. That meeting agreed to unprecedented measures of international cooperation to try to avert what then seemed almost inevitable: a collapse of the global economy so deep and so prolonged as to rival the Great Depression. Through unprecedented collective action the global community stared down the most severe, widespread and threatening fi-

nancial collapse in 75 years. That G20 meeting brought the global economy back from the brink. Many at that crisis meeting would have found it difficult to believe that two years on we could have regained as much ground as we have.

Last week I was again attending a G20 meeting, which coincided with the IMF Spring meetings in Washington. I can report to the House that the resounding message from those key international economy meetings is that, while we have seen a global economic recovery, it is still uncertain and uneven. Certainly, the developing world is doing well. But unemployment remains very high in the United States and Europe, their capacity for further policy stimulus is limited, and the contribution of the inventory rebuild to output growth is ending. The risks of prolonged slow growth in Europe and the US or even another downturn in those economies was a central theme at both the G20 and the IMF meetings.

Fortunately, Australia remains in a far better position than major advanced economies. Our economy is strong. Job creation is strong. Our fiscal position is strong. We have a large volume of both current and planned business investment that reflects confidence in the policies of this government and the future of Australia. Australians can take great pride in the stark difference between our economy's performance and that of most other developed economies. While the advanced economies of the world are still trying to claw back the output lost during the crisis, Australia's output is already substantially higher than it was before the global recession. Consider for a moment that 3½ years ago Australia and the US both had the same low unemployment rate. Today, Australia's unemployment rate stands at 5.1 per cent, compared to 9.6 per cent in the United States.

The unprecedented speed and scale of our policy response, combined with our location in the fastest growing region in the world, were critical for the strong recovery in the private sector economy we are now all seeing. Together, the bank guarantees and the stimulus packages we put in place were bold decisions that reinforced the strength of our financial system while supporting spending, production and confidence.

Domestic Challenges

But our success during the global financial crisis should not be seen as an end in itself—it should be seen as the foundation upon which we build prosperity and tackle some very familiar economic challenges. Chief amongst those challenges is addressing the capacity constraints that were left unattended during the earlier mining boom.

As we move into mining boom mark 2, we give this undertaking: this government will not squander its benefits. That is why capacity building has been and remains central to our economic agenda. We will take some time to address the capacity constraints and skill shortages in some areas of industry, but we are making steady progress. At the same time, we are having to deal with a strong currency. Some of that strength is of course a reflection of the weakness of the United States dollar against all currencies, including our own. But it also reflects the relative strength of the Australian economy, very high world commodity prices and the dynamics of international currency markets.

I well understand the impact that the high dollar is having on some parts of economy. Our trade exposed industries such as tourism, manufacturing, agriculture and education are finding it tougher to compete in global markets. That is one of the reasons we have introduced a package of reforms to make our business more competitive across all sectors,

including cutting the company tax rate and giving a tax cut to small business.

Some in the opposition have suggested we should take action to artificially lower the value of the Australian dollar. The consequence of this would be, of course, higher inflation and then higher interest rates, and with it a global collapse of confidence in the management of the Australian economy. That would hurt our manufacturing, agricultural and tourism industries, as well as homeowners right around the country.

So it is not surprising that the *Sydney Morning Herald's* respected columnist, Ian Verrender, described this argument as an 'outburst' that 'defies logic'. But I think it is more serious than that. I think it is dangerous, because it risks fracturing the long-held bipartisan consensus on the floating exchange rate.

The floating of the dollar was one of the big changes which made our 20-year record expansion possible. It has helped us to manage both positive and negative shocks and to sustain the momentum of our expansion. Any action to artificially lower the value of our currency would also encourage retaliation from our trading partners, and that is not something that is in the interests of our export industries. One of the great strengths of the coordinated response to the global recession was that we avoided a repeat of the protectionist policies that so exacerbated the Great Depression. That is why Australia will continue to support reform of global currencies as part of a broader package of reforms to lift global growth, not just shift it.

The opposition has also suggested that the government's fiscal policy is feeding the rising dollar. But if this logic were true, with larger fiscal deficits in the United States, we would see the US dollar appreciating against the Australian dollar, not depreciating. The fact is Australia has one of the strongest fis-

cal positions in the developed world. Along with our strong economy, low unemployment and strong fundamentals, this is part of what is helping to attract further investment in our economy.

Domestic Reform Agenda

Of course, the Australian success story does not mean we are immune from continuing instability in the global economy. Considered, intelligent policymaking is just as important now as it was to our success during the global crisis. That is why we are so passionate about our economic plan:

- a plan to cut business taxes, invest in the infrastructure this nation needs and keep building our pool of retirement savings;
- a plan to build a stronger, broader, more competitive economy that will create even more jobs and keep us ahead of the pack; and
- a plan to meet the challenges of mining boom mark 2.

Far from resting on our laurels, we will keep the wheels of economic reform turning here at home and at important discussions abroad. That is why this weekend's meeting of the G20 finance ministers will also be important. Together, we are focused on structural reforms needed to achieve a stronger, more sustainable global recovery. We are also determined to avoid a return to the protectionist policies of the past because we understand that such a step would have a devastating impact on the global economy as well as on our own.

I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for North Sydney to speak for 7½ minutes.

Leave granted.

Mr SWAN—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Hockey

speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding seven and a half minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (3.35 pm)—The coalition shares the Treasurer's pride in the strong performance of the Australian economy. We do so because we were instrumental in helping to make our economy robust, a point lost on the Treasurer because he and his colleagues opposed so much of what we did, from tax reform to privatisation, from waterfront reform to fiscal consolidation.

Economic growth is back to trend and the unemployment rate is approaching the treasury department's definition of full employment, at around five per cent. This is good news. In addition, demand for Australia's resources continues to swell and prices are high. Australia's terms of trade are at their highest level for half a century, which will deliver very significant income gains to Australia over coming years. Our economic future is tied to the world's largest and fastest growing economic bloc in Asia. That future at this moment is bright.

There has been much debate about the reasons for Australia's economic success. I do not wish to go over old ground today but I do want to emphasise the role played by reform over a long period of time by governments of both political persuasions. A key and critical reform was the floating of the Australian dollar in December 1983. The floating of the dollar was the culmination of a long period of gradual liberalisation of the currency markets, moving from a regime where the Australian dollar was fixed to the pound sterling, then to the US dollar, then to a 'managed float' after that, where the value of the currency was set against a basket of currencies and allowed to change gradually over time.

There were two key reasons why the Australian dollar was finally floated. The first was pragmatic: managing a currency requires the central bank to actively buy or sell the currency in the market; it is obliged to meet all comers at the specified exchange rate. The problem for a small, open economy such as Australia's is that the central bank does not have sufficient firepower to take on the markets where there is substantial pressure for the currency to move away from the set value. And, if it does try to take on the market, there can be big impacts on domestic liquidity—that is, the supply of money. Ultimately the Reserve Bank and the government can sacrifice economic management on the altar of trying to achieve a particular value for the currency. This can be illustrated utilising recently published data.

A Reserve Bank press release of 1 September 2010 shows that, globally, the Australian dollar is now the fifth most traded currency and the Australian dollar and the US dollar remain the fourth most traded currency pair. The only currencies which are more actively traded than the Australian dollar are the US dollar, the euro, the yen and the British pound. Recent BIS data shows global daily turnover where the Australian dollar was one-half of the currency pair totalled around \$300 billion in April this year. This includes spot transactions, forward swaps and options. I seek leave to table that document.

Leave granted.

Mr HOCKEY—This turnover is enormous compared with the size of our economy, which is \$1.3 trillion. It is also large compared with Australia's reserves of gold and foreign exchange held by the Reserve Bank, which totalled \$42.1 billion as of the end of August, of which \$32.1 billion was foreign currency reserves. So, in reality, the actions of the Reserve Bank in trying to ma-

nipulate the Australian dollar through intervention in foreign currency markets would be temporary and minor. It is often futile, as we have recently witnessed with central bank interventions in the Japanese yen and the Swiss franc. Both interventions delivered a short-term movement but ultimately they failed.

The second reason for a floating dollar is more important: a floating currency helps to insulate the domestic economy from shocks which originate offshore. For example, during the global financial crisis there was a short-lived dip in commodity prices. In response the Australian dollar fell sharply, from close to parity with the US dollar down to just above US60c. This also reflected a more generalised risk aversion and a more pessimistic view on growth. The sharp fall helped to insulate Australia from the shock by boosting the Australian value of foreign currency export receipts, and this helped maintain the international competitiveness of Australia's exports. The fall in the Australian dollar also made imported goods and services more expensive, thereby reducing demand. Together, these impacts on exports and imports helped to insulate Australian production and Australian jobs from the severe downturn in other countries.

The coalition believe in market pricing. We share the anxiety of many that enormous gyrations in the Australian dollar against the US dollar are creating uncertainty. This is, however, overwhelmingly linked to the devaluation of the US dollar and the quantitative easing by the Federal Reserve. It does, of course, raise an issue that has far greater implications for Australia and the world—that is, the gradual decline in the power and influence of the United States economy, a process that is being sped up by the growing protectionist influence in US politics.

In his statement the Treasurer said that some in the opposition have suggested that the government should take action to artificially lower the value of the dollar. This is simply not the case. The coalition have not suggested that the government or the Reserve Bank should intervene in currency markets to target the value of the Australian dollar. I was there, as financial services minister, in 2001 when the Australian dollar was being hammered, in part because of the US led tech boom and subsequent bust. We held our nerve when the dollar fell below US50c; we expect the government to hold its nerve now.

What we have said through this is that the government's own actions in continuing to run very large budget deficits and pump prime the Australian economy are forcing interest rates to be higher than they would otherwise be—and consequently the Australian dollar is higher than it needs to be. The government should not be running a \$41 billion deficit at a time when the economy is running close to capacity and the labour market is approaching full employment. The Treasurer tries to counter this argument by pointing to larger fiscal deficits in the US and observes that the US dollar is depreciating. The point he fails to understand is that government spending puts upward pressure on interest rates, and the exchange rate, when the economy is already operating at full capacity. The situation in the US is quite different, with a weak economy operating below capacity and with high unemployment. In that situation it is understandable that the government would wish to keep boosting demand. It can do so with no danger of putting upward pressure on interest rates or its currency.

For Australia, the role of excessive government spending in placing upward pressure on interest rates is now widely accepted. It is not 'Hockeynomics'; it is real. Now is the

time when we as a nation should take advantage of this period and start paying off our debt, not increasing our borrowings by \$100 million a day.

National Security

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (3.43 pm)—by leave—I wish to update the House on the outcomes of the largest counterterrorism exercise conducted to date in Australia, Exercise Mercury 10. The threat of terrorist attack remains a major security challenge for Australia. In recent years, a number of plots have been disrupted by the dedicated and coordinated efforts of Australia's security and law enforcement agencies, as well as our international partners.

Just as terrorists have proven to be creative and innovative, so Australia must also be flexible and adaptable to changes in the global security environment. Since 2007, the government has taken a number of important steps to strengthen our ability to understand and respond to national security threats, especially the threat of a possible terrorist attack. In 2008, the government delivered Australia's first National Security Statement, and earlier this year a counterterrorism white paper was prepared to bring together both the international and domestic elements of Australia's counterterrorism policy.

The government is committed to ensuring that our security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies are adequately resourced and prepared to deal with these potential threats. A key element of this is testing and evaluating our ability to comprehensively respond to a major terrorist incident. This must be done in the most realistic manner possible if it is to be effective.

Exercise Mercury 10 was two years in the planning and was the largest, most complex and indeed most demanding national counterterrorism exercise that our country has

been engaged in. It was also the first to include an international component, with the involvement of New Zealand authorities. The exercise was conducted over six months. It commenced in March this year. It led to the major deployment activities across Australia in August this year.

Mercury 10 simulated a series of coordinated terrorist attacks across the country and was designed to test our security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies, as well as key decision makers across federal, state and territory governments. Almost all of our key national security departments took part and every state and territory in the country participated. Importantly, for the very first time the exercise included a 'prevention phase' that simulated a national investigation into suspected terrorist activity.

To date, Australia's intelligence and law enforcement communities have been highly successful in identifying and preventing terrorist actions in this country. We know, for example, that over the past eight years, four potentially very serious attacks intended to produce mass casualties have been prevented in this country as a result of their work. Obviously, however, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. We have learned many lessons from these investigations and continually look to improve and strengthen national co-operation and coordination across all agencies and, importantly, at all levels of government. It is for this reason that the exercise brought together the police forces from every state and territory, as well as the Australian Federal Police and the Australian intelligence community. Through the exercise they were able to test and practise these processes in a high-pressure environment, with as much realism as possible.

In late August, the 'deployment phase' was conducted, where the federal government, along with the states and territories,

simulated its response to coordinated terrorist attacks against multiple targets. This phase of the exercise tested the ability of almost all members of the national security community to respond to multiple incidents across Australia. The Attorney-General's Department crisis centre provided national information coordination and, again, state and territory crisis committees, together with the National Crisis Committee, met to provide an effective and nationally coordinated response. Importantly, the Australian government provided leadership and tested its processes for providing substantial health, material and defence support in response to these attacks.

As I previously indicated, in another first for our counterterrorism exercise program, Mercury 10 included a simulated terrorist incident in New Zealand. This allowed our two countries to practise their response and support processes that may be called upon in a significant disaster or terrorist attack.

In fact, many of Australia's crisis response and coordination mechanisms are common across the spectrum of natural disasters, emergency management and counterterrorism. Accordingly, the exercise also provided a unique opportunity to test our ability to respond to other national security threats, aside from a terrorist event. For example, the Australian Health Protection Committee and the aeromedical transport coordination group were able to test their ability to provide support and coordinate the transport and treatment of the critically injured.

At the conclusion of the 'deployment phase', authorities then simulated the possible prosecution of suspects involved in the simulated attacks.

The first responsibility of any government is to protect the safety and security of its citizens. In that context, I have recently reintroduced to the House legislation implementing

key reforms to our national security and counterterrorism laws. They include:

- the National Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2010, which will implement the recommendations of a number of independent and bipartisan reviews;
- the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement Bill 2010, which will ensure transparency and accountability in the operation of national security legislation; and
- the Telecommunications Interception and Intelligence Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2010, which will facilitate greater cooperation and intelligence sharing between intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

The measures contained in these bills are designed to give the Australian community confidence that our law enforcement and security services have the tools they need to fight terrorism, while at the same time ensuring that the laws and powers that are used are balanced, have appropriate safeguards and are accountable in their operation.

The government's approach to counterterrorism is, and must be, one of collaboration between the Commonwealth, states and territories. The Council of Australian Governments places great emphasis on counterterrorism capability development, and our National Counter-Terrorism Committee ensures the appropriate prioritisation of resources against key needs.

Exercises such as Mercury 10 enable us to test our capabilities, prepare for what is ahead and continuously learn and improve. For this reason, the exercise was identified as highly successful and worth while. It provided the opportunity to focus on testing and practising our key national security agencies in counterterrorism prevention and response

arrangements. There were many lessons learned, and significant outcomes were achieved.

Looking ahead, we will soon be opening new facilities for the National Crisis Coordination Centre and the Parliament House Briefing Room. These will ensure Australia's whole-of-government crisis response mechanisms are updated. Exercise Mercury 10 enabled our crisis coordination agencies to practise key processes and resolve key issues, in advance of those centres becoming fully operational.

I have pleasure in commending the work of the more than 3,500 participants in the National Counter-Terrorism Committee exercise, whose dedication and hard work so vitally contributed to the continuous improvement of Australia's counterterrorism capability.

I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for Stirling to speak for nine minutes.

Leave granted.

Mr McCLELLAND—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the member for Stirling speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding nine minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (3.52 pm)—While the risk of terrorist attack in Australia remains moderately low, the possibility of one is something that we cannot ignore, and we must prepare for any eventuality in the war against terror. Major counterterrorism exercises such as Mercury 10 provide a full-scale, real-time test of our capacity and the capacity of our emergency and security services. Australia should be in a constant state of readiness, and exercises such as Mercury 10 are a valuable part of the preparations and training.

Since September 2001 the former coalition government provided over \$10.4 billion of funding, up until the years 2010-11, to enhance Australia's national security and counterterrorism capacity by increasing the ability of our intelligence services, by boosting Australia's aviation, maritime and border security and by enhancing our capacity to respond to and manage emergencies.

The coalition understands that isolationism will not make Australia any safer. To meet the security challenge and defeat the terrorist threat Australia must work with our allies and engage with the wider world. Australia's relationship with the United States of America and our Asian neighbours has never been stronger, thanks to the hard work and dedication of the former Howard government.

Australia has played a strong role in promoting stability and democracy, both within our region and in the wider world, in particular the Middle East. Because strong and stable democracies are most likely to be peaceful allies, promoting stability and democracy abroad is not only right in principle but is in line with our own national interests.

Defending and securing Australia requires two things: a strong will and a strong economy. The Howard government had a very strong track record on both. To protect Australia against terrorism the former coalition government increased ASIO staffing numbers from 580 at the end of 2000-01 to around 1,400 by the end of 2007 and provided funding to increase staffing numbers to 1,860 by the end of next year. We gave our law enforcement agencies the legislative teeth required to combat the threat of terrorism by strengthening the legislative framework for terrorism related offences, and we supported that by constitutional reference of powers from the states.

The former coalition government increased international and regional cooperation in the fight against terrorism through the allocation of \$266 million for three successive regional counterterrorism assistance packages, including the counterterrorism intelligence cooperation and joint intelligence, the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation, the regional movement alert list and regional law enforcement liaison and capacity building. We also sought to ensure all relevant agencies and jurisdictions were well rehearsed to respond in the most effective way to a terrorist attack by conducting frequent counterterrorism exercises, and we committed an additional \$27.4 million in 2007-08 to maintain and expand the successful National Counter-Terrorism Committee.

In government the coalition increased regional and global cooperation in law enforcement, Customs activities and legal assistance to boost the fight against terrorism and transnational crime. For example, the Australian Federal Police's international network was expanded to include 33 cities in 27 countries around the globe, enabling effective collaboration with international law enforcement agencies to combat transnational crime including terrorism, illicit drug trafficking, people-smuggling and sexual exploitation. We also established the National Security Hotline in December 2002, which has since received over 140,000 calls. In a report released by the Australian National Audit Office, agencies, including the AFP, ASIO and state and territory police forces, said they placed significant value on the information they received from the hotline.

Following the establishment of the Philippines Bomb Data Centre in 2006 the AFP's Australian Bomb Data Centre began working with partner law enforcement agencies to establish bomb data centres in Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. These centres col-

lect, collate and analyse information concerning explosives incidents, contributing to intelligence on the threat posed by the use of explosives by terrorists.

As the 2010 counterterrorism white paper noted, effective intelligence cooperation assists significantly in Australia's ability to disrupt terrorists' planning and operations before they can target Australians or Australians' interests, and implement a range of measures to mitigate emerging threats or to inform and contribute to international counterterrorism efforts. Under the former Howard government Australia worked hard to develop the capacity of security services in countries where Australia has counterterrorism interests. An example of the value of international intelligence cooperation is Australia's Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Training Program, which was established in 2005 by the coalition. The program delivers counter-terrorism training and capacity building. The training program contributes to the development of trusted, cooperative relationships with counterpart agencies.

Strong border management is needed to prevent the movement of individuals seeking to enter Australia to conduct terrorist related activities, and we should not be blind in this parliament to the security implications of having porous borders. Over the past decade, as mentioned previously, the former coalition government massively expanded Australia's border protection and counterterrorism capabilities through Customs, Defence, state and Federal Police, ASIO and ASIS. We strengthened participation in intelligence sharing with our key allies. We cooperated closely with our key regional partners, in particular Indonesia. The fact that there have been no terrorist attacks in Australia, and few involving Australians abroad, testifies to our substantial success.

In this vital area it is important that the Gillard government continues to build on the good work of its predecessor coalition government. Keeping the Australian people safe is the most basic task of the government. The previous coalition administration left Australia economically, militarily and diplomatically stronger than it has ever been. Antiterrorism intelligence operations are indeed an important element of national security. Thanks should go from this parliament to our hardworking men and women of our law enforcement and security agencies. Australia's counterterrorism capability is extensive and the public can be confident that any terrorist incident can be responded to and dealt with effectively.

I would like to associate myself with the Attorney's concluding remarks. The coalition also commends the work of the 3,500 participants in the national counterterrorism committee exercise Mercury 10. Their dedication has contributed to the improvement of Australia's counterterrorism capability and this is welcomed by the opposition.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed.

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (4.01 pm)—Continuing with the statements of Richard Tol, he says, 'Very stringent targets may be very costly, however, or even infeasible.' Professor Dr Tol goes on to say, 'The science of the uncertainty around the effects of climate change is a political decision.' However, he says, 'one should keep in mind that there is a history of exaggeration in the study of climate change impacts'. He goes on to list them:

Early research pointed to massive sea level rises, millions dying from infectious diseases and widespread starvation. Later, more careful research has dispelled these fears.

The 'price on carbon' crew have been banging away for some time now, without much challenge, but, as per the need, the economics of climate change is coming to the fore. Again IPCC author Richard Tol found that trying to keep global temperature increases less than two degrees centigrade, as the G8 industrialised nations have promised, would require carbon emissions reductions of about 80 per cent by mid-century, according to IPCC modelling. Based on conventional estimates, this would avoid climate damages of about US\$1.1 trillion over the century. But it would cut economic growth by about US\$40 trillion a year. In other words, we would effectively be spending US\$40 trillion every year from now until the end of the century to do just over US\$1 trillion worth of total good. This is in fact widely optimistic. The calculation assumes that over 100 years politicians everywhere will consistently enact the most efficient, effective laws possible to reduce carbon emissions. Dump that far-fetched assumption and the cost could jump by a factor of 10 or even 100.

The carbon price stance is now outdated. Either the Labor government will not back down on a price on carbon simply to appease the Greens, or they simply have not read the evolving literature. May I suggest that investing in advanced technology is a far smarter alternative. Devoting just 0.2 per cent of global GDP, about US\$100 billion, a year to advanced energy R&D would produce the kind of factor multiplication that could fuel a carbon-free future. The old Labor adage of acting now to avoid climate change seems a moot point, as it was Ms Gillard who said 'delay is denial', then implemented this climate change commission. If we are going to wait and see what is the best way to tackle climate change, maybe actually moving forward to intelligent discussion and viable solutions may be the best way. Also the inclusion of those who do not

believe a price on carbon is the best way forward for the climate change commission may actually engender far better outcomes. As it stands, Labor and the Greens are putting together a climate change Kumbaya which can only have one outcome, a price on carbon. How about we do not just act for acting's sake. Let us look at the literature on climate change economics and keep emotion out of it.

On the government's NBN network, forgive me for quoting so heavily but Carlos Slim Helu, the world's richest man and head of Mexican telcos Telmex, Telcel and America Movil, gave the NBN the big thumbs-down. He said the NBN 'seems expensive' at \$43 billion dollars, and he was obviously being diplomatic. He went on to say that it is not necessary to invest so much money, because technology is changing all the time, and paying \$7,000 a home to connect about six million homes was too expensive. But wait, there is more—he criticised the reliance of the project on fibre, emphasising the need for wireless services. He said:

You need to have a multi-platform of everything: mobile, landline, fibre, cable and copper. You need to have all these. You need to have a very good fibre network and rings and you need to have a loop of fibre to sustain when you have a problem in one place that the communications don't get interrupted. But with copper and cable you can give 20 or 30 MHz. I think fibre is not enough. You need to have a good network of wireless.

So the best option is clear: a forward looking wireless network which doesn't cost the world, or a technological dinosaur, which the NBN will likely be when finally built, that costs the average Australian far too much money. I am all for advancing technology, I am all for new technology. The casemix of technologies must be part fibre, part wireless, part satellite and part whatever new technologies emerge.

I implore the government to respect the public purse. The Labor Party has this strange theory that they saved us from the global financial crisis, and this gives them the right to do what they like with the public purse. They like to take a global view—hence the 'global financial crisis'—but if you look at all the countries that engaged in stimulus payments, they are pretty much all struggling economically under crushing public debt. Let us also not ignore that these same countries stimulated at much higher rates of GDP than Australia. If you look at the economic health of nations around the world who made stimulus payments, would you really say that stimulus was such a success? I do not think so. So, given the size of Australia's stimulus packages relative to global packages and the size of the debt that stimulus has created worldwide, is the Labor government really comfortable in claiming victory for their Keynesian dream world when the world experience of stimulus packages has been so much different? I think we should look at a combination of factors that kept Australia out of recession and not one factor that may or may not have made a difference and is now certainly adding to the inflationary pressures in our economy.

I also wish to acknowledge my new parliamentary colleague Ken Wyatt. No matter what your age, gender or heritage, it is an honour and privilege of the highest order to be elected as a member of parliament in Australia. However, as Ken is the first Indigenous Australian elected to the House of Representatives, I could not be more proud of him and the party he and I are part of. I wish him all the best and I know he will be a great leader in his electorate to his Noongar, Yamatji and Wongi people and to all Australians.

Native title and Indigenous issues will also be an important focus for me in this next term and I will be discussing these issues at

far greater length in the near future. Other particular focus areas for me in this term will be science, energy, defence, education, economics and communications, subjects about which I will be speaking and writing in detail in this term of parliament.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call Dr Leigh, I remind honourable members that this is his first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (4.09 pm)—It is hard to imagine a greater honour than to represent your friends and neighbours in our national parliament. Each of us brings to this place the hopes and dreams of the people who chose us. I am keenly aware of both the incredible opportunity the people of Fraser have bestowed on me and the very great responsibility to them which that opportunity entails.

Let me begin by telling you about my electorate of Fraser and the city of Canberra in which it lies. Fraser rests on the right bank of the Molonglo River, stretching north from the office blocks of Civic to the young suburbs of Bonner and Forde in the ACT's northernmost tip. Because the leaders at the time decided that a capital city must have its own port, the electorate of Fraser also includes the Jervis Bay territory, which is home to a diverse community and a school where kangaroos graze on an oval overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

In the electorate of Fraser some locations carry the names given to them by the traditional Ngunawal and Ngambri peoples, who used what is now modern-day Canberra to hold their corroborees and feast on bogong moths. Other suburbs are named after Australia's great political leaders. For the people of Canberra, a nation's proud history is embodied in our local geography.

Thanks to far-sighted decisions by generations of planners, Canberra's hills are largely

undeveloped. This means that many residents have the pleasure of looking up from a suburban street to see a hill covered in gum trees. From the Pinnacles to Mount Majura and from the Aranda bushlands to Black Mountain our city's natural environment offers ample opportunities to exercise the body and to soothe the soul.

Economists like me are trained to believe in markets as the best route to environmental protection, and I do. But I also know that smart policy will only succeed if there is a will for action, if we believe in our hearts that we cannot enjoy the good life without a healthy planet.

As vital as our natural environment is, so are the social ties that bind us together. In an era when Australians are becoming disconnected from one another, Canberra has some of the highest rates of civic engagement in the nation. Canberrans are more generous with our time and money, are more likely to play sport with our mates and are more inclined to participate in cultural activities. Part of the reason for this is that we spend less time in the car than most other Australians, but I suspect it also has something to do with the design of Canberra's suburbs.

During my time in this parliament I will strive to strengthen community life, not only in Canberra but across Australia. In doing so I hope to follow in the footsteps of my grandparents, who were people of modest means who believed that a life of serving others was a life well lived. My paternal grandfather, Keith Leigh, was a Methodist minister who died of hypothermia while running up Mount Wellington in Hobart. It was October and the mountain was covered in snow, as it is today. Keith was 59 years old and was doing the run to raise money for overseas aid.

My mother's parents were a boilermaker and a teacher who lived by the credo that if

there was a spare room in the house it should be used by someone who needed the space. As a child I remember eating at their home with Indigenous families and new migrants from Hong Kong, Papua New Guinea, Chile, Cambodia and Sri Lanka. That early experience informs my lifelong passion for Australia's multiculturalism. With a quarter of our population born overseas, Australia has a long tradition of welcoming new migrants into our midst. Earlier this year I attended a prize-giving ceremony for an art competition run as part of Refugee Week. First prize went to a Karen-Burmese woman who had woven a traditional crimson tunic. Because she did not have a proper loom the woman had taken the mattress off her bed and fashioned a loom from her pine bed base. It is hard not to be overwhelmed by the courage and spirit of Australia's migrants.

Near my home in Hackett, the local cafe is run by the three sons of James Savoulidis, a Greek entrepreneur who in 1966 opened the first pizzeria in Canberra and taught Gough Whitlam to dance the zorba a few years later. Elsewhere in the Fraser electorate you can enjoy Ethiopian in Dickson, Indian in Gungahlin, Chinese in Campbell, Vietnamese in O'Connor or Turkish in Jamison. Canberrans who are called to worship can choose among their local church, temple, synagogue or mosque. And yet I have never heard a murmur from my religious friends about the fact that the local ABC radio station broadcasts on the frequency 666.

My views on diversity and difference were also shaped by spending several years of my childhood in Malaysia and Indonesia. Sitting in my primary school in Banda Aceh I learned what it feels like to be the only person in the room with white skin. As I moved through seven different primary schools I got a sense of how it feels to be an outsider and the importance of making our institutions as inclusive as possible.

Clearly the experience did not scar me too much, because at 38 I have spent more than half my life in formal education. Sitting in Judith Anderson's high school English class, I learned to treasure the insights into the human condition that come from the great storytellers—the works of William Shakespeare and Jane Austen, George Orwell and Les Murray, Leo Tolstoy and Tim Winton. Studying law, I learned that open government, judicial independence and equal justice are principles worth fighting for. Picking my way through the snowdrifts to attend Harvard seminars with Christopher Jencks, I came to appreciate the importance of rigorously testing your ideas and the power of tools such as randomised policy trials, a topic about which members can be assured I will speak more during my time in this place.

In the decades ahead, education will be the mainspring of Australia's economic success. Great child care, schools, technical colleges and universities are the most effective way to raise productivity and living standards. Improving education is also smart social policy. First-rate schooling is the best antipoverty vaccine we have yet developed. Great teachers can light a spark of vitality in children—a self-belief and a passion for hard work that will burn bright for the rest of their lives.

As an economist, much of my research has been devoted to the vast challenges of reducing poverty and disadvantage. I believe that rising inequality strains the social fabric. Too much inequality cleaves us one from another: occupying different suburbs, using different services and losing a sense of shared purpose. Anyone who believes in egalitarianism as the animating spirit for the Australian settlement should recoil at this vision of our future.

My research has also taught me that good intentions are not enough. As a professor

turned politician, one of my role models is the late, great US senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Moynihan was innately sceptical about every social policy solution presented to him. Indeed, his starting point was to expect that any given social policy would have no measurable effect. But these high standards did not make him any less of an idealist, and Moynihan never lost his optimism and passion. What we need in Australian policy today is not more ideologues convinced that their prescriptions are the answer but modest reformers willing to try new solutions and discover whether they actually deliver results.

This spirit of optimistic experimentation has deep roots in our nation. Manning Clark once said that Australia was an experiment for the multiple faiths of the Holy Spirit, the Enlightenment and a new Britannia. So you get the sense that in these early days the Australian project was one of expansiveness, enlargement and possibility, where people were prepared to take risks and try new ideas in an effort to show that in Australia we did things differently and better than anywhere else around the world.

This Australian project is not finished. It is not something that stopped with the end of the First World War or with the death of Ben Chifley. All of us, as today's Australians, are the custodians of this project, a project that stretches back over generations and centuries and binds all Australians—past, present and future—together in this greater cause. It is like the red sand that Gough Whitlam poured into the hands of the great Gurindji elder, Vincent Lingiari, who declared: 'We are all mates now.' We have a responsibility to make sure that the Australian project, for the time that it rests in our hands, is advanced and continued.

To me, the Australian project is about encouraging economic growth while ensuring

that its benefits are shared across the community. It is about making sure that all Australians have great public services regardless of ethnicity, income or postcode. And it is about recognising that governments have a role in expanding opportunities, because no child gets to choose the circumstances of their birth.

Internationally, the Australian project will always be one of principled engagement. Australia's influence overseas will always rely on the power of our values. A respect for universal human rights and a passion for raising living standards should guide the work of our military and our diplomats, our aid workers and our trade negotiators. In the shadows of World War II, Australia helped create the United Nations, guided by a belief that all countries had to be involved if we were to create a more peaceful and prosperous world. That ideal must continue to inform how we engage with the rest of the world.

Another important part of the Australian project has been democratic innovation. What we call a secret ballot is elsewhere termed the Australian ballot. We introduced female suffrage a generation before many other nations did. We made voting compulsory, recognising that with rights come responsibilities. Yet, for all this innovation, Australians have increasingly become disenchanted with their elected representatives. The problem has many sources: the rowdiness of question time, too much focus by the commentariat on tactics rather than ideas, and a tendency to oversimplify problems and oversell solutions. I hope to help rebuild a sense of trust between citizens and politicians. It starts with respect and a recognition that we can disagree without being disagreeable. Working as an associate to Justice Michael Kirby taught me that intellect and compassion together are a powerful force for change. Admit that most choices are tough,

listen to others, be flexible and remember that the fire in your belly does not prevent you from wearing a smile on your face.

Australian politics is not a war between good parties and evil parties. At its best, it is a contest of ideas between decent people who are committed to representing their local communities. I am happy to count among my friends people on both sides of this House. I am sure some of those friends will be happy to know that I do not plan to name them today. That said, choosing between the parties has never been an issue for me. I was born in the year when Gough Whitlam won office. When my mother's pregnancy reached the nine-month mark she pinned an 'It's time' badge onto the part of her shirt that covered her belly.

It is a true honour to serve as a Labor representative today alongside so many capable and talented individuals. Thank you to those who have given me advice already. There is much more I have to learn from each of you. In the Labor pantheon the parliamentarians I most admire are those who have recognised that new challenges demand fresh responses. Among these I count John Curtin and Bob Hawke, Paul Keating and John Button, Lindsay Tanner and Gareth Evans. For each of these men their ideals and values were their guiding light yet their proposals were as flexible and innovative as the situation demanded.

I also had the privilege to work briefly as trade adviser to the late Senator Peter Cook. Peter was an instinctive internationalist as keen to chat with a visiting Chinese delegation as to swap stories with the Argentinean ambassador. He believed in ideas, enthusiastically working to persuade colleagues that anyone who cared about poverty should believe in free trade. Peter passed away in 2005—far too early. I wish he were with us today.

I also count among my role models two former members for Fraser. As a 16-year-old, I came to Canberra to volunteer for John Langmore and was struck by the depth of his principles and the breadth of his knowledge. Never did I imagine that one day I would succeed him. My immediate predecessor is Bob McMullan. Over two decades in federal parliament the people of the ACT supported Bob for being a superb parliamentarian and because they were proud to have on their home turf a true statesman who embodied every day the best of what politics can be. I acknowledge Bob and all those elected by the people of Fraser before him. Their service has set a high bar.

As elected representatives one of our most important jobs is to speak out on behalf of those who struggle to have their voices heard. The Labor Party has a proud tradition of defending individual liberties. Past Labor governments outlawed discrimination on the basis of gender or race. This Labor government has removed from the statute books much of the explicit discrimination against same-sex couples and strengthened disability discrimination laws. And all Labor governments strive to protect the rights of workers to bargain collectively for better pay and conditions. Our party also stands firmly committed to democratic reform, including the simple yet powerful notion that every Australian child should be able to aspire to be our head of state.

The Labor Party today stands at the confluence of two powerful rivers in Australian politics. We are the party that believes in egalitarianism—that a child from Aurukun can become a High Court Justice and that a mine worker should get the same medical treatment as the bloke who owns the mine. But what is sometimes overlooked is that we are also the party that believes in liberalism—that governments have a role in protecting the rights of minorities, that freedom

of speech applies for unpopular ideas as for popular ones and that all of us stand equal beneath the Southern Cross. The modern Labor Party is the true heir to the small-L liberal tradition in Australia.

Alfred Deakin was one of the earliest Australian leaders to make the distinction between liberals and conservatives. Deakin argued that liberalism meant the destruction of class privileges, equality of political rights without reference to creed and equality of legal rights without reference to wealth. Liberalism, Deakin said, meant a government that acted in the interests of the majority, with particular regard to the poorest in the community.

As for conservatives, to quote Deakin's description of his opponents, they are:

... a party less easy to describe or define, because, as a rule it has no positive programme of its own, adopting instead an attitude of denial and negation. This mixed body, which may fairly be termed the party of anti-liberalism, justifies its existence, not by proposing its own solution of problems, but by politically blocking all proposals of a progressive character, and putting the brakes on those it cannot block.

A century on, it is hard to escape the conclusion that if Deakin were in this parliament today he and his brand of progressive liberalism would find a natural home in the Australian Labor Party—and, given the numbers in today's parliament, I am sure my colleagues would welcome his vote!

For my own part, I would not be here without the support of the Australian Labor Party—Australia's oldest and greatest political party—and the broader trade union movement. Ours is a party that believes in the power of collective action. When the goal is just and we are one, our movement and our party are unstoppable.

On a more personal level, I would also not be here without the bevy of volunteers who

doorknocked, staffed street stalls and handed out on polling day. Let me thank all of those who worked with me on this campaign and gave up vast amounts of their time for a cause greater than any of us. Thank you also to my staff, who make me proud to walk into the office each day. I am deeply touched that so many friends, staff and supporters are here in the galleries to share this special day with me.

Let me also acknowledge and express my love for my parents, Barbara and Michael, who instilled in my brother Timothy and me the simple values that guide us today: be curious. Help others. Laugh often. I hope that I can be as good a parent to my two sons, Sebastian and Theodore, as you have been to me. To my extraordinary wife, Gweneth, who left her home state of Pennsylvania for the unknowns of Australia: no matter how chaotic our lives become, you will always be the fixed point that puts everything else into perspective. In the words of John Donne, writing four hundred years ago to the love of his life:

Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun.

Finally, to the people who sent me here, the voters of Fraser: with the exception only of the neighbouring federal seat of Canberra, more votes were cast in Fraser than in any other electorate in Australia, and I am keenly aware both of the deep and diverse needs of our seat and of the great trust and confidence Fraser's voters have placed in me. To them I express my enormous gratitude for the honour they have given me of representing them in our nation's parliament. And to them I make this pledge: to do my utmost always, to represent their interests to the very best of my abilities, to remember always that their support for me is not my entitlement but their precious gift, and to ensure that, in their name, I make Fraser's contribution to secur-

ing a better, fairer, more prosperous and more just future for our great nation.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call the member for Solomon, I remind honourable members that this is her first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to her.

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (4.30 pm)—Mr Speaker, I am absolutely humbled, honoured and grateful to be standing before you as the newly elected member for Solomon. I thank the electorate of Solomon for the opportunity to represent them in this place.

This 43rd Parliament celebrates a number of firsts, including the first Indigenous member of the House of Representatives, my friend Ken Wyatt, and the youngest member of parliament, Wyatt Roy. It seems strange to me that in 2010 the first Indigenous member of the House of Representatives has just been elected, given that, living in Solomon and the Northern Territory, the influence of the first Australians and, in particular, the Larakia people is substantial. Being exposed to, understanding and accepting the cultural beliefs and needs means that we are much more accepting of the different multicultural make-up of the seat of Solomon and, indeed, the Northern Territory.

Mr Speaker, I stand before you as the first female member for Solomon and the first female member of the House of Representatives from the Northern Territory. In years to come, historians will marvel at the number of historical milestones achieved in this very interesting 43rd Parliament.

My electorate of Solomon is, in my mind, a true tropical paradise—and that is why we get colds when we come to Canberra. The electorate is named after Vaiben Louis Solomon, who has been described as one of the Northern Territory's founding fathers of Federation. Solomon covers an area of approximately 337 square kilometres and includes

the cities of Palmerston and Darwin. I said Palmerston first because I used to be the Deputy Mayor of Palmerston. I believe it is one of the most multicultural communities in Australia and a place that embraced multiculturalism well before it became an accepted feature of everyday Australia.

The key industries in my electorate include tourism, mining, horticulture and fishing. Coupled with this, we have a historical link with Defence that not only has helped shape our history in Solomon but also drives our economy on a daily basis. The men and women of the defence forces and their families who live and work on the various bases are important in the social fabric of Solomon. With a population of around 90,000 people, in some instances Darwin city and its surrounds still have that country town feel. This is one of the most endearing qualities of the electorate. It means we place a high value on human existence, our environment and the sense of community spirit. People can walk down the street of Solomon and share a smile with a complete stranger. I have been doing that here in Canberra, but I do not get the same reaction. All too often I hear the story of the person who came for two years and stayed for 20. My own parents are an example of this. They went to the Territory for six months in 1968 and 42 years later they are still there.

While there are so many positive attributes to the electorate, there are a number of key concerns that inhibit its potential. One such concern is housing, not only the cost of housing to rent or purchase but also the lack of houses available. In fact, we are experiencing the worst housing crisis in the Territory's history. Currently, the median rental price in Solomon is \$550 per week. Many families are finding it difficult to make ends meet. In fact, during the election campaign I became aware of people who in many cases had full-time jobs but had to resort to sleep-

ing in their cars because they could not afford or find a home in Solomon.

I see a convergence of issues that have conspired to impact. However, the single underlying issue falls at the feet of the very people in the Northern Territory who are responsible for land release—that is, the Henderson Labor government. The Henderson Labor government has failed Territorians by being too slow in releasing land for development, and when it does it wants to cash in at the expense of the buyers. Put simply, when the Northern Territory government demands a premium over and above the value of the land and the developers' profit, the unnecessarily inflated cost for house and land packages is driven beyond the reach of the average first home buyer. I need only look to my son Aaron and his fiancee Amy to see how great the challenge is for young Territorians to be a first time owner. I have no doubt the type of assistance and intervention my husband Paul and I provided is typical of the depths that families are going to in order to help their children move forward in their lives.

Homeownership should not be a pipe-dream. Australia is prosperous. It is prosperous enough for everyone to have the aspiration to own the dwelling they occupy, but we are seeing an imbalance between supply and demand and, despite the spin otherwise, I do not believe a median home price in Solomon of \$555,000 is reasonable. The cost of housing, housing affordability and the general living costs associated with being in the Territory have a flow-on effect beyond homeownership. It impacts the ability of business to attract and retain staff and everyday Territorians to go about their day-to-day lives. Housing is a fundamental that intersects across a range of areas and it is an underlying problem in the Northern Territory and indeed the seat of Solomon.

This is why throughout my campaign I fought so strongly to save 395 houses owned by defence that were scheduled to be demolished because they were no longer needed. It does not make sense to me that in the middle of a housing crisis brought on by the inactions of our Henderson Labor government, consideration could even be given to demolishing these houses, especially given that in some cases these houses are only 10 years old or at least were renovated 10 years ago. Now fortunately, after much lobbying, those on the other side did listen and these houses are no longer scheduled to be demolished. However, nearly 150 of them remain vacant in the middle of our worst ever housing crisis. One important factor overlooked is that these houses are part of the community and while they sit there vacant it impacts on the local businesses and the local school. Ludmilla Primary School is a landmark on Bagot Road and will be affected by any non-use of these houses as 25 per cent of the school population is from defence families. I will, as the member for Solomon, maintain the pressure so that these houses can be kept and utilised for all Territorians. I am sorry, Member for Lingiari, but I am going to continue to push this. I do not accept that we should simply shrug our shoulders and view that this is all too hard.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mrs GRIGGS—He is a fellow Territorian! I call on the Gillard Labor government and the Henderson Territory government to start to exercise the most basic of common sense and make these houses available to Territorians now. I ask this place to support me in delivering more affordable housing in the seat of Solomon not only for the current crop of Territorians but for future generations. Over the coming months you will discover my deep desire to keep the issue at the forefront. The Rudd-Gillard government promised 1,200 affordable homes way back

in 2007 and reannounced the same promise in 2010. To date there have been none delivered. Nothing is more affordable than talk.

The Darwin Harbour is a pivotal aspect of the seat of Solomon. It is a hub for industry, it is a hub for trade and it is a hub for recreation. Darwin Harbour is 2½ times the size of Sydney Harbour and it is an important cog in the environmental wheel. During the course of the federal election I promised to pursue \$2 million for an engineering and implementation study to avoid further pollution of our harbour. We cannot allow it to be a dumping ground for pollution, including raw sewage, and we should do everything we can within our power to see that this harbour is protected. Darwin's importance as a transport hub for sea, air, rail and road will grow due to the increased exploration of gas and petroleum in the nearby Timor Sea and also with Australia's continued expansion in trade with Asia and the rest of the world. In his maiden speech in February 1976, then Northern Territory senator Bernie Kilgariff had this to say about industry in the Northern Territory:

We must make it attractive to overseas companies to come to Australia with their know how and equipment—companies which will put the necessary finance into such projects for the good of Australia, with Australian participation and control.

The vision remains the same some 30-plus years later but we cannot cut corners to deliver the workability and we should not cut our environmental responsibility in order to deliver that workability. There has to be a balance and there has to be a plan. There is a long-term need for a state-of-the-art sewage treatment and recycling facility in my electorate. Our proposed engineering and implementation study will assist in developing that map forward.

The wellbeing of Territorians can be linked to the environment within which the people of Solomon live, and during this term

I will continue to make representation about the delivery of health services to my constituents. As one of the fastest growing capital cities in Australia we face major challenges in providing the necessary infrastructure, health and community services to attract and retain people and to continue to grow our local and national economy. The health of the people of Solomon is at the forefront of my concern. The new paradigm has delivered increased health funding for regional centres in return for parliamentary support. Now I live in a region, and so it is my intention as the member for Solomon to ensure that the Northern Territory, as a region, gets its fair share of the funding.

During the course of the election campaign the coalition promised a positron emission tomography scanner, or a PET scanner, in my electorate. I foreshadow that I will be pursuing funding for this very important scanner. Why is it in 2010 that the people of a city the size of Darwin should have to fly interstate to use such services? This is the type of healthcare need that has been neglected, sadly, by Labor. I share the level of frustration of some of the Independents and some of my other colleagues who have to fight for these services when other constituencies take them for granted.

Let me also indicate to this place that I am committed to the improvement of mental health services in not only the Northern Territory but Australia. I agree with Patrick McGorry that the coalition's \$1.5 billion mental health policy is outstanding. In the spirit of this parliament I want to see members embrace this policy for the good of all Australians. I announce today my own personal efforts in support of mental health services with a \$3,000 annual scholarship from my electoral allowance to go to a student studying mental health in my electorate of Solomon. Let me foreshadow that during my time in this place I will be making the case

for a major medical facility to service the growth of my electorate, the neighbouring rural suburbs, including the future city of Weddell, and the neighbouring electorate of Lingiari.

The Charles Darwin University is not only my alma mater, the institution in which I completed my undergraduate qualification, but also a key organisation within my electorate and a critical part of the future prosperity of the Northern Territory. The university is experiencing strong growth in both vocational education and training and higher education programs, with a vision to increase student numbers by almost 50 per cent over the next five years from its current level of 22,000 students. I look forward to the opening of the new health and medical teaching and research facilities at the university in the coming months. I believe that the university is in very safe hands under the strong leadership of Vice-Chancellor Barney Glover.

While on education, I will turn to Indigenous education. In 2008 the Australian Labor Party introduced a policy change that resulted in the loss of a significant amount of funding to Indigenous students. In the case of Kormilda College in my electorate it represented \$600,000 worth of funding in 2010 that was specifically aimed at supporting Indigenous students to access and achieve success in secondary education. The loss of funding has resulted in the loss of four Indigenous support workers at Kormilda College but, worse still, has reduced the capacity of schools like Kormilda, who are fighting the real battles in Indigenous education, to support students who want to learn. In the closing stages of the recent election campaign the Gillard government released a press statement promising to resolve the issue by funding remote students at the remote rate regardless of where they attended school, but only if the Gillard government was returned to power. Even if it is with a

minority, the Gillard government has been returned. I am advised that so far the minister has not responded to the representations from Kormilda College. So I join Kormilda College in asking the minister: when will this matter be corrected? Where is this money?

In the scheme of political campaigning, the Gillard government was active in Solomon, sandbagging a marginal seat. Two commitments in particular stand out. The first was to the Jingili BMX Club, who were promised \$1 million to put a roof over the track at Marrara. I ask the government: when will you deliver the roof for the Jingili BMX Club? The second commitment was made by the Prime Minister herself, promising the Marrara Hockey Centre new turf. Hockey is one of the Territory's greatest sporting success stories, and that is always good in an election campaign. We currently have two players in the Australian men's team, Des Abbott and Joel Carroll, who won gold at the recent Commonwealth Games in Delhi, with a third, goalkeeper Leon Haywood, in the Australian development squad. I ask the Gillard government: when will you be delivering the new turf for the Marrara Hockey Centre?

Let me now move to the characteristics and values that drive and shape me. In my life I have been fortunate to meet a number of people who have defeated the odds with their can-do attitude and who have let nothing hold them back—and nor should it. I share now that I have been influenced specifically by two special people who have overcome the odds to achieve what I deem greatness. The first is Tahnee Afuhaamango. Probably not many of you would have heard about her. She is a world champion swimmer. I understand she is the first person in the world with Down syndrome to be included in an institute of sport program. She is currently in Taiwan defending her world title at the Down syndrome world champion-

ships. She inspires me with her tenacity and drive and I wish her all the very best of luck because she is a true champion and I am proud of her.

The second is Raymond Roach. I met Ray in 1992 through Riding for the Disabled. He was not supposed to live past the age of five. Last Friday he turned 35. He also recently won Darwin's version of *Dancing with the Stars*. We call it 'Dancing with the celebrities', and it is a major fundraiser for Total Recreation, who support people with disabilities. When Raymond won 'Dancing with the celebrities' you would have thought he had won the lottery. He has been participating in this fundraising event for a number of years and every year he improves, he works harder and he learns more steps. His absolute determination and tenacity was rewarded by winning with his celebrity partner, Lisa Pellegrino.

In many respects Tahnee and Raymond represent my simple belief in a hand up, not a handout, and certainly my belief in working hard, in being tenacious, determined and courageous and in never giving up. I believe in being the best you can be and giving everyone a fair and equal chance at achieving their best. I certainly believe in the Northern Territory, my home of 41 years. I know I do not look that old! I believe in its potential and the opportunity to make it even better.

I believe there is nothing better than your family to bring you back down to earth. I am fortunate to have a wonderful, supportive family who have always been there for me no matter what the endeavour or the challenge. Some of my family are up there in the gallery, including my magnificent mother, Sandra. She will never, ever admit that I am her favourite daughter. It does not matter how many times I tell her; she will not admit it, particularly now that my sister is sitting up there as well! My mother has taught me that

anything is possible. There is my gorgeous husband, Paul—the love of my life—who has always been there and is my rock. There is my youngest sister Nicole, who will probably wave her hand and always makes me smile. There is my favourite cousin, Ronnie, who has come from Deniliquin, and his darling wife, Glenys. Unfortunately the rest of my fabulous family—namely my dad, Ian; my son, Aaron; my brother, Andrew; my sister Sonja; my sister-in-law, Sandy; and my brother-in-law, Mark—could not be here. However, technology is such that I am sure they are watching over the net. Hi, guys!

During my nine-month campaign I was supported by such a wonderful, committed group of people. I am sorry that I will not be able to name them all, but they know that I am very grateful to them. But I would like to give special thanks to a few people. I thank my campaign director, Alison Penfold, who is also up there in the gallery and who campaigned with me for the nine months. She—like my leader, Tony Abbott—did not sleep much during the campaign. Alison is a true political tragic and a driven individual. I thank her for her support and her wisdom. To Senator Scullion over there: thank you to you and your team and thank you for being here. Daniel Gannon, who looked after my media, is another driven person who made it look easy, and I thank him. To the countless volunteers who drove campaign cars or joined me doorknocking, at the markets or at booths or handed out pamphlets and how-to-vote cards: I thank you. To the Country Liberals: I thank you for giving me your faith and support.

I must also thank the Leader of the Opposition in the Northern Territory, Terry Mills, and the members of his parliamentary team: Mr Dave Tollner, who was the first member for Solomon, Mr Peter Chandler and my local member, Ross Bohlin, John Elferink, Peter Styles and Willem Westra van Holthe. I

thank the many federal shadow ministers who provided ongoing support during the campaign and the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Tony Abbott, who taught me about being focused and disciplined. I give a very special thank you to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Julie Bishop, for holding this cane toad during the election campaign. Who knew that the inventor of the glare could be made to blink! To the member for Mackellar, Mrs Bishop, who is helping around the hallways of Parliament House: I am honoured that you have agreed to be my mentor. To the former senator for the Northern Territory, Grant Tambling: you have contributed to the development of the Territory in a way I will strive to emulate.

Let me finish with some last commitments: I will never, ever take the voters or the seat of Solomon for granted. I promise to always keep a sense of humour, to work hard in the electorate, to listen to and act on behalf of the electorate, to look beyond this election cycle to deliver long-term benefits to the Territory, to stand up for the Territory's interests in Canberra and to continue the fight for statehood so that Territorians will enjoy the same legislative rights as people in other jurisdictions. Thank you for indulging me, Mr Speaker.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (4.59 pm)—I congratulate the member for Solomon on her maiden speech. I also congratulate the Labor Party and the Prime Minister on being returned to government, even though it must be said that that has been done by cobbling together a rainbow alliance which will be tested daily by the challenges of government and the diametrically opposed views of various parties.

In the electorate of Grey I would like to thank my constituents for their vote of confidence. A positive 6.7 per cent swing at a time when we saw an overall move to the Labor

Party in South Australia was a very good result. While I take some of the credit for that result, I also recognise that the electorate was expressing a very strong desire to change the government. They were sick of the mismanagement, the waste, the backflips and the thought bubble politics which saw policy lurches in every direction. There was also a great distrust in the electorate of the obviously external mechanisms which saw the removal of a first-term Prime Minister in Kevin Rudd. The sight of Paul Howes, a union representative, on national television gloating over the fact that he had removed the Prime Minister was not something Australians expect or want to see. But the electoral system has worked and has delivered us a government with a workable majority, and the government should get on with the job of governing and delivering on their electoral commitments. We in the coalition will get on with the job of holding them to account, of holding them responsible for the commitments that they have made to the Australian people.

Already we have seen a major about-face on the Prime Minister's solemn commitment to no new carbon tax and we have seen the reversal of a commitment to have a 150-person assembly to examine climate change—quite rightly, it must be said, because what a stupid idea that was in the first place. But it was a commitment from the Prime Minister made to win an election, and what are people to think if policies are to last only the length of the election campaign? We have seen the abandonment of a commitment to implement the recommendations of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority in full. The Prime Minister committed to implement the recommendations and now instead, at the first sign of pressure, has followed the well-worn path of the Rudd government and announced a committee to review the situation—another committee.

I am, of course, disappointed that the coalition was not able to form government and that the commitments I made to my electorate will not be able to be delivered. These include, in particular, the re-establishment of the Australian technical college in the Upper Spencer Gulf; the issuing of an operating licence for an MRI machine for the region; the Green Army environmental projects in Whyalla, Port Pirie and Peterborough; major stormwater projects in Port Lincoln, Orroroo and Port Vincent; and closed circuit TV systems for Coober Pedy, Ceduna and Whyalla. All of these projects would have been delivered by a coalition government. They will not be delivered by this Labor government.

The glaringly obvious fact of the election is that the government places little priority on regional Australia. If it is to make a greater commitment, it will only be as a cost of doing business with the Independents, and it remains to be seen whether there will be a true value in those deals. I seriously doubt any long-term change in the attitudes of the government.

There is a great danger that this, the 43rd Parliament of Australia, will see a lurch to the left as the government tries to meet its commitments to the Greens. The larger political agenda of the Greens will cause concern to much of mainstream Australia, many of whom it must be said may have even voted for the Greens in the past. Next July will present a completely new environment to the Greens as they take a far more powerful position in the Australian parliament, because with power comes responsibility. No longer will they be able to espouse preposterous ideas from the safety of powerlessness, with no chance of ever being in a position to deliver. Uncosted utopian snapshots will have to stack up to new policy examination from the press, the public and the parliament.

The Greens are now faced with the option of remaining a protest movement or becoming a serious political party. It is of interest to note that their achievement of nine senators at this election is matched by the high watermark of the Australian Democrats in 1998—a time when the Democrats attempted to become a mature and responsible political party, an approach which was ultimately rejected by the electorate. What a position for the Greens. Do they accept the challenge to become responsible and accept the economic ramifications of many of their far left-wing policies and risk the wrath of their long-term supporters, or do they remain true to their radical manifest and run the risk of offending mainstream Australia, who have chosen to give them a chance? Many have said that this parliament will be very interesting. I think that is an understatement.

I listened to the Governor-General's address on the occasion of the opening of the 43rd Parliament with great interest, even though I must say that, as I gazed across the chamber, not every member of the government seemed similarly interested. Anyway, I listened in vain for an admission that the previous government had lost its way, as the Prime Minister believes the former leader had, and that the Gillard government would mend its ways and operate an improved system for Australia. I had hoped the government would face up to the waste on school halls, green loans and home insulation. Instead, it seems the government has learnt nothing from the experience and intends to blow another \$2 billion of taxpayers' money on the widely ridiculed 'cash for clunkers' scheme. This threatens to become another 'school halls', where every bucket of bolts in the country automatically becomes a \$2,000 cheque, every person who needs a cheap car will pay at least \$2,000, and in the end all it will do is bring forward inevitable purchases. It threatens to become a \$2 billion waste.

The tragedy is the missed opportunities across the nation—the infrastructure that could have been built with the money the government has wasted: \$22 billion in \$900 cheques, almost \$17 billion in school halls, green loans and \$3 billion on a home insulation scheme which has set the industry back 20 years. Remember the previous Prime Minister standing out the front of Parliament House and telling the insulation industry that he got it. Try telling the industry now that the government understands; there are warehouses full of materials and a totally destroyed market, and a population with little or no confidence in the industry.

So what could we have done with the money? Where can the taxpayer get a bang for their buck? I have said in this place before that South Australia will increasingly rely on the electorate of Grey to be the economic driver of the state. But there are a wide range of projects which need the attention of either state or federal government in tandem with private industry.

New mining taxes notwithstanding, South Australia desperately needs a new deep sea port somewhere in Spencer Gulf. No fewer than four new iron miners are trying to establish export paths. Some are planning to export out of Port Adelaide in containers, another is planning to establish a barge system and yet another is planning to export through the town of Port Lincoln, amid strong local opposition, while trying to establish a new port. But, all the while, every dollar invested in suboptimal alternatives lessens the chance of an industry-wide approach to the establishment of a new port. Unfortunately, the state government has just allowed things to meander. No doubt, prime responsibility rests with the miners, but sometimes projects need careful assistance from governments.

In South Australia we continue to pay the price for having a tired and uninterested state

government which is going through the motions of removing its leadership in an effort to shore up support. The case was made for federal assistance with port development at Oakajee, in Western Australia. A new port in South Australia is of similar importance to the region. Further west, the port of Thevenard desperately needs upgrading—so much so that, in the longer term, without an upgrade, farming west of Streaky Bay is likely to become unviable. There are real opportunities here. Already, the port supplies the bulk of Australia's gypsum for the manufacture of plasterboard—around two million tonnes per year. It also shifts hundreds of thousands of tonnes of grain and salt, with the prospect of developing new bulk commodities with major mineral sands mining developments in the west of the state. At the current time, shipments are being achieved on small vessels, which are rapidly drying up around the world and come at a high cost. For the grain industry, which is export focused, the loss of shipping would mean the western end of the grain growing region would be sending its grain more than 500 kilometres by road. Simply put, these are costs the industry cannot absorb.

Without some government attention I fear the future is not bright. Surely it is better to make sure good, viable industries survive rather than trying to resettle the collateral damage in our cities. Our roads are creaking under the strain. From our highways to our outback network, this year the roads are awash; but they are also struggling from years of state government neglect. I have just returned from a trip up the Birdsville Track. The deserts are blooming. Lake Eyre once again has a substantial amount of water, and parts of the tourism industry are having a strong year. But others, unfortunately, are languishing, simply because the road is cut. This is not just because the Cooper is in flood; it is because the South Australian out-

back road network has been run into the ground. Sure, the punt at the creek is an inadequate link but, with the road being cut by pooled water every time it rains, the traffic is not even reaching there.

Upon coming to power in 2002, the state government halved its commitment to the outback road system by abolishing two of the four road gangs. The years since then have provided rivers of gold from the GST and skyrocketing land tax revenues, but state government expenditure has risen even faster than receipts and we have little to show for it—so much so that the recent budget was a story of slash and burn as the government belatedly attempted to bring things back into order. It seems this was far too late, as state debt now stands at over \$7 billion, not far short of the \$9 billion disaster that was the calamity of the State Bank—and this debt has been accumulated at a time of comparative prosperity.

So it is not just about the Birdsville Track; the thousands of kilometres of outback roads from Wirrulla to Marla to Broken Hill are in poor repair and require significant investment. In the south, bitumen arterials like the Maitland to Minlaton road, the Bute to Kulpara road, the Barrier Highway, the Clare to Spalding road and the Wudinna to Port Lincoln road are all in need of serious attention.

The growth prospects of the entire electorate are inextricably linked to water, and new supply solutions must be provided. The recent report by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority should ensure there are no new users connected to the river. BHP's proposed expansion at Roxby Downs promises to be the biggest ever single economic contributor to the state, and I will do all I can to see it delivered. However, that is not to say we should give BHP carte blanche to do anything it wishes—and I am opposed to the siting of a desalination plant in the upper

Spencer Gulf. The environmental impact statement proposes a 100 gigalitre per year plant just north of Whyalla. Already, there is discussion that BHP may expand the operation even more than first envisaged. This would require even more water.

We cannot afford to take that risk with the sensitive marine environment at the top of the gulf, which is the breeding ground for much of the state's fisheries. A 100 gigalitre plant would see around 200 gigalitres per annum of saline water returned to the gulf, and a bigger plant would obviously return more. The Spencer Gulf prawn fishery breeding grounds are in the area approximate to the proposed outfalls. This industry returns more than \$40 million each year to the state. Similarly, the breeding grounds for the snapper and whiting, two of the state's most sought after and valuable fisheries, are in the area. We cannot afford to take this chance, only to find in 20 or 30 years time that the fisheries are ruined. We must insist on the safe solution. While all costs are important to the viability of the proposed expansion, it is difficult to believe that the extra 80 kilometres of pipeline needed to move the desalination plant to an ocean outfall on the west coast of Eyre Peninsula would be an insurmountable problem.

On the broader front, I am concerned that the government does not recognise the inherent dangers of our economic position. Australia's economy is fundamentally underwritten by exports. Dollar parity with the US is a creeping disaster for our exporters. Aquaculture, agriculture and mineral exports all have their real value eroded by this position. It is worth reflecting on what the current surge in the Australian dollar actually means to exporters. If we take a look at a wheat farm for instance, the world wheat price is currently at a very high level. A US price in excess of 700c a bushel is double what we would have considered to be a good price as recently as

five years ago. However, five years ago, farmers were receiving prices in the low A\$200 a tonne range. Now, following a more than doubling of world wheat prices, farmers will probably receive around \$275 a tonne—a lift of about \$50 a tonne, or 20 per cent. World wheat prices have doubled but we will only receive an extra 20 per cent. All the rest has been lost with our appreciating dollar. With due consideration to Western Australia, which is struggling with a drought, eastern Australia is contemplating a very good season. But farming is made of highs and lows, and it is our ability to accumulate savings in the good times that allows us to stay in business in the tough times.

The current state of the dollar is almost certainly costing good farmers \$60 to \$100 a tonne. It is also almost certainly ensuring that, when the drought returns, as inevitably it does in Australia, farmers will not be in the position they should be to withstand that drought. I have focused just on the wheat industry, but the lesson is the same across the board. Wool, meat, pulses and coarse grains are all losing millions of dollars. And not just agriculture but seafood, manufacturing and mineral exports are all missing out on high profits which are their insurance policies for the future.

There are a number of reasons for the high dollar, as there always are, and certainly the high price of mineral commodities is one of them. However, despite the government's claim, there is no doubt that high government borrowings are restricting the availability of money for business and homeowners. You simply cannot suck \$80-plus billion out of the economy in government borrowings and claim it does not affect interest rates and the availability of money. The cost of government borrowings is far more than just the interest paid. The distortions of the economy caused by the high-borrowing policy flow through to all business and consumers.

The government simply must rein in its borrowings. There is no doubt that relatively high interest rates attract investment in Australian dollars. In fact interest rates in Australia are so high comparatively that investors are borrowing money in markets like Japan and the US where they have effective rates of zero and reinvesting in Australia, only adding to the pressure on the dollar and interest rates.

I have received many recent approaches from local businesses telling me that banks simply are not lending. A motel operator in one of my regional centres was recently telling me that his bank refused a \$100,000 loan to refurbish some of his rooms. He told me he had a working overdraft of \$85,000, which represented his total liability. I estimate his business to be worth somewhere between \$3 million and \$4 million. This is not a normal business circumstance; it is a handbrake on investment. For someone to have a \$3 million or \$4 million investment and not be able to borrow \$100,000 is an absolute threat to business generally. Others have approached me with stories of an inability to buy existing and established businesses because finance which previously would have been forthcoming is simply not available.

A relatively high Australian dollar against the US gives all of our competitors a relative advantage, and all this at a time when the government intends to increase that advantage by imposing massive new taxes on our economy through the mining resource rental tax and a carbon tax. Most industry analysts expect the price of electricity in Australia to rise in the order of 40 per cent over the next five years.

Life is about opportunity, and there is no doubt in my mind that the government has a great opportunity here to do enormous damage to our economy. Higher spending, higher

taxes and higher interest rates will all erode our ability to pay our way in the world. There still time for the government to take control of its budget, address the wastage and mismanagement and reduce the pressure on Australian business and families.

In closing, I would like to thank the voters in Grey for once again giving me the opportunity to represent them here in parliament. I would like to thank those hundreds of supporters who made it possible for me to present a cohesive campaign to the electorate. We live in one of the most dramatic and exciting parts of Australia. We have unique opportunities in tourism, mining, aquaculture and downstream processing, and I believe in our future, but we also need government to work with us and not amplify the difficulties we face.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (5.18 pm)—Today gives me a formal opportunity to thank the many people who trusted me again to represent them and our region in the federal parliament—indeed, with a considerably increased margin. For the record, my electorate of Braddon has changed since the 2007 election and now includes the west coast of Tasmania, whilst losing the Port Sorell-Hawley area to my good friend Dick Adams, in Lyons. To the many thousands of voters who voted for me as an individual and/or as the Labor representative, I say thank you for the honour of representing you in the 43rd Parliament and, as things have transpired, also representing you in the new Labor government led by Julia Gillard, who is no stranger to Braddon, to be sure.

With the election done and dusted, we are left with a challenging and interesting period of national government ahead. Clearly, the national electorate, like my own, has spoken, and it is our individual responsibility as members of parliament to make what we have work. For the doubters, the most recent

of two or three opinion polls—indeed, I have just been looking at one today—if they are to be believed, indicate a similar result if an election were to be held tomorrow.

Unfortunately, in spite of all the posturing by those opposite when they were courting the Independents for support that they would honour the verdict of the nation, their actions since make a mockery of this. Once it became clear that the majority of the Independents appeared to favour a continuation of the Labor government or were publicly sceptical of the coalition's credentials to govern, those opposite reverted to type—that is, opposition for opposition's sake, negative rather than constructive, all form and little substance, self-righteous unction and resorting to personal and political bullying.

Of course, the coalition was not alone in taking umbrage at a political result that it did not agree with. Serial conservative commentators, particularly those residing in the News Ltd stable, continued their crusade against Labor and the possibility of the Independents supporting a minority Labor government. From skewing published electorate polling in the seats of New England and Lyne to favour support for a coalition government to overplaying the 'he's nothing but a media tart' card, such commentators sought to pressure these politicians and their constituents alike to reconsider any thoughts of siding with Labor. Still, these MPs are experienced enough to go their own way, and I suppose that is why the pro-coalition campaign, within and without, was so concentrated and at times dirty.

To help spice up the menu, News Ltd pumped out its daily horror stories about alleged failings in BER projects, attacked the integrity of the National Broadband Network, challenged the credibility of the pro-climate-change argument and hammered away at the so-called inequity of the minerals

resources tax. All of these enterprises were not only owned by Labor but were regarded as significant determinants affecting the potential support of Independents such as Tony Windsor and Robert Oakeshott. Of course, we were all served up a number of unnamed 'senior Labor sources' who alleged caucus disunity, poor morale, et cetera et cetera. I would love to meet some of these unnamed senior Labor sources because I have never found one. However, who am I but a member of the caucus being allegedly reported on?

In the meantime, we had the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, the member for Sturt, Christopher Pyne, and others—indeed, others sitting at the table now—publicly pretending to seek a new style of politics, preaching of a 'more collegial polity'. However, as events unfolded, and as the early proceedings in this place have clearly demonstrated, this was nothing but empty rhetoric—cant to try and persuade the Independents to side with the coalition. The cant of this position was further demonstrated when, apart from some silly, but I suppose predictable, inflammatory comments from Senator Barnaby Joyce and negative mutterings from the Leader of the Nationals, Warren Truss, the Nationals themselves were completely sidelined in negotiations with the Independents. I wonder why?

I remember on 10 August—and the member for Goldstein, who is at the table, will clearly remember this—when Treasury calculated that the coalition costings were out by some \$800 million earlier in the campaign, and the coalition's immediate refusal to submit further costings to Treasury under the Charter of Budget Honesty provisions, how little media scrutiny of any substance was placed on the coalition over this, outside the Fairfax stable. It seems that, when it comes to financial accountability for our friends amongst the conservative commen-

tariat, there is only one side to scrutinise and pursue.

Of course, it had to take until after the election to expose the massive black hole surrounding the coalition's rubbery election commitments, especially in health, education, infrastructure and its paid maternity leave scheme. In all, Treasury analysis identified a hole of up to \$11 billion in the coalition's election promise costings. I repeat, for the members of this House and for *Hansard*: an \$11 billion black hole!

As the Independents continued to seek briefings from government and coalition representatives and agencies, and once the coalition's \$11 billion black hole in costings became public knowledge, Tony Abbott's political demeanour changed to type, as his sense of new-found political bonhomie began to fracture. I thought this was beautifully presented in the recent ABC *Four Corners* expose *The Deal*, which went to air on 4 October. I would like to quote some extracts:

Sarah Ferguson: While Tony Abbott was already trying to convince the Independents he was ready for a new style of politics—

with a quote from Tony Abbott at a press conference:

I think we can have a kinder, gentler polity. I think we can be a more collegial polity than we've been. I think that the spirit of parliament has been needlessly confrontational.

Sarah Ferguson again:

Tony Windsor isn't persuaded by Abbott's conversion.

She speaks to Tony Windsor in his office, and she asks:

Is that the Tony Abbott that you know?

Tony Windsor, the member for New England, says:

No. No I don't, and I think Tony Abbott's body language, ah, suggests that they're the words that he's got to say, rather than the words he actually believes.

What an excellent epitaph to the whole sordid business of those opposite who pretended that they wanted to make the parliamentary situation and the election result work.

Nothing I have seen in this 43rd parliament to date contradicts the member for New England's assessment of the Leader of the Opposition or the opposition's tactics. For example, the refusal of the opposition to allow its MPs to sit on the Speakers Panel, to help make this parliament work better. I ask you: is there anything more mean and puerile than that? And the threatening of non-cooperation regarding the pairing of members is proof of how the coalition really regards the new polity which exists—or, more accurately, needs to exist for minority government to work.

Whilst the national result was very close, it seems the southern states of the nation remained solidly Labor, none more so than Tasmania. May I congratulate my colleague at the table, the member for Franklin, on her excellent result. I was greatly humbled by the result in Braddon, including the West Coast, and the significant swing to federal Labor. Whilst some commentators, particularly local ones, predicted a tighter struggle in Braddon, I was heartened by the response our team received out and about during the campaign. Indeed, with the focus of this parliament and government on regional communities and their needs, the opportunity exists for further investments in community and physical infrastructure and improved health, social and educational services, programs and funding in our region.

Our region, now happily including the West Coast, its people and resources, is a significant wealth generator in Tasmania. Like the remainder of regional Australia, we too seek a fair go and an equitable distribution of funding and services when compared to our metropolitan cousins. The emphasis of

the new government on rolling out funding and services to regional areas like my own, including the National Broadband Network, will mean that we will become progressively more attractive as centres of business generation and places to live and raise a family. Indeed, better liveability and the huge potential derived from the rollout of the NBN increases our prospects of becoming a major attractor for people to move to our region from more populous centres to set up business, to raise a family, to retire and/or to change lifestyles.

Over the past three years our region has benefited from nearly \$450 million of investment and a number of Labor government initiatives, including the major economic stimulus measures adopted to tackle the global financial crisis; the educational and job-sustaining benefits of the Building the Education Revolution funding for each of our 63 local schools, almost totalling \$100 million; insulation for many hundreds of North-West Coast households; the increase in the First Home Buyers Grant; the long-awaited pension increase; the dozens of community infrastructure projects spread across all our municipalities; the removal of Work Choices; significant funding for improved health facilities and services, including the Mersey Community Hospital and two GP superclinics; and the commencement and rollout of the National Broadband Network. These and other positive initiatives I believe accounted for the comparatively strong vote for Labor particularly in Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia in the recent election.

Labor policies such as a national Paid Parental Leave Scheme, rolling out of the NBN, the health and hospitals reform package, construction of trades training centres, implementation of national curriculum reform, and establishing a minerals resource rent tax are to be rolled out in this next term and I look forward to more being done for

mental health, establishing a universal dental care system, and better funding of aged care.

More locally, I look forward to delivering Labor's commitment to building the Devonport Regional Aquatic Centre, to setting up CCTV in Devonport, working with Simplot to establish a state-of-the-art cogeneration system at Ulverstone, and developing a regional cancer centre at the North-West Regional Hospital. I am also looking forward to the rollout of the North-West Tasmania Innovation and Investment Fund, which promises some exciting developments and new jobs for our region—unfortunately a region which has experienced serious unemployment issues with the cessation of our north-west paper mills, closing of parts of McCain's processing factory at Circular Head and more recently the impending closure of Tascott Templeton's carpet factory.

The coming parliamentary term will be very different from any I can recall since 1998 and indeed will be historic in many ways. I will do everything I can to make it work for the good of our nation, my state and most especially my region. The optimist in me says it can and will work with goodwill, providing that goodwill is actually there. But why wouldn't it be, because unlike most occasions, this parliament will rely on every individual member responding to the new circumstances, and why would you let such a precious individual opportunity pass by to be lost again in the collective mass of the party room and a dominant executive?

I would like to thank my hardworking, talented, loyal and wonderfully supportive office team of Luke, Kay, Luned, Karla, Tresa and Kim for the huge amount of work they have done on behalf of the many constituents who have sought our assistance over the past three years. I know this has in no small way contributed to our strong result. Our campaign team was large, enthusi-

astic and hardworking and I want to publicly thank everyone who helped out. I have individually thanked everyone on an earlier occasion but would like to especially acknowledge Luke Sayer and the office team, our doorknocking team, the sign construction and setting-up crew, postal vote campaign members, envelopers, polling booth volunteers, and the many well-wishers who gave of their time and support. A special thank you also to my friend and colleague Senator Nick Sherry and to the state ALP secretary, John Dowling, and Mike O'Connor of the CFMEU. Finally, may I thank my lovely family, Bronwyn, William and Julian, for all their loving support and their encouragement—in good times and those more difficult—to keep doing what I love: representing my region of North-West and West Tasmania in the national parliament.

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

NATIONAL HEALTH AMENDMENT (PHARMACEUTICAL BENEFITS SCHEME) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 29 September, on motion by **Ms Roxon**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (5.34 pm)—The federal government and Medicines Australia signed a memorandum of understanding in May 2010 and details were released in the budget this year. The memorandum intends to deliver savings to the government of around \$1.9 billion over the next five years. The merits of the PBS are well known to both sides of this chamber. It has been providing access to clinically proven, cost-effective medicines for over half a century. The PBS process for listing drugs is well known and it enjoys bipartisan support. We know that prior to listing pharmaceuticals need to go through the most rigorous of

evaluations both for safety and efficacy but also for cost effectiveness to ensure that the taxpayer's dollar is well spent in ensuring that Australia has one of the finest health systems in the world.

The changes that are being debated today in the National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) Bill 2010 and part of the MOU look at statutory price reductions, price disclosure and co-payment data, the last of which has not been always easily available. Many of these are largely technical amendments and relate to matters such as PBS pricing and how we actually calculate price reductions as a result of statutory price reductions, policies that we first saw implemented by the Howard government in their last term in 2006. We also know that there are amendments that will streamline the way that drugs are listed for supply under section 100 amendments.

A key challenge for successive governments is to ensure that there is enough investment in new pharmaceuticals while at the same time making sure that as drugs flow through their patented period and into off-patent periods generic drugs fall in price satisfactorily so that we are in turn able to use taxpayers' dollars effectively. One great challenge for Australia has been that, by having a PBS that offers very equitable access to pharmaceuticals nationwide within 24 hours and at affordable price, particularly for those who are concessionaires, in many cases we have had an upwardly sticky system where generic prices fail to fall after the patent period is completed.

There are no better examples than comparisons with neighbouring countries New Zealand and the UK. I note the work of Philip Clarke but also others writing over the last five years looking particularly at the statin class of drugs, one of the most commonly taken pharmaceuticals in the country.

We know that, while Australia continues to pay upwards of \$30 a month for a 40 milligram dose of a very common statin drug, Simvastatin, in New Zealand and the UK these have fallen to around \$3 or even \$1.50. Even in the US we saw the Walmart intervention where some of the most common categories of generic drugs were available for in the vicinity of \$1 to \$2 per month—yet we continue to pay upwards of 10 to 20 times that amount here in Australia for exactly the same pharmaceutical, exactly the same preparation and product. That is a cause for concern, because the PBS is expanding, despite the impressive policy reforms introduced under the Howard government which have reduced that growth. We have seen that after reductions too often those reductions again escape. We lose control of that increase in price growth and it is becoming less and less clear exactly how that money is being invested.

New Zealand's approach from straight across the Tasman Sea has been to take much stronger action to see generic prices fall. Their approach was in fact to put out to tender the supply of generic drugs and let the generic providers engage in a market based competition to provide national supply. Their prices fell up to 93 per cent, which is an extraordinary result. I move now to the Netherlands, where generic drugs such as statins cost around one-twentieth of those in Australia. These drugs are so common that more often than not senior Australians are taking them on a regular basis, and the costs to our health system are enormous.

On top of this the government, as part of this legislation we are debating today, have actually conceded the ground in the reform of pharmaceuticals and the PBS. They have said that for the next four years there will be no more cost negotiations or further reforms. This is a cause for significant concern because this part of the health system is one

that I think needs more scrutiny than to walk away for four years and say that there will be no more efforts to tune this system and make it work even better for Australians.

The pharmaceutical agreements that were introduced in 2007 by the former government introduced the issue of regulatory price cuts where, effectively, when the first new generic product arrives on the market there is a mandated cut right across the sector. That 12.5 per cent policy yielded significant financial dividends and I understand that under this legislation that will increase to 16. We know from research that even with these mandated drops in prices doctors can continue to make choices about whether they wish to prescribe a generic drug when it hits the market. Many countries have set guidelines. One is the UK, where when a cheaper, usually generic, product comes onto the market there have to be significant and clear clinical reasons why clinicians do not go right ahead and prescribe the cheaper product.

In Australia this is so often not the case. For pharmaceutical companies that can produce a slightly more improved statin, for instance, the whole front end becomes an effort to convince GPs that they need to go for the extra one or two per cent clinical efficacy even if it costs the national health system and the PBS significantly more than that. The lesson there is that in the UK they have gained considerable ability to shift people onto generic pharmaceuticals, while in Australia we so often tend to evergreen the process, keeping Australian equivalent patients on the patented product, which is significantly more expensive.

The recent PBS agreement gives business certainty to Australian pharmaceutical companies, and that would be agreed on both sides of the House. We want business certainty for the innovators so that they are

more confident to invest in the expensive multiclinical trials that are so important to bringing new drugs through the pipeline. But they also need the certainty to know that when they do business in Australia there is a PBS that can afford the best pharmaceuticals that money and Western science can provide. The great concern is that, while upwards of one-third of the PBS bill is spent on generic pharmaceuticals—in the rest of the world that can be as little as 10 per cent—we are foregoing the opportunity to bring these drugs on quickly. And I believe that a great detraction from the current PBS system is the time it takes to bring these pharmaceuticals on.

So it is great to see that in the MOU there is an undertaking from government that, within six months of the recommendation from the PBAC, cabinet will consider and make a decision on whether to list the drug. And it would be hoped that it would be a lot faster than six months. That is a lifetime for someone waiting for a brand new medication. So, in some ways we would like to see an even faster streamlining of the system. So often when you legislate for a minimum the minimum becomes the maximum and everything drags out to five months and 29 days. We want to see these drugs coming on straight away. What we cannot afford is a government that does not have the courage to look at the best possible system for pricing of generic pharmaceuticals, freeing up the resources and moving that around to the front end to help the innovators.

All the members of Medicines Australia are confident in that MOU, but there is one thing I know: as soon as we can get generics priced somewhere near where they are priced in the rest of the developed world, it will be an even better place for Australian patients who are waiting desperately for those new medications. That is the challenge that we face at the moment. On any normative inter-

national comparison Australia does perform poorly on the pricing of generic pharmaceuticals. The great paradox is that it is our wonderful PBS that does it. The fact that we pay generously for concessional and non-concessional co-payments for pharmaceuticals actually removes the incentive to be any cheaper. Why would you price a pharmaceutical any cheaper than the \$20-odd or \$29 you will receive from the government, if you were guaranteed that amount? The PBS and its very generosity actually makes it difficult to move and to garner those really great savings that are possible in the generic sector.

Let us make no mistake, the front-ending and the bringing of great new drugs through the pipeline is a very risky and expensive process. We need a government system that makes it as certain as possible for these companies that if they can bring through a life-saving drug or a significant advancement on what is currently available it will be supported and encouraged. By the same token what we cannot afford to do is what this government has done, which is effectively to walk away from any future reforms for at least four years. It is a very confident decision as to whether you will even be around as a government in four year's time. What we have done in this MOU is forfeit the right to have that conversation. That is an awfully large price to pay, particularly since, as can happen, very expensive pharmaceuticals can come down the pipeline in a relatively short period of time such as 18 months to two years. I think it was a little short sighted of the government to do that.

Let us remember what happened in 2007. The coalition was faced with similar challenges around the PBS. Their suite of measures have already demonstrated outcomes. This was the separation of single-brand and multiple-brand medicines into the F1 and F2 formularies; the statutory price reductions for model-brand medicines, which I have re-

ferred to before; the 12.5 per cent price reduction when that first bioequivalent drug for a single-brand medicine is introduced or when a medicine moves from F1 to F2; and the price disclosure arrangements which this legislation will be extending to 1,600 different lines, which I acknowledge will create for the government a significant challenge through all of the legal difficulties in being able to actually identify what is going on with those pricings and with that disclosure. It is a significant challenge, but it is an important one to progress if we are to understand whether pharmaceuticals are being priced at the market or at the most competitive price possible. We have the incentive payment in 2007 for community pharmacies to process claims using PBS Online and of course the community service obligation for pharmaceutical wholesalers who meet specific service obligations.

Let us look at those PBS reform impacts. They have been reported on. That report showed that over the forecasted 10-year period from 2008 to 2009 patients would potentially pay less—between \$592 million and \$803 million less. That is a significant saving for patients, through their co-payments, because a large number of pharmaceuticals actually become cheaper than the co-payment. That is extremely relevant, particularly for the 30 to 35 per cent of Australians who are not concessionaires and pay what we deem to be the higher co-payment. That could really mount up, prior to the pharmaceutical safety net, for families who have to pay that full amount. They are the prime beneficiaries of these kinds of reform. The total savings to government from the reforms are even higher, because they are saving on having to pay a full co-payment for every one of the prescriptions—between \$3.6 and \$5.8 million.

I draw the House's attention to research done by Philip Clarke from the University of

Sydney, who did reports on what savings could have been achieved. This was published with his colleague Ed Fitzgerald in the *Medical Journal of Australia* and estimated that Australia could have saved \$1 billion in the past four years if the UK prices had been achieved in Australia and that, more importantly, were we to implement the English pricing systems in Australia, savings could be in excess of \$3 billion over the next 10 years. I can see the shadow finance minister licking his lips as he thinks about what could be done in the health system with \$3 billion invested in the new drugs coming through the pipeline and being brought on early. That is a genuine incentive for our pharmaceutical manufacturers and for our innovators to be coming up with the new breakthroughs: the Gardasils; the treatments that save thousands of lives and reduce morbidity. They are the areas that we should be investing in rather than paying unnecessarily high prices for generic pharmaceuticals which are being produced around the world in large factories for sometimes less than a fraction of a cent per dose.

The PBS reforms that were initiated by the coalition were significantly successful. We note that this MOU has the support of Medicines Australia and a number of others who made submissions. They are encouraging both sides of the chamber to consider this legislation, and I make the following observations about the ground that has been forfeited in basically declining to look at this area again for any form of reform for the next four years. It is terribly important, therefore, that the parliament carefully scrutinises all of the measures in this bill—the measures for under-co-payment data and statutory price reductions; which are being increased to 16 per cent, and, most importantly and probably most challenging of all, price disclosure.

The great challenge for government is that there simply is not enough information about the price at which wholesalers provide pharmaceuticals to pharmacists. We know that there are significant discounts. If those discounts lead to better service or better provision of pharmaceuticals or a better range of products to patients, one would not complain about that. But, fundamentally, that discounting represents government and taxpayer resources that need to be used well. That is why I believe that this side of the chamber would want to see a full and frank evaluation of the impacts of this legislation and where it is going. We are also mindful that it is currently under inquiry at the moment. I think it would be very, very short-sighted to move forward and vote on this bill prior to seeing the results of that Senate inquiry into this very bill.

This bill will be expanding those elements that I referred to before. It will be extending some of the things that were achieved in 2007. But I would certainly not want to see this bill completely debated and passed through this chamber without seeing the full results of the Senate inquiry being conducted at the moment. We have a date on which we expect that inquiry to come down. I would hope that we would put off this debate until that inquiry has been heard and read. (*Time expired*)

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (5.49 pm)—I speak in support of the National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) Bill 2010. I listened to the member for Bowman talk about the great support that the previous Howard coalition government had for the PBS. The last time a coalition government was elected—in 1996—the coalition government immediately hit pensioners with an 18.5 per cent price hike for drugs listed in the PBS. That is exactly what they did. If those people opposite had been on this side and had been sitting here right here and

now, we would have seen a \$1.2 billion cut to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. That cut would have meant that pensioners and concession card holders would be slugged with, on average, an extra \$28 per person per year in the cost of their prescription drugs.

So let us not come into this place and talk about the great support for the PBS from the coalition, because they have got form with respect to their years on the Treasury benches. Their proposal at the last election was simply to make the personal circumstances of pensioners and people on low incomes more difficult in dealing with sickness, ill health and disability by making it more costly for them to get access to the drugs they needed to alleviate the conditions and illnesses they suffered from. It is a bit of sanctimonious rhetoric coming from those opposite in their support for the PBS. All other Australian families, if the coalition were sitting here, would be slugged with an increased cost of about \$4 per person per year for prescription drugs. This would rise to about \$6 extra per person by 2013-14. So, the coalition has never been particularly supportive of the PBS. For the member for Bowman to talk about the benefits of reducing costs to Australian taxpayers, pensioners and concession card holders—to hear coalition members talking about that with their rhetoric which does not match their record—really sticks in my craw.

The purpose of this legislation is to make sure that we have a viable PBS system. This is important. It is part of the overall package of health and hospital reform that we are undertaking because we have a great challenge in this country. We have the third-longest life expectancy in the world. Our future generations, if they want to enjoy access to a world-class health system, need to get access to drugs, not just to doctors and allied health professionals. We want to make sure they have universal access to a decent healthcare

and hospital system. It is important that we invest in primary health care. I commend the federal Labor government for their assistance in that regard with the money available to doctors. I am also pleased to see the new round of funding for regional health infrastructure from the Health and Hospitals Fund. In particular, the legislation that is before the House today deals with issues that maintain the viability, sustainability and security of the PBS.

Currently the PBS costs about \$9 billion in the 2010-11 year and it is estimated that it will cost us \$13 billion by 2018. So the taxpayer is the winner from the MOU which has been agreed to with Medicines Australia, which represents over 50 companies. About 86 per cent of total annual PBS expenditure goes to companies which produce drugs through Medicines Australia. We are talking about nearly 60 per cent of sales of off-patent medicines as well. So I thank Medicines Australia for their willingness to ensure price certainty and the reductions that will benefit not just the taxpayers of Australia but also the pensioners and concession card holders who really need access to the kinds of drugs that will make their lives better.

The bill sets out a new PBS pricing arrangement that aims at reducing the growth and the cost to the taxpayers. We want to make sure that taxpayers get access to funds which we can use to build roads, to improve schools and to improve our health system generally. The minister said in her second reading speech on 29 September 2010 that the purpose of this bill is:

... to achieve a more efficient and sustainable Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), better value for money for Australian taxpayers, and policy stability for the pharmaceutical sector.

I agree entirely with her assessment in that regard.

Over time we have seen the PBS price for multiple-brand medicines affect taxpayers in an adverse way. We think it is important that where we have multiple-brand medicines they reflect the price at which medicines are sold by suppliers into pharmacies. We think that information could be disclosed, we think that the PBS price will reduce the average price across all brands and we think that is fair and equitable to taxpayers. Price disclosure is critical. You cannot have a situation where the market is in that way secret, because it results in prices being higher than they otherwise would be. Consumers should not and will not have to pay extra money for the changes that are in this legislation. Indeed, we believe that some non-concessional consumers will also end up having to pay less.

We have talked about the savings. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars being saved directly by consumers from lower prices as the result of the changes in this legislation. This legislation is important in the sense that it does not affect a patient's access to necessary medicines and neither will it affect a doctor's ability to prescribe PBS medicines which are clinically appropriate to the condition that the patient suffers. The amendments also make it clear that price disclosure will allow the market forces to apply and play a part in pricing of PBS medicines. It always mystifies me that those opposite claim that they are the supporters of the market when the reality is that it is Labor governments which have supported small business operators and the market forces generally. Those opposite too-often side with big tobacco, big companies and big multinational endeavours, whereas we on this side of the chamber are the authors of trade practices legislation to help small business. We are the ones who are concerned about market share and market power. We are the ones con-

cerned about making sure the market works better for taxpayers.

The bill sets out, as the minister has pointed out, that we think there will be an average price reduction of at least 23 per cent, to be achieved across all brands in the cycle. What that means is there will be a very large saving in the PBS and we think this will be market driven. The minister has pointed out, in a report to parliament on the 2007 PBS changes that the member for Bowman talked about, that consumers will benefit. She says that somewhere around \$700 million will be saved over 10 years. That is roads, schools and health care. That is community infrastructure which can be used in communities across regional and rural Australia and in my electorate of Blair in South-East Queensland. We think that this legislation is a better deal for taxpayers and we think it is a better deal for consumers. We think it is a better deal for pensioners and a better deal for non concessional card holders. We think it will mean that the market will play a role in reducing the cost of medicines for people. We also think that the pharmaceutical industry will play a role, as will the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, in achieving better outcomes for taxpayers and consumers.

It is my honour to represent the electorate of Blair. In the shopping centre where my electorate office is located in Brassall, the biggest suburb in my electorate, is a pharmacy. Every day as I walk past the pharmacy I see people going in and getting the medicines and tablets that they need each day. Every time I see that I think about the fact that those people need and deserve access to health care in a way that benefits them and their community. We should all thank the previous governments that had the wit, wisdom and foresight to bring in the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, which means that medicines, tablets and assistance can be

given to low-income earners, including in my electorate to the people of Brassall, who are able to purchase their medicines because of the PBS.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (6.00 pm)—The previous speakers in this debate on the National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) Bill 2010 have spoken about the foundation stones of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and the coalition's history of reform to make this scheme sustainable. In commenting on the coalition's 2007 reforms, a report released by the Department of Health and Ageing states:

... the data suggests that the PBS is buying more generics at a cheaper price while maintaining access to new innovative medicines. More generic prescriptions at overall lower cost to Government is an indication that the community will gain better value from PBS expenditure over time, particularly as medicines become subject to competition.

In many ways, the PBS reforms initiated by the coalition government have achieved more than was anticipated. The reforms were not undertaken lightly but were subject to extensive consultation and negotiation prior to the introduction of the legislation. Unfortunately, this government has failed badly to demonstrate any capacity to consult or, indeed, to engage in evidence based reform. Many of this government's so-called reform processes are driven by ideology or by fiscal incompetence. There is scant regard for outcomes, which has been all too evident with the Building the Education Revolution, the insulation scheme, cuts to the cataract rebate and chemotherapy changes to name just a few. In light of these issues, it is especially important that the parliament carefully scrutinises all measures presented by this government.

The bill before us seeks to accelerate and increase statutory price reductions. Specifically, it provides an additional two per cent

reduction for drugs listed on F2A. In addition, there will be a five per cent reduction to all drugs listed on F2T. The price reduction applying when a bioequivalent drug is listed or when a drug moves from F1 to F2 will increase from 12½ per cent to 16 per cent. The bill expands and accelerates the price disclosure arrangements for all medicines listed in the F2 formulary. The addition of a new brand will no longer be required to trigger a price reduction.

An important aspect of the MOU which is enacted by this legislation is a minimum average 23 per cent price reduction to applicable F2 medicines in the cycle to 1 April 2012. The MOU does specify that drugs will continue to be excluded from adjustments where the difference between the weighted average disclosed price and the proved ex-manufacturer price is less than 10 per cent. For medicines subject to price reductions, the guaranteed adjustment proportion is calculated and, in effect, used to gross up each price reduction so that the average of 23 per cent is reached.

Given that the Minister for Health and Ageing has a chequered history of implementing savings measures, it may not be improbable that the minister demanded X amount of savings over the forward estimates and negotiations then worked backwards to arrive at the 23 per cent. This would have allowed the minister to lock in savings over the forward estimates to try and rebuild her image with the then so-called 'Gang of four'. Unfortunately, though, it may not be conducive to good public policy and gives greater justification for closer parliamentary scrutiny. According to evidence at Senate estimates, price disclosure will impact 1,600 brands, up from 160 at present. The process of price disclosure is administratively complex. It is claimed by some stakeholders that such a large increase in the number of brands covered and the additional 23 per cent

weighted average price cut will give rise to higher administrative costs.

Whilst it may be appropriate to pursue measures to better match the price paid by government to the market price, it is important that the government consults on such a large change. It appears that this has not been the case. Generic medicine companies are highly exposed to the price reductions and disclosure provisions. Whilst there are some conflicting accounts of their level of involvement in negotiations on these changes, it appears that generic companies were not directly involved in devising the final MOU. The viability of the generic medicine sector is of particular importance in ensuring a competitive market when medicines come off patent and reducing the cost of medicines to the government and individuals. The sector also employs 5,000 Australians in a variety of roles, including manufacturing, research and development. The subsidised pharmaceutical sector is different from other fully competitive markets. When drugs come off patent there can be reluctance from medical practitioners and patients to move to other brands. The generic sector is important to price competition, but brand substitution is imperfect and it can be difficult for Australian generic companies to attain and maintain market share.

In circumstances where it is clinically appropriate, pharmacists can offer patients a generic alternative. The coalition introduced a financial incentive for pharmacists to dispense a substitutable, premium-free medicine. While this agreement continues that incentive, it explicitly states that the Commonwealth will not make any variations without the consent of Medicines Australia and also will not introduce any measure which favours the prescribing or dispensing of generic brands without the consent of Medicines Australia. It remains to be seen whether the information campaign proposed

by the government will be sufficient to offset other factors affecting market share and viability of generics as a result of these changes.

The MOU also provides for no new therapeutic groups to be formed for the duration of the agreement. The government introduced a new therapeutic group in the 2009-10 budget and three new groups in MYEFO. Clinicians raised concerns, particularly in relation to the bisphosphonate group. It was argued that the government had failed to consider the concerns of many clinicians that the drugs were not interchangeable at a patient level. At present, exemptions can be granted by Medicare to premiums paid by patients in certain circumstances. However, if the drugs are not interchangeable and exemptions need to be granted in most instances, timely access to treatment may be jeopardised. Accordingly, a Senate committee inquiry was launched into the therapeutic goods to allow for a proper investigation and, in the interest of process, the Senate disallowed the relevant groups until the Senate committee had reported. Contrary to what has been suggested the Senate did not move the disallowance because of opposition to the policy of therapeutic groups; rather, it was to allow clinical concerns to be heard and to examine the process and reasoning of the government's MYEFO measure.

The 2009 budget measure for two statin drugs was not disallowed and there are a number of therapeutic groups that have existed for many years. The concerns supporting the disallowance were purely in relation to the process followed and clinical arguments presented. The MOU does specify that the three therapeutic groups announced in MYEFO are not excluded for the purposes of this agreement. It is appropriate that consideration be given to the groups following the outcome of the Senate inquiry, which is con-

sistent with the coalition's position from the outset.

The bill also makes changes to section 100 of the act to provide for the government's compromised chemotherapy arrangements. The government first proposed changes to the funding of chemotherapy drugs in a 2008-09 budget measure. The government claimed that the savings of \$105.4 million would be delivered over four years. The changes proposed to reduce wastage of chemotherapy drugs by providing funding according to the precise quantity of active ingredient used rather than by the vial. The changes were due to commence on 1 July 2009, but the Minister for Health and Ageing announced in April last year that the changes would be delayed until 1 September 2009. It is only now, towards the end of 2010, that the minister has finally worked through the detail with stakeholders. The changes would have made it unviable for many pharmacies to supply such drugs, especially in rural and remote communities. The wastage from unused portion in the vials would have been wholly borne by pharmacies. The minister did not understand and did not bother to consult on the practical implications of the proposal. It created unnecessary stress for patients, pharmacists and health professionals. Incredibly, it took two years for the minister to resolve. The chemotherapy bungle again highlights the minister's, and indeed this government's, incompetence and dangerous policy approach.

The changes proposed under this bill are also reported to affect wholesalers who ensure timely supply of pharmaceuticals to community pharmacies and in turn patients. Under the previous reforms, funding was provided through the community service obligation to ensure no adverse interruption to the supply chain. Under these new changes, it appears that there has been a failure to consult or at least a blatant disregard

for the concerns raised. With a change such as this it is imperative that the government is able to provide assurances that the supply chain will not be disrupted. To date there has been no such substantiated assurance.

The MOU also provides for changes to administrative processes to streamline the listing of new treatments. These changes are welcomed and, on behalf of patients and clinicians, I genuinely hope the government manages to fulfil this promise. This is particularly the case with the time taken for cabinet consideration. With the listing of new drugs we have seen this government using the process to delay important treatments recommended by the PBAC. This was exemplified with drugs such as Avastin, approved by the PBAC in July 2008 but not listed by the minister until July 2009. Unfortunately, the language of the MOU on this aspect is far from convincing. It states:

... the Commonwealth will use its best endeavours to implement a maximum time frame of six months for consideration and decision ...

Too often this government's so-called best endeavours are nowhere near good enough.

The coalition will stand up for parliamentary scrutiny, especially on measures as significant as this. The bill before us today proposes significant changes to a vital component of our health system. Following extensive consultation, the PBS has undergone significant reform over the last few years. The coalition government's reforms are expected to generate savings far greater than originally anticipated according to the government's own calculations. The government has sought to wring more savings out of the scheme through measures that were not consulted on and may have had serious implications for patient access to treatment. Again it appears that this minister has undertaken a complex change without consulting fully with all stakeholders affected.

It is important that the parliament be given an opportunity to scrutinise the changes in detail and that all stakeholders can have input. The bill has been referred to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee for inquiry and the coalition will reserve its position and consider the outcome of that inquiry. It is entirely appropriate that debate on this bill occurs with the benefit of the inquiry's findings. The coalition proposes that the bill be deferred until after the reporting date of the inquiry—that is, 16 November. This will allow for a more informed consideration and there will remain a number of sitting days for the bill to be debated before the parliament rises this year. Accordingly, I move the following amendment:

That all the words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words: "the House declines to give the bill a second reading until the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs has reported to the Senate on its inquiry into the bill".

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—Is the amendment seconded?

Dr Southcott—I second the amendment.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (6.13 pm)—The National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) Bill 2010 is another example of the government making great strides in the reshaping and delivery of a new and remodelled comprehensive and affordable health system for Australia. This bill goes to the cost-effective and affordable delivery of our beloved PBS well into the future. The future of the scheme has been under a cloud of rising costs, as has been our overall health system. There is no inflation like health expenditure inflation and the PBS alone was forecast to increase by some 40 to 50 per cent over the next several years. This is an increase that could not be sustained across the board and it would suggest a health system that, while dearly loved by Australians of all walks of life, if left un-

tended could become unaffordable in the not too distant future. The compromise of our health system, Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme will not be accepted by Labor, the creators of Medicare.

The focus of the bill before us is the weighing down of the cost of the pharmaceuticals purchased under the PBS. Through the work of the minister with the industry group, Medicines Australia, this government delivers in this bill pricing reforms and administrative changes that improve the PBS listing processes. It cuts the red tape and will achieve highly significant savings over the years ahead. This bill enshrines the agreement between industry and government while delivering the significant additional price benefits for the Australian public. The price benefits will be through the PBS, but individual members of the public may also find that they can access certain courses of medicines more cheaply.

This bill goes to the government's delivery of more with less—more benefit for our health dollar and less wastage of expensive medicines. The bill sees greater downward pressure on the cost of a greater number of drugs. This will be achieved through the PBS's price averaging mechanism, expanding from its current application to 162 medicine brands to some 1,600 brands—a 1,000 per cent increase—with substantial consequent savings. It must be noted that these reforms will in no way diminish a patient's access to necessary medicines and nor will they in any way diminish or interfere with a medical practitioner's ability to prescribe PBS medicines that are clinically appropriate.

This is simply another example of this government's drive to reform the health system and to meet the need of a growing and increasingly ageing population of Australia for a health system that will deliver afford-

able health care through the decades ahead. There is no greater example of this drive, of Labor's capacity to plan and deliver systemic and affordable reform for the benefit of all Australians, than the national health and hospitals reform plan. It commenced in the term of the previous parliament, and the reform agenda and the drive for superior outcomes and better efficiencies with our limited health dollar continues.

We have seen the agreement between the government and states and territories as well. We have replaced eight separate health systems with a single National Health and Hospitals Network, combining all public hospitals, GP services and related services. We have dedicated one-third of GST revenue previously paid to the states and territories for the Commonwealth to take majority financial control and to control the entire network and invest this revenue in health and hospitals. We have elevated small, local hospital networks to be in charge of their own service delivery. All of this is achievable through the greatest shake-up of our health finances this nation has probably ever seen. It is deliverable by the Commonwealth through ending the blame game and the tireless abdication of funding responsibility and cost-shifting that has been a feature of the health system for far too long. It is achievable through the goodwill of the states and territories, who have agreed to end the games and enable the Commonwealth to take 60 per cent of funding responsibility for public hospitals and to take over full responsibility for GP and related services provided outside of hospitals.

The government is most intent on making substantial improvements in the funding of health services and in health service delivery. But there are always a few spoilers. While we are reshaping the remedial health landscape through the PBS pricing mechanism and hospital reform program, there are of

course areas where the government has had its reform and improvement of the health system stymied by the opposition. One might have thought that this parliament, due to the outcome of this last general election and the agreements that appeared to be made prior to the forming of this government, would be a little more constructive than the last. One might have thought that a little more weight would be put on debate and decision making to judge legislation on its merits. Regrettably, the reflex of opposition for opposition's sake, irrespective of rational thought, appears to remain the position of many in this House.

Two areas of opposition for opposition's sake will immediately come to the minds of members present. What is the point of reshaping the hospital system to reduce patient suffering if one does not even bother to try to prevent the suffering in the first place? I am talking about the preventative health agency. The Minister for Health and Ageing has now long been in pursuit of Australia's first ever preventative health agency—an agency dedicated to preventing the public's need for emergency departments and surgery theatres, an agency dedicated to relieving the pressure that has long been on our public hospitals and an agency dedicated to maintaining the health and thereby the wellbeing of all Australians. Such an agency is common sense. But that makes it, as we have seen, directly at odds with the opposition. While it is common sense to anyone you might speak with, the opposition simply does not get it. It is like water off a duck's back.

Similarly, the current Leader of the Opposition while Minister for Health and Ageing repeatedly refused to have the Commonwealth participate in dental care. As Minister for Health and Ageing, he preferred to watch hundreds of thousands of principally elderly Australians suffer with troublesome dentures and decaying teeth, suffering deteriorating dietary habits due to the lack of healthy teeth

with which to eat properly. Clearly treatable dental problems grow and expand into nutritional problems, causing the most frail in our community to become even more susceptible to viruses and other illnesses. As it was in the previous government in which Mr Abbott was a minister, now it is under Mr Abbott's opposition—opposition to preventative health, opposition to dental care, opposition to the reduction of preventable decay and the onset of entirely preventable, unnecessary and avoidable disease.

The government stands by the commitments it made to the Australian people prior to the last election. In the bill before us we have just one element of the government's ongoing commitment to delivering superior, affordable health care for all Australians—an important element in the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. I am very pleased to be able to support the measures of this bill and the ongoing benefits that will accrue to the Australian public by its passing. I commend this bill to the House.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (6.22 pm)—If there has ever been legislation that should be supported in this House, it is the National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) Bill 2010. This legislation will deliver cheaper medicines to Australians and at the same time save \$1.9 billion over five years. This legislation should be voted on and passed by this House tonight. It is my understanding that the opposition is seeking to defer a decision on this legislation and refer it to a Senate committee, and if that is the case I would say that the opposition is abrogating its responsibility to support the government in this very sensible cost-saving measure and deliver cheaper medicines to the Australian people. I will first go through the legislation and then come back and touch on my disappointment and anger with the opposition in the action it is proposing to take: to have the House abrogate its respon-

sibility to make decisions on important legislation such as this and defer the bill to a Senate committee for consideration. I do not believe that the Australian people would like to see that. I think that, if we did that, we would be failing in our responsibility to the people whose votes put us into this parliament.

The National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) Bill 2010 will amend the National Health Act 1953 to achieve a more efficient and sustainable Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme through moderating growth in expenditure and delivering better value for money to taxpayers and greater certainty to the pharmaceutical industry. An enormous amount of consultation has taken place on this legislation. I see that the shadow health minister, Mr Dutton, has returned to the chamber, and I say to him what I have already stated here in the House: the opposition will be abrogating its responsibility if it does not support the passing of this legislation through the parliament tonight. It is currently estimated that the PBS will cost \$13 billion in 2018 compared to about \$9 billion in 2010-11, and that is a significant increase. PBS expenditure needs to be managed. If it is not, the scheme will not be sustainable or affordable, and that will mean that Australians will not have access to the many essential medicines they need.

This legislation is about delivering medicines to the Australian people at an affordable price and ensuring the future of the PBS, a scheme that has delivered to Australians for a very long time. The bill gives effect to further PBS price reforms that were announced in the 2010-11 budget and the subject of a memorandum of understanding with Medicines Australia, which is the peak body in the pharmaceutical sector. As I have already stated, this will result in \$1.9 billion in savings over five years. The bill focuses on medicines that are the subject of competi-

tion in the market. That means that PBS prices will closely match the prices at which the medicines are actually sold, and I think that is a very important point. Medicines will be affordable, they will be provided at a competitive price and Australians will benefit from lower prices and timely access to innovative treatments. For the PBS to continue to be the successful scheme that it has been, it needs to be able to include new and cutting-edge medicines—innovative treatments—but if it does not remain an affordable scheme this will not happen. Every member of this parliament would have constituents coming to see them on a regular basis and raising medicines that they would like to see listed on the PBS. There is a process that medication must go through before it can be listed on the PBS. As members we all wish to deliver the best medicines and see that our constituents can access the best medicines and the latest treatments, but unless we maintain an affordable PBS this will not happen.

Price disclosure will be accelerated and expanded through the implementation of this legislation. It requires pharmaceutical companies to advise the Commonwealth of prices at which PBS medicines are sold to pharmacies. That is very important, because people buying that medication will then know the exact mark-up on the price of the medication, and the government will be able to better monitor the process.

This legislation will benefit the whole Australian community. From October this year price disclosure will be mandatory for all multiple brand medicines, increasing the coverage from 162 brands to about 1,600 brands, which is a significant increase. That will lead to an average price reduction of about 23 per cent, which will be required across all medicines in this cycle. The duration of the price disclosure cycle will be reduced from two years to 18 months. This

will be of significant benefit to Australians and it will also make medication and the PBS much more affordable.

As I mentioned earlier, this has been discussed at length. There has been adequate time for community consultation. I see this legislation as being a win-win. It is a win to government because it decreases the cost of the PBS, it is a win to the Australian people because they will be paying less for their prescription medicines and it is a win to the generic medicine companies, who will be able to continue in the marketplace and who will be able to deliver medications at a cheaper price when they come off patent.

Given the fact that there are so many benefits associated with this legislation, I do not understand why it needs to be referred to a Senate committee. I do not understand why we in this House are abrogating our responsibility and saying that there should be no decision at this stage, that a Senate committee should be able to decide whether or not legislation that delivers cost savings to the Australian people and cost savings to the Australian government of \$1.9 billion over five years should be passed by this parliament. I commend this legislation to the parliament and I urge each and every member to support it because the benefits that it will deliver to the Australian people are extremely important.

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (6.33 pm)—The merits of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme have been well canvassed in this parliament. Since the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme was introduced in 1949, 61 years ago, it has provided subsidised access to clinically proven, cost-effective medicine. The PBS and the process for listing drugs enjoys in-principle bipartisan support. It is one of the pillars of our health system.

Prior to listing, drugs need to meet rigorous criteria to ensure that patients get access

to important new treatments and taxpayers get value for money. We have the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee and we have the Pharmaceutical Benefits Pricing Authority. A key challenge for successive governments has been to ensure that there is an incentive for research, development and listing of new medicines whilst ensuring that the health budget is sustainable into the future.

Australia currently spends about 9.1 per cent of GDP on health. That is about average for the OECD. It is significantly up on where it was 10 years ago but we are average in terms of our spending in the OECD. With that, we see that many of our measures for health put us in the top third of countries in the OECD. Particularly in areas like life expectancy at birth and life expectancy at 65, Australia is ranked third in the OECD. Only people in Japan and, for women, France and, for men, Iceland have longer life expectancies than Australians.

In 2008-09 there were 181 million prescriptions dispensed under the PBS. This is anticipated to grow to 232 million by 2013-14 alone.

Mr Snowdon—It sounds like you need one now!

Dr SOUTHCOTT—Yes, I did fill one this afternoon. Real spending per capita on pharmaceuticals is also expected to continue to increase over time, as is health spending as a proportion of GDP. For the financial year ended 2009, Commonwealth government expenditure on pharmaceutical benefits amounted to some \$7.7 billion. The annual growth rate of PBS expenditure is currently around 10 per cent.

PBS expenditure is driven by many factors. Relative spending on pharmaceuticals per person is highest for those in the 75 to 84 age group. A rapidly ageing population will be a key driver of prescriptions dispensed

and the overall cost of pharmaceuticals. It is important that the government is able to secure value for money for pharmaceuticals—and the coalition provided genuine reform to do so. In 2006, after extensive consultation and negotiation, the previous coalition government announced a series of reforms to support the sustainability of the PBS. Mr Deputy Speaker, you will remember it was anticipated in the first *Intergenerational report* in 2002 that the PBS's share of GDP would increase by five times over 40 years—and that was one of the imperatives in addressing the reform of the PBS. The key reforms which were initiated by the coalition included the separation of single-brand and multiple-brand medicines into F1 and F2 formularies; statutory price reductions for multiple-brand medicines; a 12½ per cent price reduction when the first bio-equivalent drug for a single-brand medicine was introduced and when a medicine moved from F1 to F2; price disclosure arrangements triggered with the listing of a new brand of medicine; a \$1.50 incentive to community pharmacies to dispense a substitutable premium-free medicine; an incentive payment for community pharmacies to process claims using PBS Online; and additional funding through the community service obligation for pharmaceutical wholesalers who met specific service obligations.

These reforms were successful in ensuring the sustainability of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme but they were not undertaken lightly. They were subject to extensive consultation and negotiation prior to the introduction of any legislation. The legislation before the House, which is the result of a memorandum of understanding between Medicines Australia and the government, has not allowed all parties to have input into the MOU. That is why it is important for the parliament to be able to consider all views before voting on this legislation. The legisla-

tion has been referred to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee, and that committee will report on 16 or 17 November. The opposition believes that, before we give this bill a second reading, we should be able to have the benefit of the views of all parties and all stakeholders. That is why the member for Dickson has moved an amendment which will have the effect of not giving the bill a second reading until the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee has reported.

The opposition have demonstrated in a number of ways that we believe in the sustainability of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. It is important to make sure that the scheme is sustainable but, in such a multibillion-dollar expenditure, it is absolutely critical that the parliament has the benefit of all the information and that we are able to consider that information. That is why the opposition has moved this amendment and supports it.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (6.41 pm)—In summing up, I would like to thank all members who have participated in this debate. The purpose of the National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) Bill 2010 is to deliver a more efficient and sustainable PBS, better value for money for Australian taxpayers and policy stability for the pharmaceuticals sector. We in Australia can be very proud that we have a world-class PBS that provides timely access to medicines for all Australians. The reforms in this bill will guarantee that the PBS continues to provide this essential service to Australians while at the same time ensuring that every precious health dollar is spent effectively.

The proposed changes to pricing policies recognise that competitive pricing already exists in the market for many PBS subsidised medicines, but the changes acknowledge that Australian taxpayers should be benefiting

from this market competition and the lower prices that result from it. The reforms will result in no extra costs for patients. In fact, patients will benefit from price reductions where the price of a medicine falls below the general co-payment amount. The direct saving to consumers from these new measures is independently estimated to save general patients on average close to \$3 per prescription.

During this debate some members have raised the issue of consultation with industry on these reforms. The government negotiated collaboratively and closely with the pharmaceuticals industry to develop these reforms. Both Medicines Australia, which represents about 50 companies, and the Generic Medicines Industry Association, which represents five companies, were involved in discussions with the government and were asked to provide proposals to enhance the sustainability of the PBS. Discussions with Medicines Australia proved to be very fruitful, and the matters agreed between Medicines Australia and the government were ultimately given expression in the memorandum of understanding.

On multiple occasions, GMiA was able to discuss options for reforms to the PBS with the government, including with me, as the minister, in my office and with senior officials of the Department of Health and Ageing. GMiA had a good hearing and the government valued the exchange of views. However, I do need to note here that GMiA's key proposal to the government in these discussions was that patients should be made to pay some \$5 more for off-patent medicines made by originator companies compared to the same drugs made by generic companies. This proposal would have resulted in concessional patients paying nearly twice as much as they currently do for some off-patent medicines. The government could not support this proposal. Notwithstanding these differences of view, the government contin-

ues to work closely with the industry on how these reforms will be implemented, through a working group which includes GMiA, pharmaceutical wholesalers and Medicines Australia.

I also note that it has been suggested that a vote on this bill be deferred until the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee has reported to the Senate on its inquiry into the bill. In fact, I understand that the member for Dickson has now moved such a motion. Of course, this is not the normal procedure which has been followed in the past in the parliament. We are operating in a new parliament and, if that is the will of the House, then so be it. What is being proposed is that the House not pass this legislation while a Senate inquiry is underway. Following the procedures of the past would mean that debates on legislation in the House would be delayed, and usually a Senate inquiry would commence only when legislation moved to the Senate. In recent times, those inquiries have been commencing earlier to enable the quick handling of important matters such as this one. The government would not press for this to be voted on in the Senate before the Senate committee reported on this matter.

We believe that it is an appropriate mechanism for the opposition to reserve its right to state whatever position it likes in the Senate. However, I note that the Liberal opposition have previously indicated that they would support this measure. I do want to record my concerns here that this appears to be an indication that the Liberal Party will oppose this measure with its very significant savings for taxpayers, money which can be used for other important health initiatives, also failing to honour the agreement negotiated and reached with Medicines Australia. We think that the opposition will have plenty of time when the Senate committee reports to the Senate. We will have the capacity to consider those findings when the bill is debated

in the Senate. Any amendments passed by the Senate will come back to the House for consideration.

This is the usual way of doing business. I understand that the Liberal opposition do not want to continue with that being the usual way of doing business. We will make an assessment. As I say, the legislation would not be voted on in the Senate prior to the Senate committee reporting but it would absolutely be our preference that this be noted in the House, that the procedures continue and that an opportunity be provided for the bill to be handled in a prompt way at an appropriate time in the Senate.

I thank Medicines Australia for their very cooperative approach through very difficult negotiations. This was not easy for industry or for the government, but I believe that Medicines Australia has been far-sighted in wanting to protect the interests of its members, particularly in providing innovator drugs and ensuring that the PBS is sustainable in the future. The reforms in this bill support a more sustainable PBS, while providing certainty to industry in relation to medicines pricing policy. This was a key factor for Medicines Australia. These changes will ensure that all Australians can continue to benefit from PBS subsidised medicines now and in the future.

Finally in the debate, some members asked whether these reforms would affect jobs, particularly in generic medicines companies. I would like to emphasise that the key mechanism in the bill, price disclosure, captures the price discounting that already occurs in the market. This discounting is a result of decisions by companies, not by government. The government and taxpayers will simply be paying the average discounted price for pharmaceuticals. The reforms will affect both innovator and generic companies as the majority of medicines that are affected

by price competition are supplied by Medicines Australia member companies. It can be argued that this sector will be more affected by these arrangements than those companies represented by GMiA.

The policy stability encapsulated in the memorandum of understanding provides a secure environment for future investment. For example, Eli Lilly has announced that it will contribute up to US\$50 million to help expand and develop the biotechnology industry in Queensland. Eli Lilly believes the pricing certainty provided by this policy will help to foster investments like this one in Queensland's biotech sector. In addition, there are 19 medicines estimated to come off patent in the next 12 years which cost the PBS \$2.3 billion in 2008-09. Some high-volume drugs will come off patent as early as 2012. Overall, these 19 medicines represent almost 30 per cent of total PBS expenditure and these patent expirees will provide the off-patent sector with significantly increased opportunities to expand their business and jobs.

I commend the bill to the House. It is our preference that the bill be able to proceed to the Senate where it will await the outcome of the Senate inquiry. Obviously, it is a matter for the opposition if they would like to take a different approach. Ultimately, if that is the will of the House, we will be seeking the opposition's support to ensure that the matter can be progressed quickly in the Senate following the tabling of the Senate committee report. I put on record here our concern that the Liberal Party appear to have changed their position, putting at risk nearly \$2 billion worth of savings over the next forward estimates period.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georgas)—The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Dickson has moved

as an amendment that all words after 'That' be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The question now is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question. There being more than one voice calling for a division, in accordance with standing order 133(b) the division is deferred until after 7.30 pm.

Debate adjourned.

**TAX LAWS AMENDMENT
(CONFIDENTIALITY OF TAXPAYER
INFORMATION) BILL 2010**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 29 September, on motion by **Mr Shorten**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (6.50 pm)—I rise to speak on the Tax Laws Amendment (Confidentiality of Taxpayer Information) Bill 2010. As members of the House would be aware, this bill was introduced in the first week of sittings. The Tax Laws Amendment (Confidentiality of Taxpayer Information) Bill 2009 collapsed prior to the election. It was introduced in November 2009 by the now Minister for Trade, the member for Rankin, then as Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy and Minister Assisting the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. The 2009 bill followed, as the Assistant Treasurer pointed out in his introductory speech, a long period of consultation which really began some years earlier.

The bill was referred to the Senate Economics Legislation Committee, which reported in March of this year. I will come back to that because the relevant Senate committee examined the bill in great detail. As the Assistant Treasurer has pointed out, the purpose of the bill is to consolidate the tax secrecy and disclosure provisions that are in his words 'scattered across 18 taxation

acts'. The purpose and the aim is to consolidate that into a single framework. He outlined that purpose during his speech and I have to say on behalf of the shadow Assistant Treasurer, Senator Cormann, whom I am representing at this time, that the coalition of course supports the principles that underpin this bill. We support the consolidation and voiced that when we were in government. In fact, I think it was in 2006 that the public consultation process on just this sort of outcome commenced.

As I said, the bill that proposes this new framework to 'protect the confidentiality of taxpayer information' was subject to considerable inquiry by the Senate committee and that Senate committee reported some months ago, in March of this year. The new framework places a general prohibition on the disclosure of taxpayer information and, as I have said, we support this intent. We support effective attempts to provide taxpayers, the ATO and stakeholders with important clarity and certainty about tax laws.

I will surmise briefly because the bill is quite technical. The bill does permit the disclosure of taxpayer information among government agencies where the public benefit associated with such a disclosure outweighs the need for taxpayer privacy. Such a determination is to be made with regard to the purpose for which the information is to be used, the potential impact on the individual from the disclosure and the subsequent use of the information and whether the new disclosure would represent a significant departure from existing disclosure provisions.

The coalition agrees that effective enforcement of the law might warrant transfer of such information on occasions. However, we would hope and expect that the government would think that this parliament must be vigorous in ensuring that the legislation is subject to appropriate safeguards. The con-

cern of the coalition—and this was voiced many, many months ago in that Senate inquiry, which is why I quite specifically referred to it in my opening remarks—has always been that the legislation as currently drafted does not provide all the safeguards it could and should. Indeed, the Senate inquiry report raised two issues—one unanimously and the other by the minority coalition senators. The first issue relates to the taxpayer privacy specifically but is about the authorisation by a tax officer. The report states in paragraph 3.9 on page 15:

The bill in its current form is silent as to who will make the determination that a specific disclosure is required on the basis that the public benefit of the disclosure outweighs a taxpayer's privacy. In their submission to the inquiry, the Rule of Law Association of Australia (RoLAA) suggested that such a decision should rest with a senior Tax Officer with at least the classification of Assistant Commissioner. RoLAA further suggested that the officer responsible for making this decision should be required to be independent of the particular business line area which is seeking to disclose the information to ensure impartiality.

That Senate committee, comprising Labor and coalition members and—now I look at the membership of that committee—Independent senator Nick Xenophon, reported unanimously that:

... the Government consider amending the bill to reflect that in instances where a determination as to whether the public benefit of a proposed disclosure outweighs taxpayer privacy concerns needs to be made, any decision is required to be made by an appropriately authorised tax officer.

The bill does not do that as it stands today in its current form. To quote the Senate committee:

The bill in its current form is silent on that issue. That was so compelling to the members of that committee that there was a unanimous recommendation to include additional safeguards in this bill.

The government's response as far as we can tell, as far as Senator Cormann can tell and as far as his other coalition Senate colleagues can tell, was to remain silent on their own silence in the legislation. To our reckoning the government has not responded to that in any way, shape or form. In fact, when the Assistant Treasurer introduced this bill again in the first week of sittings just a few weeks ago, he referred to the committee report. He said it had been considered by the Senate Economics Committee which recommended it be passed by parliament. He, for whatever reason, failed to mention the other recommendation that the government consider amending the bill to correct this deficiency. The Labor senators on that committee—Senator Hurley, Senator Cameron and Senator Pratt—sat through the hearings, read the submissions and came to the view, which the coalition still holds today, that the bill should be amended. From March 2010 through to the election, the former Assistant Treasurer ignored that recommendation. With the reintroduction of this legislation in this new parliament following the election, the new minister has unfortunately also ignored this recommendation. He referred to the Senate Standing Committee of Privileges, which suggested some amendments, and points out in his speech that those amendments have been adopted, but he is silent on that unanimous recommendation.

The second recommendation within that Senate Economics Committee report—I stress this was a recommendation by coalition senators in additional comments—related to another safeguard issue. It obviously reaffirmed the support of those senators for the unanimous recommendation, but it also raised another important issue that had come to light during the course of the inquiry, which was that with this act, with this consolidation and with these changes there should be regular reviews and regular report-

ing on the operation of these new provisions and the act itself. Given the issues at stake, which are recognised by everyone in this parliament I would have thought, it is important that there should be that sort of safeguard put in place. In particular it would be for the Commissioner of Taxation to prepare and furnish to the minister a report every two years on how the act is working and on some of the detail behind the decisions taken under the powers within the act. The intention is that the minister receive this report as soon as the commissioner is reasonably able to provide it after 30 June every second year. That report should also ultimately, after a short period of time, be tabled in the parliament. That was an important safeguard that coalition senators recommended in their additional comments in the report way back in March.

I make those very detailed points because the government has had every opportunity to respond to the Senate committee report. It may well be the case that the government was of a mind to simply ignore the Senate committee report and to ignore the considered views of its own senators. The point for this parliament is that those safeguard amendments have been there on the public record for six months or so and the government, in reintroducing the bill, was either ignorant of them or arrogantly dismissive of them, but at no point has it sought to actually address them.

As I said at the outset, this is an important bill. It brings together and consolidates 18 separate acts of parliament that currently contain the powers and it adds some new ones as well. But, as with any bill, it is never right the first time. The government knows this and the Assistant Treasurer will get to know this very well. Later in the week we will be debating a tax law amendment bill and tax law amendment bills contain all manner of things. They contain changes the

government has implemented. They contain the implementation of new policies. But they also contain corrections, adjustments and rectifications of errors made in previous legislation.

This legislation has been a long time coming. There has been public consultation and the Senate inquiry at the start of the year was a very important part of it. But the government should listen to the senators who worked on that inquiry. They have ignored the report and they have ignored, with respect to one of the recommendations, their own senators.

The coalition think the government should put in place these appropriate safeguards. On behalf of the coalition and my colleague Senator Cormann, who has followed these issues very closely and who, of course, will deal with them in the other place, I will move two amendments that give effect to precisely these two issues that we regard as important. We regard the safeguards as issues that the government has ignored and we will move the amendments in the hope that the government sees and accepts the need for some improvements on a bill that all members of parliament, I am confident in saying, would regard as an important and necessary piece of legislation. It would be a very arrogant and ignorant government that automatically began this new parliament by doing what they did in the last parliament, which was to ignore the need for these safeguards.

We have some more speakers in this debate but I will circulate the amendments that give effect to those two issues, which I do so on behalf of the coalition and Senator Cormann, the shadow Assistant Treasurer. And I call on the government to accept the need for these safeguards in a spirit that recognises that difficult and complex pieces of legislation need safeguards in place. So often we come back to legislation again and again,

particularly in relation to tax law, to try and correct things that could have been dealt with earlier on.

I sense that we will return to this issue tomorrow, given the hour of the day, but I will circulate the amendments. We urge the government to consider them and to consider the need for them, to see commonsense and not to ignore the bipartisan work of that Senate committee. I refer there, of course, to the unanimous recommendation.

No doubt I will be here at this dispatch box again tomorrow addressing these issues. I know there are some additional speakers in the debate tonight prior to 7.30 pm but I will leave the amendments on the table on behalf of the coalition and urge the government to do what it has not done up until now and that is to address those issues.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (7.12 pm)—I speak in support of the Tax Laws Amendment (Confidentiality of Taxpayer Information) Bill 2010. This bill gets the balancing act of the legitimate right of Australian taxpayers to privacy and the public benefit in disclosure of information right, particularly for organisations such as the Australian Taxation Office and ASIC in areas involving fraudulent or criminal activity.

For a long time we have seen names and phrases seeping into the knowledge and understanding of Australian business, accountants and taxpayers such as ‘bottom of the harbour schemes’, ‘Operation Wickenby’ and ‘phoenix activity’. Names like that get out into the public and people start to understand.

No-one wants to see the Australian taxpayer ripped off. When people lose faith in the taxation system and do not pay taxes the Australian public suffers and then we do not have the financial integrity and capacity to deliver on health and hospital services, roads and community infrastructure, education and

defence or on other things that matter to the Australian public.

We want to make sure we have a taxation system that people respect, that people feel they can trust, that the normal pursuits of their business and domestic activities can be undertaken and that the information they provide to the Australian Taxation Office in the normal course of their domestic and business arrangements will not be disclosed. There is a public interest in terms of privacy, but a public interest conflicting in terms of the need to disclose information to prevent criminal and fraudulent activity, which will be injurious to the Australian taxation system and to our financial and community life. How to balance this conflict is always difficult.

The legislation before us has aspirational provisions. I am a lawyer of longstanding. I love aspirational paragraphs at the beginning of subdivisions and divisions because they say a lot about what that piece of legislation purports to do. They can, by the way, also influence how judges, magistrates and other judicial officers as well as the public generally interpret that legislation. The objects of the relevant divisions in this legislation talk about the need to protect confidentiality of taxpayers' affairs. It imposes strict obligation on Taxation officers and others who acquire protected tax information and encourages taxpayers to provide correct information to the Commissioner of Taxation. We need to do that. The commissioner cannot do his job if people do not provide accurate information. There is a need to facilitate efficient and effective government administration and law enforcement by allowing disclosures of protected tax information for specific and appropriate purposes.

Statutory law revision is not a particularly sexy thing. It is not the most inspiring and interesting thing that captures the imagina-

tion of the political commentariate. The fact that we have no-one except an AAP journalist up in the gallery is an indication that this is not the sort of legislation that inspires the editor of the *Australian* to put it on the front page their paper. I do not see members of the *Fin* talking about this stuff in their paper. I do not expect to see the member for Casey's learned and lucid comments on the front page of the *Australian Financial Review* tomorrow. However, this is really important stuff; it really is. We have seen different drafting styles, terminology and nomenclature across a variety of pieces of legislation. What we are doing here is bringing it all into one piece of legislation. We are bringing some sense and simplicity into the disclosure provisions with respect to taxpayer information.

Statutory law revision is an ongoing process. The member for Casey is right: we amend lots of tax laws through schedules. Tax laws amendment bills are the most common pieces of legislation put forward in this House. Taxation law in this country has long reminded us of the need to protect the fundamental rights of the Australian public with respect to confidence in the operation of the system and to privacy. I am a supporter of a bill or a charter of rights. I said in my maiden speech years ago that I thought that was important. The protection of the privacy of taxpayers with respect to the pursuit of their ordinary businesses is really important.

The new framework contained in the legislation continues to prohibit through the provision of criminal offences the unauthorised disclosure of taxpayer information obtained by officials and others. It provides some standardised definitions on issues of tax law, which overcome eccentricities, idiosyncrasies and ambiguities. We have not really broadened the disclosure provisions in this legislation. It is not the intention of the legislation to rewrite the whole tax law or to pro-

vide the kind of breadth of revision that the member for Casey seems to be asking us to do. This legislation is a matter of clarification and definition. Clear rules are necessary for ongoing disclosure, and of course we have made it an offence for people to disclose information.

There is some history to this legislation; it goes back some time. It is not something that we thought up or that came to our knowledge the day after the election. This legislation has come as a result of a review of taxation secrecy and disclosure provisions undertaken by Treasury in the days of the Howard government in 2006. An exposure draft to the bill was made available when we were in power, back in March 2009. The acceptance of the recommendations of the Treasury review was made by the then Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs, the Hon. Chris Bowen, MP. Many submissions were made to that initial review. According to my research, close to 40 submissions supported the idea of consolidation into a code to make sure that we could go to one place to see what the legislation provided. Governments took up the mantle accordingly. There was an exposure draft, which received an additional 12 submissions in which concerns were outlined in relation to it. There was a Senate Economics Committee inquiry into the legislation, which the member for Casey talked about. He would know very well that not every report made by a committee inquiry, bipartisan or otherwise, results in the government of the day, regardless of which side of politics is in power and sitting on the Treasury benches, accepting every single one of its recommendations.

The purpose of this legislation is to provide consolidation and codification. It provides a comprehensive solution to the problem. It is not about rewriting tax laws or the Income Tax Act, which should not be meas-

ured by words but by weight—it is so heavy. Taxation law affects all of us. I would say that no piece of legislation affects more Australians than the Income Tax Assessment Act. It certainly affects more Australians than any criminal code or criminal law of any state, WorkCover legislation or the child support regime under the Family Law Act. It covers all of it. Every taxpayer in the country is affected by the Income Tax Assessment Act and by the need for confidentiality and security under that law. There are benefits to this legislation. There are benefits to getting rid of inconsistency. There are benefits to making sure that there is a new framework that provides for prescribed offences, serious offences, that will act as a disincentive for taxation officials and others to misuse taxpayer information.

But there are also in the bill some new disclosure provisions in which the public benefit does outweigh taxpayer privacy, and they relate to information to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, ASIC. I think they are important. I think we need to give ASIC greater powers to deal with areas of corporation difficulties, director malfeasance and taxation investigation because clearly large companies and wealthy individuals can get access to the kinds of information and assistance through accounting and legal advice that the average taxpayer cannot access. Having been involved in my old law firm in lots of different cases involving taxpayers in litigation, I can say that we need to empower ASIC with greater capacity to get information to ensure that fraudulent phoenix activity and other kinds of activity which are harmful to the Australian taxation system and its integrity and operation can be investigated. I am very happy to support legislation that will simplify and make more consistent taxation law in this country and I commend the legislation to the House.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (7.23 pm)—I rise to support my colleague the member for Casey and, indeed, Senator Cormann in the other chamber on the Tax Laws Amendment (Confidentiality of Taxpayer Information) Bill 2010. As I understand it, this bill—and I appreciate that I have not been in this parliament very long—has gone out for consultation. One thing that we have been instructed on very clearly over the last few weeks is that this is the House, this is the chamber, which takes on board input from the community, input from inquiries, and this is the place to make amendments and to make them now before they go out into the public when it is too late and becomes too difficult. It strikes me that this is a very clear case where, once again, the Labor government has not listened to the recommendations, has not listened to the response and has not listened to the inputs.

These are fairly basic safeguards which it is imperative that we put in place at this time. Indeed, they are the recommendations of not just coalition senators but Labor senators as well. This is the opportunity and this is the time that we should act. In this legislation I am advised that we are looking at amalgamating several tax laws—up to 18 different ones—that are often unclear and inconsistent. In principle, we support these initiatives which seek to consolidate taxation secrecy and disclosure provisions that are currently found in numerous taxation laws into one identifiable and accessible framework. This process started when we were in government in 2006 and we began to address this issue. In fact, it was the then Treasurer, Peter Costello, who announced a review and released a discussion paper entitled *Review of taxation secrecy and disclosure provisions for public consultation*. Following that review in 2009, the Assistant Treasurer announced a draft bill to implement a consolidated framework calling extensively upon

the work of the then Treasurer to govern the protection and disclosure of taxpayer information received from the Australian Taxation Office. In March 2010, the Senate Economics Legislation Committee handed down its report into this bill. The coalition supports the intent of this bill. However, this side of the chamber is extremely concerned that the Gillard Labor government has failed to recognise the appropriate safeguards as decided after extensive consultation by the Senate Economics Legislation Committee.

I appreciate that the member for Blair suggests that the AAP is the only media outlet interested in this bill, but I can assure this chamber that if these safeguard provisions are not acted upon it will be on the front page of every newspaper when something goes wrong later down the track; it will not just be AAP who are interested in making sure that the appropriate safeguards are in place. In his second reading speech the then minister declared it was not the intention of this bill to broaden the circumstances in which information could be disclosed. While this rhetoric may suffice, what remains clear is that the bill is silent on how safeguards relating to the release of information should be strengthened.

I am very proud to say that the Howard government believed in reform and did not just talk about it. Like so many of the former coalition government achievements, our policy work and initiative in the area of tax reform came about through the determination, strength and leadership of John Howard and Peter Costello. Unfortunately, and regrettably, the Labor way is to stall, talk, re-evaluate, send the problem to a committee, leave it in the too hard basket and then talk about it some more, perhaps get a community committee in place, bring them all to Canberra, talk about it and delay it. This is in stark contrast to the Liberal-National path which is about solutions, action and results,

not just Labor spin. We believe in actual outcomes for hardworking Australians.

This bill also proposes a new framework to ‘protect the confidentiality of taxpayer information’. It places a general prohibition on the disclosure of taxpayer information—something that is long overdue and needed. As I said before, the coalition supports the intent of this bill. We support effective attempts to provide taxpayers, the ATO and stakeholders with clarity and certainty about the tax laws. The bill does not permit disclosure of taxpayer information among government agencies, whether or not the public benefit associated with the disclosure outweighs the need for taxpayer privacy. Such a determination is to be made with regard to the purpose for which the information is to be used, the potential impact on the individual from the disclosure and subsequent use of the information and whether the new disclosure would represent a significant departure from existing disclosure provisions.

The coalition agrees that effective enforcement of the law might warrant transfer of such information on occasion. However, it must be subject to appropriate safeguards. We are concerned that the Gillard Labor government has ignored the findings of a Senate Economics Legislation Committee inquiry into this bill on how these safeguards should be appropriately strengthened.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! It being 7.30 pm, the debate is interrupted.

**NATIONAL HEALTH AMENDMENT
(PHARMACEUTICAL BENEFITS
SCHEME) BILL 2010**

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—In accordance with standing order 133(b), I shall now proceed to put the ques-

tion on the motion moved earlier today by the honourable member for Dickson, on which a division was called, for the deferral in accordance with the standing order. No further debate is allowed. The question is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

The House divided. [7.34 pm]

(The Deputy Speaker—Hon. BC Scott)

| | |
|---------------|-----------|
| Ayes..... | 72 |
| Noes..... | <u>70</u> |
| Majority..... | <u>2</u> |

AYES

| | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| Adams, D.G.H. | Albanese, A.N. |
| Bandt, A. | Bird, S. |
| Bowen, C. | Bradbury, D.J. |
| Brodtmann, G. | Burke, A.E. |
| Burke, A.S. | Butler, M.C. |
| Byrne, A.M. | Champion, N. |
| Cheeseman, D.L. | Clare, J.D. |
| Collins, J.M. | Combet, G. |
| Crean, S.F. | D'Ath, Y.M. |
| Danby, M. | Dreyfus, M.A. |
| Elliot, J. | Ellis, K. |
| Emerson, C.A. | Ferguson, L.D.T. |
| Ferguson, M.J. | Fitzgibbon, J.A. |
| Garrett, P. | Georganas, S. |
| Gibbons, S.W. | Gillard, J.E. |
| Gray, G. | Grierson, S.J. |
| Griffin, A.P. | Hall, J.G. * |
| Hayes, C.P. * | Husic, E. |
| Jones, S. | King, C.F. |
| Leigh, A. | Livermore, K.F. |
| Lyons, G. | Macklin, J.L. |
| Marles, R.D. | McClelland, R.B. |
| Melham, D. | Mitchell, R. |
| Murphy, J. | Neumann, S.K. |
| O'Connor, B.P. | O'Neill, D. |
| Oakeshott, R.J.M. | Owens, J. |
| Parke, M. | Perrett, G.D. |
| Ripoll, B.F. | Rishworth, A.L. |
| Rowland, M. | Roxon, N.L. |
| Saffin, J.A. | Shorten, W.R. |
| Sidebottom, S. | Smith, S.F. |
| Smyth, L. | Snowdon, W.E. |
| Swan, W.M. | Symon, M. |
| Thomson, C. | Thomson, K.J. |

Vamvakinou, M.
Windsor, A.H.C.

NOES

Abbott, A.J.
Andrews, K.
Baldwin, R.C.
Bishop, B.K.
Broadbent, R.
Chester, D.
Ciobo, S.M.
Coulton, M. *
Dutton, P.C.
Fletcher, P.
Frydenberg, J.
Gash, J.
Haase, B.W.
Hockey, J.B.
Jensen, D.
Katter, R.C.
Kelly, C.
Ley, S.P.
Marino, N.B.
Matheson, R.
Mirabella, S.
Moylan, J.E.
O'Dowd, K.
Prentice, J.
Ramsey, R.
Robb, A.
Roy, Wyatt
Schultz, A.
Simpkins, L.
Smith, A.D.H.
Southcott, A.J.
Tehan, D.
Tudge, A.
Van Manen, B.
Washer, M.J.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—It being past 7.30 pm, proceedings are interrupted in accordance with standing order 34.

Wilkie, A.
Zappia, A.

**INTERNATIONAL TAX AGREEMENTS
AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2) 2010**

**PROTECTION OF THE SEA
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
BILL 2010**

**PRIMARY INDUSTRIES (EXCISE)
LEVIES AMENDMENT BILL 2010**

**NATIONAL SECURITY LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL 2010**

**PARLIAMENTARY JOINT
COMMITTEE ON LAW
ENFORCEMENT BILL 2010**

**OZONE PROTECTION AND
SYNTHETIC GREENHOUSE GAS
MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT
BILL 2010**

Referred to Main Committee

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (7.44 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the following bills be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration:

International Tax Agreements Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2010;

Protection of the Sea Legislation Amendment Bill 2010;

Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment Bill 2010;

National Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2010;

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement Bill 2010; and

Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas Management Amendment Bill 2010.

Question agreed to.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS
Youth Allowance**

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (7.45 pm)—I move:

That this House:

(1) require the Government:

(a) urgently to introduce legislation to reinstate the former workplace participation

criteria for independent youth allowance, to apply to students whose family home is located in inner regional areas as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics instrument Australian Standard Geographical Classification; and

(b) to appropriate funds necessary to meet the additional cost of expanding the criteria for participation, with the funds to come from the Education Investment Fund; and

(2) send a message to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting its concurrence.

I put this motion on behalf of every student in Australia whose higher education is being so badly affected by the Labor government's changes to accessing youth allowance due to the unfair Australian Standard Geographical Classification of 'inner regional'. The Prime Minister herself is responsible for introducing these changes as the education minister and I am asking the Prime Minister and all parliamentarians for fairness and equity of access for the thousands of regional students who have to relocate to attend tertiary education who are currently classified as 'inner regional'. Put simply, I am asking whether members of this parliament believe in a fair go for rural and regional students and their families or whether this parliament will continue to discriminate against these same students and families.

Thousands of regional students around Australia have no choice but to relocate to study, which means that they and their families face significantly increased costs from having to live away from home. We all know that regional students are significantly under-represented in tertiary education. Fifty-five per cent of metropolitan students go on to tertiary education, compared to only 33 per cent of students from regional areas. Most importantly, evidence has shown that it is the financial barrier of the cost of relocating that

prevents more regional students from undertaking tertiary study, and that is why this motion is so important. The Labor government has altered the eligibility criteria for independent youth allowance, which effectively forces students from areas identified as inner regional to work more hours for a longer period. Inner regional students must work an average of 30 hours per week for 18 months out of two years.

Students classified as 'outer regional', 'remote' or 'very remote' have three alternative ways of qualifying for youth allowance, including only having to take one gap year. Students defined as 'inner regional' cannot. Inner regional students have to take at least 18 months away from tertiary education or training. For set courses at university that have no mid-year intake—like medicine, law, veterinary science and many others—students are now forced to take two years away, and that is a long time. Unfortunately, many students will simply not come back to their studies at all. The Labor government is clearly discriminating against students from areas they have classified as 'inner regional' in electorates around Australia. For instance, nearly three-quarters of my own electorate has been classed as inner regional and one-quarter as outer regional. Yet none of my electorate is within daily commuting distance of the metropolitan area, with some at least 220 kilometres from a metropolitan tertiary institution.

If the government agrees to this motion, inner regional students will only have to take a 12-month gap year, rather than two years. We currently have a totally inequitable situation where students from the same year 12 class in schools like Busselton and Dunsborough find that some of them qualify for independent youth allowance under one criterion of outer regional, while others do not qualify because they are classified as inner regional. They live metres apart perhaps but

220-odd kilometres from a tertiary education or training facility and both have to leave home to study. One will qualify for youth allowance with a single gap year; the other is now forced to take two gap years. This is inequitable and unfair. It is a ridiculous situation where students are discriminated against and treated differently because of a line drawn on a map based on an assumption that finding 30 hours of work a week in a regional area for 18 months is easy. And where are the jobs for these young people? Those of us who understand regional Australia know that these are often at best seasonal employment areas in tourism, agriculture and hospitality—if there are jobs at all. Even worse, under the current rules the government will calculate the hours a student has worked in 13-week blocks. The student must work 390 hours in each 13-week block. How does the student fulfil this requirement under seasonal work conditions only?

The Victorian parliament's Education and Training Committee report was supported unanimously and commented on the government's youth allowance measures that 'the Committee believes that the removal of the main workforce participation route will have a disastrous effect on young people in rural and regional areas'. We need to act, and nothing the government has proposed is addressing the disadvantage of these students and families. I am hearing this from my constituents all of the time. I constantly hear what I call 'horror stories' from students and families who are struggling financially to cover the costs of having young people living away from home to study, parents trying to find extra hours of work or take on a second job just to fund their children's education. There is the horror story of parents who are having to choose which one of their children they can afford to send to university. This is 2010—it is not acceptable to limit the educational opportunities of our young peo-

ple to one child in a family simply because the family lives in regional Australia.

One father wrote to me saying: 'Along with many others I think that this package ignores many country children. In our particular situation Busselton is classed as inner regional, yet 20 minutes down the road at Yallingup, those families qualify. Hard to figure how we can be in the same category as Mandurah where students can be in Perth on the train in 45 minutes.' Another parent said: 'Our daughter Grace completed year 12 in 2009 and this year is taking a gap year prior to starting university in 2011. We are devastated to find out that she will qualify for absolutely no allowances or scholarships as we do not meet the new criteria. We believe this location categorisation is outright discrimination. We have to relocate her, she will have to find employment to supplement her living expenses and these costs are substantial. I believe this decision will have an adverse effect on where people choose to reside.' Another parent said, 'This inequity for non-remote rural inhabitants will result in them making hard decisions as to whether their children are actually able to attend university.'

One concerned mother from my electorate wrote directly to the Prime Minister. She said:

My question to you is WHY? Please, please explain to me the government's reasoning. My daughter was prepared to work 42 to 45 hours per week over 12 months to complete the required hours. Why is this not good enough?—

I would have to ask the same thing: why is this not good enough?—

She has worked hard at school to get the marks to go to university in Perth to study Architecture or Engineering.

She has 'lined up' 2 jobs by working part time while in year 12, in order to be able to start work as soon as school finishes. She is prepared to work 7 days a week if necessary. But the new

way of working out ‘average’ hours means she would have to still be working 30 hours a week when she starts university, impossible with a heavy study work load.

Another family said

I have already seen a change in people’s university plans.

Most have lost all hope of their children being able to access youth allowance and many are encouraging their children to go to the local TAFE instead.

It is generally agreed that one gap year is okay, but any longer than that and there is very little chance the kids will go to uni as they are established with whatever they are doing.

It is hard for us seeing all those city kids taking for granted the fact they can go straight to uni from school and live at home. It is such a huge advantage for them.

I will finish with this email from a very worried parent:

I have no idea how we will find \$15,000 per annum so our daughter can fulfil her university dreams. And what about our 3rd child? We will then be having to find an extra \$30 000 per annum to support both of them in Perth.

What are we supposed to do?

It is like a return to the olden days when families could only afford to send one child through education (my parents era) and the others had to do without.

I am asking members of this parliament not to discriminate, to allow equity of access to Youth Allowance for students and families in regional and rural areas in Australia.

I said to the mother who said to me that she would have to choose which one of her children would go to university that I was committing to her that I would fight this issue on behalf of all students who are affected by this inner regional classification. To those who have no option but to relocate to pursue their higher education dreams I say that I will continue this fight on their behalf. I seriously ask the House to support this motion

and I urge all regional members to stand up for their constituents. This is so important. And it is also important that these young people qualify as doctors. We are short of GPs in regional areas. These young people are ideal to come back to our areas and practice as GPs in underserved areas. I ask all members of this House and all regional members to stand up for their constituents and support this motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Is the motion seconded?

Mr Ramsey—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (7.55 pm)—The member for Forrest and I have some things in common and one of them is a passion for education and our grief when we see people not being given the opportunity to fulfil their potential. In my community in Western Sydney young people enrol at university at just over half the rate for the rest of Sydney. In the ten years of the previous government we saw the gap between enrolment rates in Western Sydney and the rest of Sydney actually widen. We saw a decrease in enrolment from people of low socioeconomic status and a decrease in enrolment from our Indigenous communities, all of which should be regretted. They are things that we need to change profoundly.

Prime Minister Gillard holds as one of her core beliefs the transformative power of good education, and I share this passion. In fact I believe that if Australia wants to continue our currently outstanding economic performance we have no choice but to drive investment participation and productivity in higher education. The Gillard Labor government will not accept anything less than a high-growth, highly skilled, high-wage economy for Australia’s future. To deliver this we need to broaden our skills base. Put simply, we need more people from a greater

variety of backgrounds to be given a chance to possess higher skills and higher qualifications. This is the context in which the government's reforms to the youth allowance system became of critical importance. These reforms to the youth allowance system were all about driving increased participation in higher education.

The previous government left behind an incoherent and poorly targeted system of youth allowance that was completely lacking in policy direction. The Bradley review of higher education found that 18 per cent of students who were living at home and were receiving Youth Allowance because they were considered independent were from families with incomes above \$150,000. Ten per cent were from families with incomes above \$200,000 and three per cent were from families with incomes above \$300,000. Professor Bruce Chapman, carrying out a review of HILDA data, found that 36 per cent of Youth Allowance recipients were in households earning more than \$100,000 a year. By contrast, 32 per cent of recipients were in households earning less than \$50,000 a year. The number of students qualifying as independent by earning the required minimum income of \$18,500 between school and university rose by 27.7 per cent between 2001 and 2007, but the number of dependent students who passed the critical parental income test fell by 21 per cent over the same period. So people from a lower socioeconomic status were choosing well and truly to withdraw from the possibilities of higher education.

By 2007 the number of students who qualified as independent by working, often during a gap year, exceeded the number of students eligible as dependent because of low family income. At the same time rural and low-SES participation was falling. Participation by regional young people was falling under the old system, not rising. Participation of regional students at university fell

to 18.8 per cent by 2007 compared with 25.4 per cent of the population and the remote participation rate fell to 1.1 per cent compared to 2.5 per cent of the population. Low-SES participation languished at around 15 per cent compared to 25 per cent of the population.

Bernard Lane, commenting for the *Australian* in 2008, said:

The Youth Allowance program appears to have lost its rationale, as a growing number of university students from affluent backgrounds sidestep the parental income test.

Soon after that, Mr Lane received support from the then opposition spokesperson for education, Tony Smith, who called for a review of the youth allowance, saying it had become 'too easy for students from affluent backgrounds to qualify'. Speaking at a gathering of Liberal students at the Australian National University in 2008, Mr Smith said, 'The program, introduced by the Howard government, should be reviewed,' and went on to argue:

The evidence seems to suggest that it has become too easy for students from affluent backgrounds to qualify and too difficult for students from modest backgrounds—or can I say anyone from a family whose parents earn more than \$30,750—to qualify.

Mr Smith continued:

This shows up in the figures, with the number of students qualifying for Youth Allowance under this threshold actually falling by 22 per cent since 2001.

Mr Smith concluded his remarks with reference to the particularly adverse affects of the Howard system on country areas. He said:

It particularly disadvantages many students—particularly those from the country—who have to leave home to study, and has resulted in a situation where record numbers of students, or around one in 10 students in my home state of Victoria, defer their studies with many of them taking a year off to earn enough money to qualify for in-

dependence for Youth Allowance and possibly not returning to study.

This federal Labor government could not support this incoherent and poorly targeted system, which saw participation rates fall for the people who needed our help the most and financial windfalls for the better off who would be attending university regardless. Parramatteans were particularly horrified by this waste, because at that time they were seeing declining investment in our university and falling participation rates across the west generally.

This system of youth allowance existed side by side with declining investment and declining enrolments in my electorate. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations figures show that the number of students commencing courses at the University of Western Sydney in 2006 was down 11.5 per cent on the previous year, and the total number of students attending the University of Western Sydney in 2006 was also one per cent down on 2005 numbers—again, an outcome which is not acceptable to this side of the House. Both regional enrolments and enrolments in the poorer areas of our cities were in decline—something that we had to reverse and reverse quickly.

We had a lot to clean up and a backlog in investment, but now we have a youth allowance policy which is coherent with national objectives—policy that realises that spending has its limits and makes sure that the priorities are right. Our changes to youth allowance particularly benefit students who have to move away from home to study and students from low-income backgrounds. The age at which a person is automatically independent is changing. It will be phased down from 25, where it is now, to 22 by 2012, at a rate of one year per year. This change means that more young people will be eligible for youth allowance and that many existing

youth allowance recipients will receive a higher rate of payment.

Under the government's new arrangements, many students who previously had to prove independence will now be able to access support automatically as dependants through the raised parental income test. Those who have worked full time and are independent of their parents can still access support in this way. The annual parental income test threshold for dependent youth allowance recipients to get the maximum rate will increase from \$32,800, where it is now, to \$44,165 per year, making more young people entitled to youth allowance and many people who are already receiving youth allowance receiving a higher rate of payment.

The parental income reduction for youth allowance has changed from a taper rate of 25 per cent per person to a family taper of 20 per cent—again, reducing the effect of parental income on a youth allowance recipient, particularly where the parent has more than one child. The parental income cut-off for a family is substantially raised. For a family with two children living away from home, the parental income cut-off point is raised to almost \$141,000 per year, up from \$79,000 under the previous government. These changes are allowing 68,000 students to become eligible for income support payments and will result in higher payments for a further 34,600. Again, these changes will impact in areas where enrolment rates were in decline under the old system.

We are also raising the personal income-free area for youth allowance and Austudy students and new apprentices. It will rise from \$236 to \$400 per fortnight. Students and apprentices will therefore be able earn up to \$400 per fortnight without having their payments reduced. All students receiving youth allowance while undertaking an approved course are receiving a student start-

up scholarship. In 2010, the scholarship will be \$2,254 for the year and will be paid in two annual instalments. This scholarship is benefiting 146,600 students in 2010—28 times more than the number of equivalent scholarships that were provided when the government came to power. DEEWR estimates that by 2012 a total of 172,000 students will benefit from this additional assistance, which will help students meet the costs of books, equipment and lump sum expenses in each year of their course. Unlike the previous system, where the number of scholarships was limited and many eligible students missed out, under the new system the scholarships will be administered by Centrelink and all eligible students will receive a scholarship. So there have been many, many changes that have increased the amount of allowances paid to students who are in most need. (*Time expired*)

Mr HAASE (Durack) (8.05 pm)—I rise this evening in strong support of the motion moved by the member for Forrest on the youth allowance criteria. This is not, as has perhaps been alluded to by the member for Parramatta, about statistics. It is not about spin. It is not about what was done in the past and excuses for not doing something in the future. This whole issue is about equity. It is about a fair go for rural families who have students who aspire to attending tertiary education. The past has seen government assistance for those primary school students and secondary school students who necessarily have to board away from home. When they achieve well with that government support, they are left absolutely high and dry with nothing once they aspire to attending tertiary institutions.

If they live more than a reasonable daily travelling distance from an institution they need to be supported so as to create a level playing field equal to all metropolitan students around this great nation, and right now

that is not the case. A classic example of the inequity: any family group that is living in one of the very many prosperous areas in regional Western Australia has an income that is far in excess of this paltry \$44,000 allowance before youth allowance is reduced. It is laughable. The cost of living in these high-wage areas is comparatively the same as in the low-wage areas. It is a nonsense to simply talk about these people being incredibly wealthy and therefore having excessive disposable income because they earn in excess of \$44,000. It is a ludicrous sum. What is required here is equity. Government assistance ought to be given to those whose schooling in primary and secondary years has created a situation where they might reasonably aspire to obtaining a degree. We talk about the lack of professionals in regional and remote areas and yet we do nothing to encourage them back to those areas. If you are a star scholar and you want to get tertiary institution training, you ought to be encouraged to go back to your regional homeland and contribute to that community. Right now there is nothing, and there ought to be.

There ought to be a tertiary access allowance that is not anything to do with whether or not you are an independent student. There is a whole list in the department as to how you might qualify as an independent student and therefore be entitled to an allowance, but you should not have to be an independent student simply because you do not live within cooee of an institution. This government ought to come of age, look to its conscience and see how they can justify treating those who live outside metropolitan areas as second-rate citizens. There ought to be support given to all of our youth who have done the right thing in their schooling years and aspire to being professionals, enabling them to go back into our regional and remote areas to make a contribution. To that end, to carry on and talk about the fine minutiae of why

we can and cannot do particular things with our metropolitan students and what paltry allowances we make for outer regional and remote students is an absolute nonsense. This debate is about equity. It is about fairness. It is about doing the right thing so as to empower our youth to go back and serve their community. Anything less than the creation of a tertiary access allowance will be seen to be paltry and insufficient, and anyone who has spent any time with families who have come from those areas where there is no tertiary institution know that that is what they expect from government. It is not an unreasonable expectation.

Something ought to be done, because to hear continual bleating from the government about how many more students have now been included because the parental income per family has been raised to \$44,000 is an absolute nonsense. You cannot afford to live in most of my areas unless you are earning well in excess of \$44,000. It is time the government woke up and did something to display their humility and to create a level of equity for all Australian youth.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (8.11 pm)—I welcome the motion from the member for Forrest, because it gives those of us in the parliament an opportunity to talk about fact and to dispense with some of the myths being propagated by the opposition on the very important issue of youth allowance. I heard the member for Forrest call upon us to stand up for students in rural and regional communities. That is exactly what the government is doing. I am standing up tonight for the hundreds of young people in my electorate who will now qualify for youth allowance and for Abstudy because of the relaxation of the parental income test—a test which was out of sync with the family tax benefit test and which, of course, was extraordinarily low. It was a test which meant that a student whose

parents were earning just \$59,000 a year was not qualifying for youth allowance.

I do agree with the member for Durack on this point: this is a debate about equity. This is ensuring that the limited money government has available to spend in this area of public policy is well targeted. Usually when we have a debate about hard policy issues in this place, it is about money. It is about government ministers trying to find savings in outlays for redirection to other government priorities. But this debate is not about money. This policy is revenue-neutral and expenditure-neutral. This is about taking the same amount of money and making sure it is properly targeted—making sure that more students have an opportunity to go to university. And guess what: the people who are currently disadvantaged are typically those living in rural and regional Australia and, more particularly, those living in rural and regional Australia who are from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. So this is an initiative on the part of the government which is designed, in particular, to help and assist rural and regional communities. I am happy to admit that when the then education minister first announced this policy I was not particularly happy. I thought we had not got everything right. But since then we have improved significantly on this policy and I believe we now do have that policy right. This will mean the policy will be well targeted.

Take my own electorate, for example. More kids will get a student allowance because parental income is lower. Those who live in the more remote parts of my electorate will get special concessions. I remember only too well when the government's first response to the global financial crisis was to give to eligible people a \$900 cash bonus—it was very effective in dealing with the financial crisis. My three teenage children, all in study—and I am not talking about self-interest here in any sense—wanted to know

why they were not getting the \$900 cheque when all of their mates were. I scratched my head for a little while before determining that the reason all of their mates were getting the \$900 was because they decided to game the system. I am not suggesting that every student games the system, but many of the ones I know were. They were taking a gap year to enable them to avoid the parental income test and to get on with life under the youth allowance. Sometimes they moved back with mum and dad, who were earning \$300,000 or \$400,000 a year, but were still getting youth allowance, while other kids who had taken the conscious decision to go straight on to university for whatever reason were missing out not only on youth allowance but on the cash bonus that the government had designed as part of its rescue package for the global financial crisis.

Let us not bleat in here about equity. There is no better example of an equitable proposal than taking a bucket of money and making sure it is properly targeted. Yes, there will be losers. There have been losers in my electorate and I have spoken to many of them. I sympathise with them, but the government has to make tough decisions. I am very confident and am convinced that these changes target this funding more appropriately. Again, the government has made changes to protect those who had already made the decision to take a gap year, so in effect there was no retrospective operation of this very important change.

I welcome the debate. I welcome the opportunity to put some of the myths to rest and I want to reinforce the key point: this is about giving a hand-up to rural students. *(Time expired)*

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (8.16 pm)—It is with great pleasure that I join this debate. Let us reflect for a moment. The member for Hunter made some very good points,

but they were in the wrong debate. The member for Hunter referred a lot to the parental income thresholds, which have nothing to do with the motion that has been brought to the House by the member for Forrest. I congratulate the member for Forrest for moving this very important motion and recognise the interest which has been shown by regional MPs from across the political spectrum, primarily of course from the Liberal and National parties, but some Labor regional MPs and some Greens have also expressed a great deal of interest in this debate.

It is a real opportunity for us to prove to the people of Australia that under this minority government in this hung parliament we can actually work together to achieve some positive outcomes, particularly on behalf of regional students. I take up the contribution by the member for Durack, who referred to the fact that this is about equity. That is the crux of this issue, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott. I know that in your own electorate of Maranoa there are some real concerns amongst regional families about the great inequity faced by students from regional communities who go to Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne or Perth and try to make ends meet when they move away from home to undertake further studies. Today we have a chance to take some real, positive steps to fix the mess that has been created in relation to student income support in this nation.

Before I discuss the full details of the motion, I want to remind the House about the recent history of this government in dealing with issues surrounding student income support and particularly the reform measures introduced by the Minister for Education in the Rudd government, and current Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. Last year, she announced without warning or consultation plans that actively discriminated against students who were on their gap year at that

time—students who had done absolutely nothing wrong, who had followed the advice of their careers advisers, parents and teachers. In many cases they had even sought information from Centrelink. As education minister, Julia Gillard was prepared to pull the rug out from under their feet without any consultation whatsoever. The only reason she changed her mind was that she saw a political problem in the torrent of petitions and letters and of pressure and protest coming from throughout regional Australia. The end result was that, yes, some changes were made and students on a gap year at the time were protected from the retrospective nature of the legislation. But the minister's insistence that the changes were cost neutral created more problems.

This was not an education revolution, as the minister often proclaims. It was just tinkering at the edges and in the process another discriminatory position was entrenched which actively discriminated against many students in regional areas. This concept of inner regional and outer regional classifications for the purpose of deciding eligibility for the workforce participation criteria associated with the independent youth allowance is a mess. Yes, that is a mouthful and that is part of the problem. The system of student income support is ridiculously confusing. It is cumbersome, it alienates parents, students and teachers and it is fundamentally flawed. The government knows it. The regional backbench MPs in the Labor Party know it as well. This motion is an attempt to fix just one of those flaws.

Under the Rudd-Gillard government reforms, we have the ridiculous system where two students attending the same school, going to the same class but living just a couple of kilometres apart have to achieve different standards of workforce participation to achieve independence and become eligible for the highest rate of youth allowance. I

remind the Labor backbenchers who have spoken here tonight that we are talking about the independent youth allowance. It might suit them to talk about the parental income test and the improvements to the thresholds, which were supported by this side of the House, but the debate tonight is about the independent youth allowance and the discriminatory classification system of inner regional and outer regional, which is inequitable. The minister knows it and the Labor backbenchers know it as well. They stop me in the hallway and talk to me about it. They talk to me about the system of youth allowance.

Mr Bradbury—Name them!

Mr CHESTER—I could name quite a few. You know they will not stand up in your own party room. They are happy to talk to us in the hallways and point out the faults of your policy. They were happy to stop us and demand that we fight for the kids on the gap year last year. They did not have the courage to stand up for their own convictions in public, but they were happy to talk to us in the backrooms here in parliament and make sure we continued to argue the case. The member for Dobell is shaking his head. He just has to get out into regional Australia more often and talk to the people who have been affected by this decision.

This is a chance to help make it a little bit easier for all students in regional areas to achieve their full potential. The motion deals specifically with one section of the student income support system and I believe it is only the first step. There needs to be fundamental reform of the student income support system to address the inequity of access which currently exists. I support the member for Durack in his support for a tertiary access allowance. I believe this is an important first step but we must do a lot more to give country kids a fair go. (*Time expired*)

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (8.20 pm)—I rise to speak on this private member's motion and welcome the opportunity to do so. When Labor came to government we inherited a mess in relation to student support and the way in which that operated. I agree with some of the contributions we have had today in relation to how they have identified the problem. There was a problem with equity and there was a problem with access to university. So this government had an expert review the system—the Bradley review. We looked at what was suggested there and we took its advice.

We inherited a problem when we came to government, and that was that we saw a decline between 2002 and 2007 in enrolments at university from rural students. We also saw a decline in relation to those from low socioeconomic areas. In fact, the participation rate in universities of those from low socioeconomic areas was 15 per cent, as opposed to 25 per cent across the whole of the population. Over 10 per cent of people receiving the youth allowance came from families with incomes above \$200,000, and three per cent from families above \$300,000, and we saw a decline in the number of people from rural and low socioeconomic areas going to university. The problem was squarely an issue of equity. It needed to be reformed, and that is what this government did. We reformed this area so that there was greater access and greater equity. We made sure that we would get more people going to university. In my electorate there are close to 800 kids who are over \$1,000 better off because of the reforms that went through, and those reforms were cost neutral. As the member for Hunter pointed out, we took a bucket of money and made sure that it was distributed in a way that was more equitable and in a way which achieved the aim of getting more kids going to universities. That was a good reform and it is something that

we on this side of the House should be very, very proud of.

The previous system was broken for young people from low socioeconomic areas and, as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker Bird, my electorate has the lowest household income in New South Wales, so people from my electorate were particularly disadvantaged. We are lucky to get 40 per cent of our kids finishing high school, let alone going on to university, and we had a system that was weighted in favour of those who were earning high incomes and who were able to work the system so that they could stay at home. They were able to use the system to continue to get youth allowance while those in my electorate and similar ones were simply missing out. That is not fair and it needed to be addressed, and that is why this government took the action it did in relation to student support reform.

It is almost the height of hypocrisy, though, for those opposite to lecture this side on anything to do with higher education, and in particular to do with the funding of higher education. The previous government had one of the worst records in the OECD in funding of higher education. So whether it is about putting caps on GP training places, about reducing the number of nursing places available at universities, about making sure that our universities did not have the funds to be able to do the work they needed to do to train the next generation of Australians or about the mish-mash of the student support system that was in place, those on that side are in no position to lecture this side on what is appropriate or on the best way of addressing issues within higher education. This government made sure that we had an equitable system for student support, a system that made sure that those from low socioeconomic areas got a fair crack in relation to being supported while they went to university, and we did it in such a way that did not lead to an increase

in the overall burden on the budget—despite our hearing continually from the other side during the election campaign about the amount of money this side was spending. So we did something that was both economically and socially responsible and which provided equity. They were good reforms and they stand those kids going to university in great stead. *(Time expired)*

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (8.26 pm)—I rise this evening to express my full support for the motion put forward by my colleague the member for Forrest and for other colleagues on this side who are supporting this motion. The issue has been ongoing for quite some time now, and I am sure that the Prime Minister, the former Minister for Education, wishes that the coalition would just let it go. But now that she is the Prime Minister for regional Australia, so she says, perhaps she will take a renewed interest in this issue, because it affects the many young people in areas that are considered inner regional Australia, when in fact the definition is wrong in relation to so many communities.

When the former education minister, the current Prime Minister, decided to change the criteria for independent youth allowance, the decision was met with uproar across Australia, particularly from the families of the 2009 gap year students, who had the rug pulled out from under them. Thankfully, after intense pressure from this side of the House, the then education minister performed a very graceful backflip. She also made some changes so that young people from rural and outer regional Australia would not suffer under her new, unfair rules. And at the time this side of the House welcomed those changes.

But unfortunately there are still a number of young people who are disadvantaged by the changes to the independent youth allow-

ance criteria, and they are the young people who live in what is classified as inner regional Australia. In my electorate of Maranoa that includes towns like Dalby, Warwick, Kingaroy and Nanango. They are considered to be inner regional Australia. They are 200-odd kilometres from Brisbane and often further than that from the nearest university. Dalby's closest university is the University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba. It is more than 80 kilometres away. Warwick is about the same distance from the University of Southern Queensland. The same university is the closest for people in Kingaroy, but they are 150 kilometres away. That is their closest university and yet they are considered to be inner regional Australia. The University of the Sunshine Coast is some 200 kilometres away from Kingaroy. Yet these three towns are considered to be even more metropolitan—and this is the irony of it—than the city of Cairns, which has a university and an international airport, because they are considered to be outer regional Australia. The same is true of Townsville, which is home to the James Cook University. It is also considered to be outer regional Australia. I do not dispute that, but they also have the James Cook University, and the students who live there can qualify under the outer regional Australia criteria. But that is not the case in my towns of Dalby, Warwick and Kingaroy, which are considered to be inner regional Australia.

I am sure families in those towns in North Queensland that have those international airports and have access to universities are very happy, but I have to say that families in my electorate are not. In Dalby and Kingaroy, as I said, which have populations of somewhere between 10,000 and 12,000 people, the young people will have to work an average of 30 hours per week to be eligible for the independent youth allowance. That is

just eight hours short of what is considered full-time work.

For many employers in these smaller towns, why would you hire a young person, train them up and then watch them after the 18 months it takes to qualify for independent youth allowance take those skills to a city like Brisbane or even Toowoomba? Why would they hire them when they know they are only a temporary employee and when they could hire someone they know will stay? And for the young people in many of these towns who are lucky enough to get a job for 30 hours per week, why would they give up a job of 30 hours per week? I know this is happening. There are some students who are taking a job and deferring, perhaps forever, going on to university. That is the great tragedy for so many students and young people living in rural Australia.

That is why during the election campaign the coalition committed to relaxing the work test for students living in inner regional areas such as Dalby, Kingaroy and Warwick in my electorate and many other rural and regional areas. That meant that they would have to earn at least 75 per cent of the maximum rate of pay under wage level A of the Australian pay and classifications scale in an 18-month period, or work part time for at least 15 hours each week for two years. I support the motion put by the member for Forrest. It is on the right track. *(Time expired)*

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (8.31 pm)—Let me first welcome this motion by the member for Forrest, who is no longer with us because she had other duties. This has been of great concern and great interest to me. In fact one of the reasons I entered politics was what I perceive to be the inequity in the way in which we treat rural and regional students. Last March it was quite a breakthrough for the coalition and a reward for perseverance when the Prime Minister—the then Minister

for Education—Julia Gillard backed down on at least some of the amendments to youth allowance. I said at the time that I supported many of the government's amendments to the arrangements for access for tertiary students to youth allowance. Some of the reasons I did support that were highlighted by the member for Parramatta and the member for Hunter—the lowering of the age of automatic eligibility for youth allowance from 25 to 22, the lifting of household income thresholds, the fact that students could earn a bit more before losing payments and the tightening of eligibility so students who live at home cannot qualify for independent youth allowance. I applaud the remarks of the member for Hunter in this area. I was very pleased to see that shut down.

But the move to effectively shut down independently accessed youth allowance by demanding students work a minimum of 30 hours a week for 18 months out of two years was a bridge too far. It unfairly targeted regional students. The coalition insisted for nine months and the then Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, kept saying that the budget could not afford the changes. We were under pressure from those who supported the minister—the student union, the vice-chancellors of the major universities and the government—but we would not budge. Eventually the minister saw some reason and allowed students from outer regional, remote and very remote Australia to continue to qualify under the old criteria. Without going through the detail of those criteria, basically they mean you earn \$19,000 in an 18-month period, which qualifies and loosely fits the students who wish to take a gap year.

But that policy abandoned inner regional students in Australia. I have just one community in that category—most of my electorate is outer regional, remote or very remote—and that is Eudunda. I am appalled by

the unfairness of a line on a map. These lines on a map were drawn up by ABS to assess health eligibility in a completely different debate and had no jurisdiction at all in education. The facts are that if you have to live away from home to attend university you have all the attendant costs. I developed a paper before this became an issue in the budget of 2009 which identified many of those costs and suggested a way forward for regional Australia. Those costs are around \$20,000 a year per student. That is not \$20,000 to attend university; that is \$20,000 over and above the cost of someone living in the city attending university.

Whatever a family's financial ability to meet these costs, they are inflicted on a student by reasons of nothing but geography. Sometimes students are not part of the decision-making process which determines whether a family would support them through that process. They are the part players in this and are put to one side. If you live in Mount Gambier, Echuca or Eudunda—which is in my electorate, as I have pointed out—you cannot live at home and attend university. It is just too far to travel. But you have all the same costs as someone who does live in a remote area like Port Augusta, Wudinna, Ceduna or Coober Pedy. Yet this line on a map says that you do not qualify for the same level of assistance. The reason I have chosen to speak in this debate even though I have only one affected community is the principle of fairness. We have abandoned this group of students and said, 'You shall have something lesser than the rest of Australia.' I do not think it is good enough.

For the coalition this is unfinished business. I concur with the member for Durack and the member for Gippsland, who would prefer to see a living-away-from-home allowance established outside the youth allowance framework. But we are where we are in this debate at the moment. The motion that

the member for Forrest has put up does actually meet at least minimum criteria.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Gene Patents

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (8.37 pm)—I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) on 6 September 2010 the ABC's Four Corners program screened a story entitled 'Body Corporate', highlighting growing community and scientific concern regarding gene patents;
 - (b) in particular, Four Corners discussed the case of five year old Liam who needed to have a genetic test to see if he had gene mutations to the SCN1A human gene linked to a specific form of epilepsy called Dravet Syndrome;
 - (c) Bionomics, a South Australian company which had received a specific grant of around \$1,000,000 from AusIndustry to develop a SCN1A gene test:
 - (i) took out an Australian patent over the SCN1A human gene; and
 - (ii) subsequently exclusively licensed the patent to Genetic Technologies, a Melbourne company that charges \$2,000 for the SCN1A gene test in Australia;
 - (d) Liam was being treated at the Westmead Hospital—a publicly funded institution that is part of NSW Health—which could not afford to pay Genetic Technologies \$2,000 for each SCN1A gene test;
 - (e) Liam's doctors sent a sample of his DNA to be tested in Scotland where the charge was just one third of the price charged by Genetic Technologies; and
 - (f) the option to send the DNA sample overseas for testing not only took more

time, leaving the young boy and his family waiting in distress, but highlights how Australian taxpayers providing research funds to:

- (i) Australian universities to identify the SCN1A genetic mutations; and
- (ii) an Australian company to develop a genetic test

have been deprived of the benefits of that very research;

(2) notes that:

- (a) in July 2008, Genetic Technologies, as the exclusive licensee of Myriad Genetics, a United States company granted Australian patents over the BRCA 1 and 2 gene mutations linked to breast and ovarian cancers, demanded via a lawyer's letter sent to all Australian hospitals and clinical laboratories (including the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre) that they stop all testing for breast cancer, claiming such testing infringed Myriad Genetics' Australian BRCA patents;
- (b) in 2009 in the United States, eleven plaintiffs, including Lisbeth Ceriani, a 43 year old single mother diagnosed with breast cancer, and professional medical and clinical associations such as the American Society for Clinical Pathology, launched a legal challenge to seven of Myriad Genetics' United States BRCA patents, where: and
 - (i) Ms Ceriani found that she was unable to get a second opinion on a positive genetic test for ovarian cancer because in the United States there is only one test, owned by only one company, Myriad Genetics, which charges over US\$3,000 per test;
 - (ii) in March 2010 a United States Federal Court agreed with the plaintiffs and declared all seven United States patents invalid on the ground that under United States patent law, patents can only be granted over

inventions, not for the discovery of natural phenomena; and

- (iii) the Court so held because, first, despite being removed from the human body and thus 'isolated', the BRCA genes were 'not markedly different from native DNA as it exists in nature' and second, the analysis of these two human genes by way of a genetic test was 'merely data gathering to obtain clinical data';

(3) notes that:

- (a) at the official commemoration of the decoding of the human genome in March 2000, United States President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that 'raw fundamental data on the human genome, including the human DNA sequence and its variations, should be made freely available to scientists everywhere', yet by 2005, according to a survey published in *Science*, more than 20 per cent (probably now much higher) of the human genome was the subject of United States intellectual property;
- (b) President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair also said that 'unencumbered access to this information will promote discoveries that will reduce the burden of disease, improve health around the world, and enhance the quality of life of all humankind.';
- (c) unencumbered access to genetic information cannot be achieved when patents over human genes are being used to suppress competition, innovation, research and testing;
- (d) Professor Ian Frazer, the inventor of the cervical cancer vaccine, has joined other cancer researchers in calling for a revision of Australian patent law, stating that researchers need to be able to proceed with their work without having to consult the companies whose patents the work might infringe: 'restricting the research use of a gene sequence could de-

lay the development and testing of truly inventive and practical uses of the gene and its protein product for diagnosis and therapy.); and

(e) other groups opposed to the granting of gene patents include the Cancer Council Australia, the Breast Cancer Foundation of Australia, the Royal Australian College of Pathologists, the Human Genetics Society of Australia and the Australian Medical Association; and

(4) calls for amendment of the Patents Act 1990 to ensure that patents cannot be granted over any biological materials which are identical or substantially identical to what exists in nature.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—Is the motion seconded?

Ms Saffin—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Ms PARKE—I will try to set out at the outset what is involved in this issue. First, it is a fundamental principle of patent law that there must be an invention; however, it is clear that human genes are not inventions but naturally occurring phenomena. Second, in my opinion it is wrong from the point of view of public policy to allow genetic and biological material to be privately owned and controlled and for that control to be wielded in the interests of profit-making rather than in the interests of the public good. Lastly, when the companies that would be affected by the proposal to ban gene patents stir into the predictable frenzy of lobbying and public relations warfare to protect their interests, as is starting to happen right now, let us remember that their one argument—that is, that gene patents provide an incentive for companies to fund medical research—is both exaggerated and based on a false premise. The vast majority of research is publicly funded. Some of the 20th century's greatest medical breakthroughs were not made in pursuit of a patent—penicillin and the polio

vaccine, to mention just two. It is likely that banning gene patents will actually accelerate innovative competition in the biotechnology sector because the raw materials for new diagnostics treatments and medicines will be freely available and unencumbered.

I acknowledge the presence in the gallery tonight of Dr Luigi Palombi, who has dedicated much of his professional life and his passion to this issue. Since lodging my notice of motion about this issue a couple of weeks ago, I have been inundated with emails from around the country sent by people who cannot believe that we would permit genetic material to be controlled by patent. One of those emails was from a doctor at Westmead Hospital who each year cares for over 500 new families with a genetic history of breast and other cancers. On 30 September, Cancer Council Australia and the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia issued a press release welcoming my notice of motion. As I noted on 22 June 2009 in my last parliamentary speech on this issue, in 2008 a Melbourne company, Genetic Technologies, ordered Australian hospitals and clinical laboratories to stop testing for breast cancer, claiming it had the exclusive right to control access to the relevant gene under the licence it had obtained from US company Myriad Genetics.

In the US, public attention was drawn to the issue last year when two women, Genae Girard and Lisbeth Ciriani, who had sought second opinions on positive genetic tests for ovarian cancer, could not get those opinions because there is only one test, owned by only one company, Myriad Genetics. Ms Girard and Ms Ciriani, together with other patients and medical associations, participated in a legal challenge to Myriad's US patents over the breast and ovarian cancer genes. In a landmark decision, the US Federal Court in New York held earlier this year that the patents were improperly granted to Myriad and

were invalid under US patent law. In a subsequent article entitled *The case against gene patents* written for the *Wall Street Journal* in April by Nobel Prize winners Professor Joseph Stiglitz and Professor John Sulston, it was noted:

The court held that genes and human genetic sequences are naturally occurring things, not inventions. They are a part of all of our bodies and contain the most fundamental information about humanity—information that should be available to everyone. The researchers and private companies that applied for these gene patents did not invent the genes; they only identified what was already there.

Myriad is appealing the decision and it may take years for the matter to be definitively resolved in the US courts. In the meantime, Myriad has jacked up the price for its genetic test for ovarian and breast cancer from US\$3,000 to \$US4,000 per test. Americans cannot typically recover this cost under health insurance. A test case was launched by Cancer Voices Australia against Myriad's Australian breast cancer gene patents in the Australian Federal Court earlier this year. Significantly, rather than having the principle determined by an Australian court, Myriad has chosen to surrender the entire patent in an attempt to avoid this happening.

There is no objection to corporations that have invested in research to develop a new diagnostic test or vaccine or medicine being granted patents. However, there is a very large objection to corporations being granted patents over the underlying biological materials—that is, genes and proteins—because, although the biological materials have not been invented, by having the patent on them corporations prevent others from carrying out clinical tests or undertaking research using those biological materials. In the *Wall Street Journal* article I referred to earlier, Professors Stiglitz and Sulston wrote:

Proponents of gene patents argue that private companies will not engage in genetic research unless they have the economic incentives created by the patent system. We believe that a deeper understanding of the economics and science of innovation leads to exactly the opposite conclusion.

Patents ... not only prevent the use of knowledge in ways that would most benefit society, they may even impede scientific progress. Every scientific advance is built on those that came before it. There is still a great deal to learn about our genes, particularly how they contribute to disease. Gene patents inhibit access to the most basic information.

This motion calls for an amendment to Australia's patent law to impose a ban on patents over biological materials such as human genes. Genetics technology companies argue that such a change will mean the end of medical research—the end of discovery. In fact, the exact opposite will happen. By liberating these naturally occurring materials from patents, the process of discovery and invention will be improved significantly. Everyone knows that human genes are not inventions but products of nature. They belong to everyone. This is why, when the human genome was decoded 10 years ago, US President Clinton and British Prime Minister Blair issued a joint statement which said that to 'realise the full promise of this research, raw fundamental data on the human genome, including the human DNA sequence and its variations, should be made freely available to scientists everywhere'. Why did they say that? Because they believed that:

Unencumbered access to this information will promote discoveries that will reduce the burden of disease, improve health around the world, and enhance the quality of life for all humankind.

How are scientists supposed to make new discoveries and inventions to cure cancer if they have to seek permission and pay thousands if not millions of dollars to companies like Myriad who own patents over human

genes? Publicly funded R&D is crucial, and these kinds of patents cause unnecessary delay and make research much more costly. During the Senate's inquiry into gene patents, Australian scientists at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre told of how their research into breast and ovarian cancer was delayed by two years and ended up costing three times as much as it otherwise might have because Genetic Technologies refused to grant permission to use the patented genes.

Let us remember that nearly all of the primary research which has led to the discovery of human genes which are linked to cancers and diseases has been publicly funded by taxpayers or by philanthropic organisations. Is it right that Myriad should own patents over the BRCA 1 gene mutations which cause breast and ovarian cancers, when it was Professor Mary-Claire King, a publicly funded researcher at the University of California who, after spending 16 years looking for the BRCA 1 gene, found it on human chromosome 17q? That Myriad's scientists were able to see a little further and sequence the BRCA 1 gene is only because they stood, borrowing the words of Sir Isaac Newton, on the shoulders of Professor King, a true scientific giant.

Is it right that Australian taxpayers, who have provided research funds to universities to identify the epilepsy gene and have provided a \$1 million AusIndustry grant to the Bionomics company to develop a genetic test for epilepsy, have now been deprived of the benefits of that funding and research to the point where doctors at Westmead Hospital are sending children's DNA samples to Scotland rather than pay the fees and royalties demanded by Genetic Technologies? We now know that we are merely at the beginning of a long and complex story about how genes work. To grant patents to those that make the initial link will impede the neces-

sary work which must be done in order to turn science fiction into science fact.

As Professor Bowtell from the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre said to the Senate inquiry:

We are coming into an era where lots of genes are actually being identified that work in concert to actually cause an outcome, like the risk of developing breast cancer, diabetes, stroke ... If the patents for each of those genes are held by different companies then it is going to be extremely difficult to assemble a practical test to test for a particular condition.

Finally, a bedrock principle of the patent system which has stood for more than 500 years is that there must be an invention. Without an invention there is no reward. The proposed ban on gene patents will not prevent Myriad and other companies from seeking patents for new and inventive diagnostics, treatments, medicines and cures which make use of human genes. After all, that is what the patent system is about, rewarding those who invent such things. But the gene itself is not something that anyone has invented.

Professor Ian Frazer, inventor of the cervical cancer vaccine, President of Cancer Council Australia and former Australian of the Year, has said:

... there is no more invention in isolating and characterising biological materials that exist in our bodies ... than in collecting and arranging a set of postage stamps.

Further, he said that 'if we allow patenting of genes we're allowing patenting of ourselves'. These are some of the reasons the Cancer Council of Australia, the National Breast Cancer Foundation, the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, the Clinical Oncological Society, the Human Genetics Society and many ordinary Australians are calling for an amendment to the Patents Act to ban gene patents.

Dr WASHER (Moore) (8.47 pm)—I wish to thank the member for Fremantle for moving this motion on gene patents and to let her know that Senator Bill Heffernan is very passionate and agrees with you, and so do I. Systems for protecting commercial rights stretch back for centuries, with patents being recorded in Britain under the Statute of Monopolies of 1623. In Australia an invention may be patented under the Patents Act 1990, if the invention is a manner of manufacture, is novel, involves an inventive step and is useful. Inventions which are patented give the patent holder an exclusive right to sell their invention for a standard term of 20 years. A mere discovery or bare principle is not a manner of manufacture.

In Australia the Patent Office manual refers to the distinction between discovery and invention. A chemical substance which is discovered in nature without any practical application is a ‘mere chemical curiosity’ and not patentable. However, if the isolated gene has some practicable application it is potentially patentable. IP Australia has also indicated that ‘the building blocks of living matter, such as DNA and genes which have for the first time been identified and copied from their natural source and then manufactured synthetically as unique materials with a definite industrial use’ are not discoveries and are therefore patentable. In June 2004 the Australian Law Reform Commission stated that a new approach to the patentability of genetic materials was not warranted. One of the reasons provided was that it would represent a departure from accepted international practice and may adversely affect investment in the Australian biotechnology industry.

Currently in the EU, isolated genetic sequences are patentable following the Biotechnology Directive in 1998; and in the US the Patent and Trademark Office has issued patents on genes and other DNA sequences covering up to 40 per cent of the human ge-

nome. But there are real concerns over the correctness of this policy. Apart from US President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair issuing a joint statement some 10 years ago saying that the human genome should be made freely available to scientists everywhere, recent decisions of both UK and US courts have cast a shadow over the legality of this policy.

In October 2004 the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords, sitting as the final court of appeal in the UK, invalidated the patent claims over a synthetically made human protein because the protein was identical in its genetic structure and function to the protein as it existed naturally in the human body. According to their lordships the protein was not ‘new’.

In March this year the US Federal Court ruled that seven US patents on the BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 human genes and the genetic mutations to those genes, which are causative of breast and ovarian cancers, are invalid. These patents have allowed Myriad to secure a near monopoly on diagnostic tests for BRCA gene mutations in the US. It is interesting to note that one of Myriad’s patents on BRCA 1 was found to be so broad that it covered genetic sequences found in 80 per cent of all human genes. What is important to note is what the judge said: because the claimed isolated DNA is not markedly different from the native DNA as it exists in nature, it constitutes unpatentable subject matter under US patent law.

Applied properly, patents protect investors’ rights to be rewarded for their hard work and investment, whilst enabling others to improve on their innovations. Without patents there would be little incentive for researchers to invest their time, money and effort. Pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers can legitimately argue that the patent system is crucial for stimulating re-

search and development which leads to new products to improve medical care.

The problem with gene patents is that there are legitimate arguments that, rather than promoting biomedical innovation, they actually inhibit it. The process of determining which relevant patents are important to a research project, and the negotiations for access to them, can delay or even kill innovation. Unfortunately, IP Australia has told the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, which has been conducting an inquiry into the impact of gene patents for nearly two years, that, unless directed by an Australian court to do otherwise, it will continue to grant patents over naturally occurring biological materials. And although the Federal Court of Australia has finally been given an opportunity to review this policy—thanks to Cancer Voices Australia and Mrs Yvonne D'Arcy, a woman suffering from breast cancer—Myriad has responded by surrendering its patents over BRCA 1 gene mutations. This move, if it is successful, will bring that opportunity to a premature end. So it is now a matter of critical importance that this parliament consider this motion and take this subject seriously.

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (8.53 pm)—I commend the honourable member for Fremantle for moving this private member's motion, which I support. This is an issue which has long concerned me, and I was so pleased to see that the member had it listed for debate. I have had so many positive messages from people all around Australia asking me to support this motion. I told them that I do support the motion and will be speaking on it. The support for some action in this area comes not just from women but from a whole range of groups covering the political spectrum—not partisan political but across ideologies.

Some months ago a law graduate from Southern Cross University, Keda Ley, did some research for me on this issue, for which I thank her. I will speak on some of the research she did for me. She said that, from a women's rights and human rights perspective, the Women's Network of the United States argues that 'isolated DNA constitutes an unpatentable product of nature whose patenting harms women by stifling innovation and interfering with patient access to medical testing and treatment'. I agree. She also said proponents of the patenting of isolated human genes argue that an overall abolition of such patents would result in the stifling of genetic research because the incentive to invest in such research would be gone. I disagree. We heard the honourable member for Fremantle talk about people who know far more about this than I do—especially Professor Joseph Stiglitz—and they disagree.

There are also arguments against patents on human genes, which is clearly unethical because genetic material is the common heritage of humanity and it should not be subject to private ownership and exploited for profit by private owners. Furthermore, patenting such material may also hinder further development. I argue that human genetic material and isolated human genes should remain in the public domain.

As we know, the current position in Australia is that patents may be granted over selected genetic material or other methods or products used in testing for mutations in a gene or genetic sequence. For example, a United States company which we know of, Myriad Genetics Inc., holds patents internationally on isolated genetic materials associated with breast and ovarian cancer. Myriad's patents also cover methods for predictive testing and products and processes involved in its breast cancer predisposition test, which is called 'BRACAnalysis'. And we know about BRCA 1 and BRCA 2. There was a

High Court case dealing with this, but it was in 1959. I think we have moved on a bit since 1959. If it were tested in the courts, it would be interesting to see what they say. But we can actually deal with this here. In its discussion paper No. 68 on gene patenting and human health, the Australian Law Reform Commission says, among other things, that there are many existing mechanisms through which problems might be addressed. These include the use of the compulsory licensing and Crown use provisions of the Patents Act and laws dealing with anticompetitive conduct and prices surveillance.

There are also ways in which the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, as funders and purchasers of healthcare services, may be able to influence the way in which patent holders exploit or enforce patent rights. Mandatory licensing, as suggested by the ALRC, is one way to go, but it would involve the Commonwealth having to pay just-terms compensation. I do not want more public money paid out in just-terms compensation on this issue, and it does not solve the ethically problematic issue of the private ownership of human genes.

The legal argument as to why genes are not patentable under the Patents Act is that, for subject matter to be patentable, it has to be an invention, not merely a discovery of something pre-existing in nature. The discovery of genes and gene sequences is just that—a discovery. Hence, in my view, it is not an invention and should fall outside the patents system. Explicit exclusion of human genetic material from the Patents Act would lay to rest any argument that human genes are patentable.

The policy argument about the incentive role of patenting is that it ensures innovation continues. But patenting can also hamper research, innovation and scientific progress by giving private owners too much power to

name the price for the use of genes in research or experimentation—at an unjustifiable cost to society.

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (8.58 pm)—I am pleased to support the member for Fremantle’s motion. I commend her for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. This is an issue that was obviously going to go under the radar until she raised it in the House some time ago, and I support the motion’s direction. This is one of the longest private member’s motions I have seen in a long time. It calls on the parliament to note various things. I will start where it finishes. It says:

That this House:

...

(4) calls for amendment of the Patents Act 1990 to ensure that patents cannot be granted over any biological materials which are identical or substantially identical to what exists in nature.

I note that the member for Fremantle adopts a compassionate, humanitarian approach. The member for Moore adopts a medical approach. Mine is just a simple pragmatic and scientific approach. It seems to me an oxymoron that the discovery of a human gene brings with it the entitlement to patent it. If anybody owned the gene, it would be nature itself. I think we have seen examples now in two great societies: the United States, which the resolution refers to, in legal cases; and Great Britain as well, which the member for Moore mentioned. I think it is time that we grew up and had that patent law amended to ensure that, particularly, cancer sufferers are not denied an opportunity to have access to the best medical testing at an affordable rate.

The member for Fremantle’s resolution draws attention to one particular case which was funded by taxpayers, by AusIndustry, with a sizeable grant. For that particular

company to take advantage of taxpayer funded research is not, in my view, a patent or legitimate. I am disturbed that such an event has occurred, and I support the member for Fremantle in her call. It is true that many would argue that scientific investigation and experimentation costs an enormous amount of money, with the laboratory time and the patient time, and that therefore there is an entitlement for that level of investment to be returned. Opportunity exists for that in the charging of fees for service, but not at the extortionate amounts that are described in this resolution.

The call that the member for Fremantle brings to our attention is supported by a large number of significant groups in Australia: Cancer Council Australia, the Breast Cancer Foundation of Australia, the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, the Human Genetics Society of Australasia and the Australian Medical Association. I think it is fitting and suitable that this parliament takes up this cause, and I look forward to the ongoing opportunity—and I have no doubt that the member for Fremantle will continue to agitate until this revised legislation is brought to the attention of this place to ensure that people who suffer from cancer are not denied an opportunity to access their cure.

On Friday night, I was in my home town of Swan Hill, participating in the walkathon. I was thinking of three people I knew who we lost to cancer just in one year. One of them was Albert Heslop, who was my mentor when I was first elected as a rookie to the Swan Hill Rural City Council, and he followed my career from there. He was a great man. Sadly, he left his visit to the doctor till too late, and from diagnosis to his passing from prostate cancer was only a matter of weeks. I said to the group, ‘We’ve got to find this one last cure for what is one of the nation’s most debilitating diseases.’ (*Time expired*)

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (9.03 pm)—I rise in support of the motion. I thank the member for Fremantle for bringing this important issue to the attention of the House. This motion calls for an amendment to the Patents Act 1990 to expressly prohibit the granting of patents over ‘biological materials which are identical or substantially identical to what exists in nature’, such as gene sequences. I believe this makes sense legally, and from my understanding of the scientific commentary on this issue it also appears to me to make sense scientifically. It also makes sense to me as a matter of good public policy.

Currently, sections 18(2) and 18(3) of the Patents Act state:

- (2) Human beings, and the biological processes for their generation, are not patentable inventions.
...
- (3) For the purposes of an innovation patent, plants and animals, and the biological processes for the generation of plants and animals, are not patentable inventions.

This is qualified by section 18(4), which states that this definition:

... does not apply if the invention is a microbiological process or a product of such a process.

It may appear as though the practice of issuing gene patents is justified because gene sequences are subjected to a microbiological process. The process of isolating the gene, removing it from the human body, removing the extraneous materials and inserting it into another cell constitutes an ‘invention’.

However, in reality there is no difference between an isolated cell and a cell that occurs naturally in the human body. This is a view supported by scientists who worked on the genome project. For instance, Nobel Prize-winning biologist Sir John Sulston has said, ‘The idea that genes can be isolated from the human body is simply absurd, be-

cause the essence of a gene is the information that it contains.' Sir Sulston is essentially saying that nothing new is being created—no invention is taking place. And, if no invention is taking place, it makes it problematic to argue that a patent should be granted. This is a view supported by Cancer Council Australia, which recently said:

... human genetic material is not an invention and should not be patented.

Personally, I think it is important that the Cancer Council supports the prohibition of granting patents over genes.

In my first speech to this House, I gave a special commitment to support cancer research. I am concerned by reports that gene patents have the potential to hinder cancer research and medical research more broadly. Cancer researchers and support organisations across the country share these concerns and are opposed to the granting of patents over human genes. This includes the founder of the cervical cancer vaccine, Professor Ian Frazer; Breast Cancer Network Australia; the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre; the Breast Cancer Action Group NSW; and Cancer Voices NSW.

Professor Ian Olver, from the Cancer Council, has warned that gene patents could curtail the development of cancer treatments. He has stated:

If you can patent a gene, a company could monopolise it for 20 years and that would preclude anyone else from doing research and that would slow up any discoveries of new treatments ...

I find this perplexing, considering that approximately 20 per cent of human genes are patented in Australia.

I also note the disturbing instance to which this motion makes reference, as pointed out by the member for Fremantle—the BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 tests. These tests are used to determine whether women have a high risk of developing breast and ovarian

cancer. The demand that public hospitals cease performing the tests on the ground of patent infringement would have made the BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 tests out of reach for many women across Australia. As members of this House we have an important responsibility to help, not hinder, cancer research. That is why I am speaking in support of this motion. It makes sense to me to prohibit the granting of patents over human genes if such perverse consequences would be the result.

In light of all these things, it appears to me that there is a statutory solution to the legitimate concerns noted by the member for Fremantle in this motion. It would be consistent with the legislative intent of the Patents Act to enact amending legislation which clarifies that gene patents cannot be the subject of a patent grant under law.

I note that there is an ongoing inquiry into gene patents by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee, which is considering this question. I will be closely examining the committee's report, which is due to be released on the last parliamentary sitting day of this year. I understand that, for a variety of reasons, this committee was originally scheduled to report on the last day of the 2009 sittings. I am particularly interested to see whether the committee concludes that there exist valid grounds against legislative amendment.

I have been made aware of counterarguments to the need for legislative change, including the argument that researchers may be unwilling to undertake research for fear of infringing a patent. I am yet to be compelled by those assertions. As it stands, and in light of the reputable support for the sentiments expressed therein, I am very pleased to support the motion by the member for Fremantle.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (9.08 pm)—I congratulate the member for Fremantle.

tle in bringing forward this motion tonight and thank the members from both sides, the members for Greenway and Page on the government side, and the members for Moore and Mallee on the opposition side, who have spoken in support of this motion. I too am very strongly in support of this motion. It is a very long time since I practiced in the patent area, and I do not claim to retain any particular knowledge or expertise of patent law, but my dim recollection is that a patent needed to be an invention, there needed to be novelty. I struggle to see, as indeed honourable members have struggled to see tonight, how the discovery or identification and isolation of something which is existing in nature can be regarded as an invention. It is something that is part of us. As so many people have said—as Ian Frazer in particular said, very eloquently not so long ago—by allowing patents of this kind to continue we are in effect allowing corporations to acquire a patent on ourselves and on a part of humanity.

The honourable member for Greenway referred to the controversy that attended the litigation over the breast cancer susceptibility genes 1 and 2—BRCA 1 and 2. This is worth dwelling on. It is a matter that really goes to the vital health and the ability of so many people to deal with and resist cancer, to have cancer treated. While the names of these genes would imply that they are largely related to cancers in women, in particular breast cancer and ovarian cancer, these genes are also associated with an increased risk of cancer in men. These genes are known as tumour suppressors, and mutations of them are found to be associated with an increased risk of cancer. These mutated genes are found in women of Ashkenazi Jewish descent, for example, more often than in the wider community. Naturally, if you have a chance of having these genes, whether by

reason of family history or ethnic background, or both, you would wish to be tested.

Recently, as we know, an Australian company bought the rights to these genes from an American company, Myriad, and were proposing to stop laboratories in Australia from testing for these genes without payment. They backed off, thankfully and appropriately, because of public pressure; and in the United States the Federal Court has ruled against Myriad on the basis that I outlined at the very outset of my remarks—that this is not a patentable invention; this is a discovery, an isolation of something that is part of nature and it is not in the nature of an invention. A novel test for identifying the presence of these genes may well be patentable. A modification may well be patentable. A treatment may well be patentable. But the problem is the vice of allowing the patent to subsist in respect of these genes is that it discourages and locks up research on that gene. You can tie up a gene with one of these patents and nobody else will then have the ability, let alone the incentive, to find a treatment for it or a test for it. It is vital for the interests of all Australians—indeed, for all mankind—that we have the maximum amount of research being directed at cancer. And we know that the whole of cancer diagnosis is going to be based on the study of genes and their products. Targeting genes is critical. We need to have the greatest openness and encouragement for the widest possible research. For those reasons the motion should be supported. *(Time expired)*

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (9.13 pm)—I rise to support the motion put forward by the member for Fremantle. In April 2003 scientists announced that they had mapped around 20,000 genes in the human genome, a truly great endeavour for humankind—up there with Galileo Galilei's heliocentric solar system, Florey's penicillin and the Wright brothers' first flight. With this achievement

came a lot of hope that there would be new opportunities for the treatment and diagnoses of many diseases—hope also that, through genetic testing, families facing recurrent unexplained illnesses might finally have some answers. But this hope has not yet turned into reality. Our grasp has not quite matched our reach.

It is troubling, then, that we are now hearing reports that gene patents are in fact stifling research and making access to genetic testing more difficult and more expensive for patients. More surprising still that companies like South Australian-based Bionomics should use \$1 million of taxpayers' money to fund their research and then through Genetic Technologies charge \$2,000 for the genetic test—a cost far out of reach of many Australians. They are denying taxpayers the benefit of the research that taxpayers themselves funded.

A similar company in the US, Myriad Genetics, charges \$3,000 per test. In March this year a New York court ruled that Myriad Genetics did not have the right to patent genes linked to breast cancer and ovarian cancer as they were a 'product of nature'.

The Australian Cancer Council is one body among many in Australia who believe that natural biological materials should be freely available for research and public health. The patent system has created a monopoly for the companies who 'own the gene', consequently driving up the cost of tests for patients and all but prohibiting the sharing of important medical knowledge. Back in 2008, the Australian licensee for the genes BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 demanded that public laboratories stop conducting diagnostic tests. And there was nothing to stop them from doing so. These are diagnostic tests, as other speakers have mentioned, that are connected with breast cancer. I should declare that my mum had breast cancer and aunts

both on my mother's side and my father's side and my sister have all had breast cancer. But this is not the hereditary gene type of breast cancer, fortunately, I guess.

President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Tony Blair believe that genetic information should be used for the greater good, not for the profit of the patent holders. They mentioned this at the official commemoration of the decoding back in March 2000. But while the patenting of genes continues, there seems to be no way to stop corporate overreaching overwhelming the public interest. I know the balance is hard. We want scientific endeavour to continue and this needs funds, and funds flow from protecting intellectual property rights. I understand it is a balance. But the Cancer Council points to a commonsense way forward. In their submission to the Senate inquiry on 5 August 2009 they made a compelling argument for reform and they continue to push for an overhaul of gene patents. This is happening as the Gillard government facilitates a review of the patent system. The Cancer Council said:

As we sit on the cusp of a huge surge in the use of genes in diagnostics, treatments and cures for major illnesses, it is clear that the patent law system has not involved adequately to handle sophisticated substances such as human genes and needs to be overhauled to exclude genes.

If we allow patenting of genes, we are basically allowing patenting of ourselves. The patent system should be about protecting true inventions, such as medicines developed from genetic data, but not the data itself.

Australia should set a global precedent and put public interest at the forefront of genetic science by invalidating the patenting of genes.

I echo the sentiments of the Cancer Council and call for reform of gene patents because medical research should not be just about the bottom line, particularly taxpayer funded research. I am not against the profit motive or smarter industries—Queensland has a new

but already proud record in this area. Professor Ian Frazer has been mentioned by a few, working out of the PA hospital and the University of Queensland. However, the human genome project and its offspring are supposed to be about better understanding for humanity of who we are and creating a healthier future for all of us, not just the well-heeled.

I thank the member for Fremantle for bringing this matter before the House and acknowledge her efforts to support the basic human rights of all people, both here in Australia and all around the world. I commend the motion.

Ms O'NEILL (Robertson) (9.18 pm)—I too want to thank the member for Fremantle for raising this issue of great importance and the motion for debate in this place today. Advances in gene therapy will be the 21st century health breakthrough. Isolating one of 20,000 genes found in every human that carries breast cancer or hereditary genetic disorder and replacing it with a functional gene will mean longer lives, less pain and less suffering.

Innovation and invention are inherent in such breakthroughs, and are very much the drivers behind economic growth, productivity and general progress. Innovation certainly needs to be nurtured, encouraged and safeguarded to ensure that the spirit of creativity is instilled in our society. We need innovation to continue to strive for the betterment of our fellow community members. However, when we are protecting not what is invented but what already exists, and when we are prohibited from accessing medical advancements because of protections, we must consider our values carefully. Gene patents limit usage of an estimated 20 per cent of all human genes. This puts a stranglehold on a clinical institution's ability to carry out their most important work.

It is not just that private organisations, the sole owners of genes, can compel medical groups to stop using what is, under law, private property—even for research or testing purposes. The problem of restricting gene use to only those who hold the patent serves to restrict the growth of educational and research possibilities for the Australian medical industry. The Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre—Australia's only public hospital solely dedicated to cancer treatment, research and education—articulates the worry that day-to-day screening work, commonly done by public laboratories, will be severely reduced as more and more genes are made off limits through private intervention. The centre has raised specific concerns about the potential to skew research into genes BRCA 1 and BRCA 2, whose mutation commonly results in breast cancer. While testing might be available, albeit at an inflated price, occasional testing of more obscure gene mutations would not be accessible, as the commercial need would mean private sector development of testing practices.

This kind of testing environment would leave Australian researchers and clinicians unskilled in detection, and would put patients at risk due to a lack of testing availability. So a fundamental issue in gene patenting is that of access—access to affordable health care, access to best practice treatment, access to world leading research and development. This fear of a lack of access is also held by the Association of Genetic Support of Australasia, a charitable support group for many families and their children. The association deals with genetic disorders on a daily basis and fears the worst if genetic patenting is to continue unhindered.

I am not comfortable allowing the Australian experience of universal access to health-enhancing and potentially life-saving testing services to mirror that of the United States, where too often we hear that only those who

can afford it are assured of care. We cannot let a situation develop that would require an Australian patient to travel overseas to have a test performed there because it is cheaper than having it done locally. We must work to ensure that we sufficiently skill and enable our medical personnel to perform tests quickly, cheaply, and locally, so that patients are not forced to send samples overseas to get results in a less timely fashion than would be the case if testing occurred in Australia.

There is another critical aspect to this debate. As gene therapy progresses, so will the issues of privacy related to it. Australia's current insurance industry maintains fair and balanced membership standards where the presumption, even with existing medical conditions, is that cover will be granted to those who apply without prejudicial knowledge of what may occur to the applicant 10, 20 or 30 years down the line. However, as our knowledge of this area increases and we are able to link genes to specific medical conditions in later life, we must ensure that patents are not used to prejudice the hopes or chances of fairness in the future.

It is the responsibility of this government, and all governments, to ensure that their people have unencumbered access to the best standard of health care, and while gene patents are restricting development of medical advancements that cannot occur. As such, I support the call from the member for Fremantle to amend the Patents Act 1990 to ensure that patents cannot be granted over any biological materials which are identical or substantially identical to that which exists in nature.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information) (9.24 pm)—I move:

That the House do now adjourn.

Mental Health

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (9.24 pm)—On the weekend marking International Mental Health Day, 10 October, the *Weekend Australian*, in its Inquirer section, ran two interesting articles on mental health in Australia. Authors Patrick McGorry and John Mendoza know what they are talking about and when they say that more needs to be done then that is what has to be done.

Back in 2006 the coalition government saw the under-delivery of mental health services by state governments and injected a massive \$1.9 billion in an attempt to bring things back on track. Four years later not much seems to have changed, hence the comments by professors McGorry and Mendoza. The problem is that the further you go away from cities, the scarcer the service availability and access, and not just in mental health. Everyone is fighting over the same small bucket of money and it certainly does not help to have an organisational system—if I can call it that—which encourages internal competition for scarce funds. The net effect is a dissipation of energy and a much reduced delivery of effective service.

The problem for me is getting a handle on what is actually available and how it is delivered. Recently I was approached by representatives from the mental health support community in the Shoalhaven. They wanted virtually the same things that professors McGorry and Mendoza were advocating. Let me itemise what the Shoalhaven group is seeking and perhaps that will provide a hint as to why I suspect the way we deliver mental health services needs to be reappraised.

To improve things for their mental health clients they need more community mental health workers; mental health units and beds at our local hospitals; more access to psychiatrists; more community based supported accommodation; better cooperation and coordination with alcohol and other drug services; and, transport services to and from the nearest mental health unit. I am sure the government is more than aware of these needs.

The temptation to simply throw more money at the problem is not the answer, but it certainly could be part of the solution. But we also need to change the way things are done. For as long as I can remember, the lack of effective delivery of mental health services has been a constant source of frustration for all concerned. With all the direct and indirect sources of funding currently available, it is reasonable to ask whether these needs have evolved as a result of the inadequacy of funding that has been given or through inefficiency of delivery. For instance, how much is being burnt up in administrative costs and how much is actually left to help the clients? And is it a fair apportionment?

What I think is needed is a model that service providers can follow. At the moment there is a mix of government agencies, non-government agencies and volunteer groups all trying their hardest, all well intentioned and all struggling to remain viable. I suspect there is also some territorial competition between the providers burning up money.

Can we do it better and what sort of assistance has the government to provide? I fail to see the point in introducing new programs side by side with existing programs which, on the surface, seem to replicate the same approaches. It is like giving an old car a new paint job and telling everyone how its performance is going to be improved. Yes, we need funding and we need it now. But first

let us decide on a plan and a structure to deliver a measurable outcome. And then let us put into place an effective management system. We need a method that is outcome oriented rather than process oriented, an effective program that can be guaranteed to make significant inroads to addressing mental health. Then we need to comprehensively fund it.

I do not know what the answer is, but I want to know it and so do a lot of other people who live with this constant frustration of trying to do a lot with very little. Whether it is money or organisation, the government is obliged to make sure the right mix is reached. I applaud our local providers for doing the best they can under extreme difficulties. The recent community forum they held, which many of our local community attended to discuss the services, was a great plus in their favour. And I certainly applaud organisations like Beyondblue. All sides of politics have a lot to answer for, certainly here in Gilmore.

Blair Electorate: Infrastructure

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (9.28 pm)—I want to talk tonight about the bridges of Blair and three in particular. On 7 September I was pleased to be present at the opening of Pointings Bridge, which was constructed by the Somerset Regional Council using \$1.9 million of federal government funds under the Roads to Recovery Program. The remainder came from the Somerset Regional Council. I commend the council for the work they have done.

The \$37 billion we put into nation building funding is important in terms of my state of Queensland. An amount of \$22 billion has been spent in rural and regional Australia on roads, rail and port. The residents of Blair will get a good outcome from this bridge, particularly the children at Patrick Estate Primary School and the residents in Lowood.

On 16 September I was also pleased to be present at the opening of the new bridge on Neurum Road over Neurum Creek in the northern part of my electorate. It is a 27-metre, two-lane bridge that replaces the old wooden bridge. The wood from the old bridge will be salvaged. It was an old single-lane bridge that kinked. It will be recycled for the maintenance of other timber crossings in the Somerset region. This again was done with federal government money. I was there with Somerset Mayor Graeme Lehmann as well as Moreton Bay Regional Council's Division 12 councillor Adrian Raedel. The Neurum Bridge crosses the boundary, geographically, between the Somerset and Moreton Bay regions. It is a good example of a construction project—an economic stimulus for the region. It created jobs and it is good for farmers in the area and small business operators, as well as the Kilcoy Pastoral Company. It will make a big difference to the communities in the northern part of my electorate, east of Kilcoy particularly.

I was also present last Saturday for the opening of the Bradfield Bridge linking the south side of Ipswich with the north side, over the Bremer River. It is a footbridge. It was supposed to have been done some years ago. When Riverlink Shopping Centre was built in 2007, the footbridge was supposed to have been part of that construction. It was not built, and the stakeholders—Leader Holdings, QR and the Ipswich City Council—all engaged in a bit of blame shedding and sharing. The bridge is named after John Bradfield. He was an outstanding engineer who was involved in the construction and design of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in Sydney and the Story Bridge in Brisbane. Bradfield moved to Ipswich as a young child and attended North Ipswich State School, now known as Ipswich North State School, on the north side of the river. He attended Ipswich Grammar School on the south side

of the river. I commend Ipswich City Council for their apt naming of the bridge. A special guest at the opening was Dr Bradfield's great granddaughter, Anna Jackson, who 'warmed everyone's heart', according to the *Queensland Times* editorial today, 'with recollections of her illustrious ancestor's abiding love for Ipswich'. She spoke particularly well.

I was pleased to be present when Ipswich mayor, Paul Pisasale, and Bob Ell of Leader Holdings were available to cut the ribbon. The bridge has been warmly received by the Ipswich community, and it means that the north side of Ipswich, where the Riverlink Shopping Centre is, will be formally linked as part of the CBD. Andy Broderson was there. He is an Ipswich 150 ambassador. He was there with his wife. Andy summed it up really well in today's *Queensland Times* when he said that he thought the bridge was 'absolutely wonderful'. Andy is a fantastic communitarian. He works hard and is a real patron and mentor at Collingwood Park State Primary School. He is a fantastic guy, 74 years young. He has lots of patience and an abundance of energy. He is the sort of person that every community wants. I think Andy summed it up brilliantly with his comment. Andy says, 'It's healthy to walk.' He is absolutely correct. I walked across the bridge last Saturday to my mobile office in the markets in the CBD of Ipswich. There were literally thousands of people present on that day.

It is a great step forward for Ipswich. It will revitalise the CBD. Riverlink, together with the revitalised Ipswich, will make sure that money—hundreds of millions of dollars of retail money—will stay in the Ipswich community instead of being lost to Brisbane. It should always be back in Ipswich.

Malu Sara

Mr ENTSCH (Leichhardt) (9.33 pm)—Friday just passed—15 October—marked the

fifth anniversary of the tragic sinking of the Malu Sara in the Torres Strait, where five Torres Strait Islanders lost their lives: Wilfred Baira, Ted Harry, Flora Enosa and her younger daughter Ethena, and Valorie Saub. Sadly, the tragic circumstances in which they lost their lives were absolutely and totally avoidable. The coroner was quite scathing about the actions of both the Department of Immigration and, in particular, the manager in the Torres Strait at the time, and also the actions of the police. Sadly, of course, that does not bring back these lives that were so tragically lost. The families are still struggling to come to terms with that loss.

I will focus tonight on one family. I am referring to John Saub and his wife, Henrietta, who have become responsible for the four children who were orphaned by the tragedy. At the time, they were aged between three and 11 years. I am referring to E-Dow, who is now aged 16; Henrietta, who is 13; Boston, who is 11; and Do-Fa, who is aged eight. As you can appreciate, it has been a big struggle for the past five years for this family—for John and Henrietta—to take care of these children, particularly given Henrietta's own health problems. She has only one leg. She has struggled with diabetes. Her health is not the best, and so there are demands in that area. They really had very, very little. Members of the community—and I make reference particularly to Mark Bousen; he and his family own the *Torres News*—have been incredibly generous in supporting the family, as has Jason Briggs, a young lawyer who has also been very supportive in assisting the family to try to get justice. A number of members of the business community in Cairns have provided various items of furniture to help the family as they have been going through their court battles. Only last week, John reached a settlement in relation to a legal claim. The amount he received was

fairly small, but nevertheless it will start to help him supply for the educational and general needs of the family. Of the four children, the youngest one has learning difficulties, which is an added burden to the family.

What we are endeavouring to do now that the legal side of it has been addressed is to look at a solution that will offer full closure for the families. I have been working with Scott Morrison, opposition spokesman for immigration, in an effort to try to find a solution here. We are looking at setting up a Badu or Malu Sara trust that will support the children of the families on an ongoing basis until they reach independence.

We are also very keen to get some sort of closure for the families by providing a monument on Badu Island and another one on Thursday Island. At this stage the department's response has been to name two buildings here in Canberra after two of the victims. Unfortunately, none of the families are ever going to travel to Canberra to appreciate that. It is important that we get this closure in the community on Badu Island. At least they would have somewhere to grieve, because only one of the five bodies was ever found. We also have to make sure that those responsible for this are held accountable, and I hope we can eventually get them brought into a court of law to be judged on their actions and also to make sure that there are changes made to ensure that this type of thing never, ever happens again.

I would like to salute John Saub for the outstanding effort that he has made and continues to make in campaigning to make sure that his family is given recognition for what has occurred. He should get some level of justice not only for his daughter but for those other victims. Those families should get closure so that they can move on with their lives.

Ms Heather Weston
Doveton and Eumemmerring
Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr BYRNE (Holt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (9.38 pm)—I rise tonight to pay tribute to two local success stories from Doveton, a great suburb in my electorate. One is an individual who embodies what it means to be a resident of Doveton. Another is a group of people who embody the spirit of Doveton and community through an event which brings thousands of community members together. First of all I want to acknowledge in this place the work of Heather Weston, a Dovetonite through and through who, sadly, passed away in June of this year but whose legacy acts as an inspiration as a battler who overcame the odds and whose work influenced countless individuals who crossed her path in her years with the Doveton Neighbourhood House.

Heather was born in Ballarat and moved to Doveton in the 1980s. Almost immediately she became involved with the Doveton Neighbourhood House, where she would maintain an involvement for the 24 years that followed. The Doveton Neighbourhood House was originally opened in 1976 and offers pre-accredited adult education classes, social support, after-school activities and many other services. Doveton Neighbourhood House acts as an essential community hub that provides a place for members of the local community to get together to meet new friends and to further build on what is a unique, deeply connected community.

When Heather became involved with the Doveton Neighbourhood House she was, in her words, illiterate and, by her own words, often felt that she was good at nothing. Not to be overcome by this, Heather quickly enrolled in basic English reading and writing courses at Doveton Neighbourhood House,

forming an affinity with the centre that would see her spend 15 years on its committee, holding the positions of assistant to the treasurer, vice-president, secretary and president. In fact, Heather spent a total of three years as the centre's president. These are significant achievements in themselves, but Heather's true achievement—and, indeed, where her passion lay—was in inspiring and driving others. She used her success against her plight to empower others in the community to emulate her achievements.

Jodie Berry from the Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre where the Neighbourhood House now operates described Heather as a person who 'represented what community houses can do in the way of communicating and strengthening the community'. Brian Oates, who knew Heather from his time with the City of Casey, including as mayor, described her as someone who will be remembered for her 'giving nature, voluntary involvement in the community and wonderful sense of humour'. Her achievements were recognised in 2008 when she received a Holt Australia Day Award for her long-running commitment to the Doveton Neighbourhood House. Heather Weston, unfortunately, lost her battle with leukaemia this year. She was aged 53.

I would also like to pay tribute to another outstanding success story. The annual Doveton Show was held on Sunday, 19 September at Myuna Farm in Doveton. Mr Speaker, you should go there at some stage. It is held each year at the same time as the Royal Melbourne Show. The Doveton Show has been an exceptionally successful community driven initiative, attracting tens of thousands of attendees over the years, showcasing the Doveton-Eumemmerring community and providing a low-cost alternative to the Melbourne Show, which costs roughly \$60 for a family ticket. You can enter the Doveton show merely by supplying a gold coin dona-

tion. The show is organised and run by an events committee that is made up of a group of volunteers who work together to create the Doveton Show each year.

In its inaugural year of 2005, event organisers and the founding committee—not surprisingly including Heather Weston and her brother Neil Tiley—were confident of attracting at least 1,000 people and were hopeful of perhaps 2,000 people. Hopes were exceeded, with over 5,000 people flocking to Myuna Farm from places as far away as Nyora and Keilor. This year the event attracted a record 12,000 people, which is an exceptional turnout for a locally organised event, especially one run by volunteers. It shows how the event has become increasingly popular with locals and people from all over the state. There is something for everyone at this event, including amusement rides, an animal nursery, Indigenous and multicultural performances, arts and crafts competitions, vintage cars and stalls offering toys, plants, emergency service information and much more. I have heard stall holders, vendors and ride operators reserving places for next year and commenting on how much they loved being part of this unique event. This event is a great tribute to the work of the Doveton and Eumemmerring Neighbourhood Renewal and the organising committee, which has helped create a more prosperous, safe and healthy community. It is a testament to what can be achieved through local networks and the community at large in this working-class suburb of Doveton. In particular it is a home-grown success and something that I am very proud of.

Programs like the Doveton and Eumemmerring Neighbourhood Renewal, centres like the Doveton Neighbourhood House and volunteers like Heather Weston are vital elements, vital people that make the community tick. They make the community work. I would like to say tonight that I remember

Heather Weston incredibly well. I hope that in some way, shape or form this statement tonight acknowledges her substantial contribution to the Doveton community.

Infrastructure

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (9.43 pm)—Roads are the single most vital piece of infrastructure for regional Australia, and for individuals and businesses alike roads are essential to the everyday functioning of our region. For Calare in Western New South Wales our potential to prosper as a region is highly dependent on the infrastructure provided today. During the last election the issue of roads was singled out as the No. 1 concern for Calare residents, and the development of the Bells Line Expressway was listed as one of my key priorities for Calare and the whole of Western New South Wales. I have listened to the people of Calare and I am committed to taking real action on these issues.

The Gillard government's decision not to commit funding to the Bells Line Expressway was a massive kick in the teeth for the people of regional New South Wales. The government say they have a renewed focus on regional Australia but are clearly not interested and are certainly not listening to the concerns of its residents. The people of Calare and western New South Wales need and deserve a safe and efficient passageway across the mountains. The month of October has been a horrific time on Calare's roads and is further proof of just how necessary and urgent this vital piece of infrastructure is. How many lives will it take before the government realise a safer corridor across the Blue Mountains is a priority?

During the 2007 election, the coalition committed \$20 million to get the Bells Line Expressway project up and running. So far, we have not seen a single cent committed to the project by the federal government and the

idea has been thrown out the window by the Keneally government, with documents stating that the project will not be on the agenda for at least 25 years. All we continue to see from both the state and federal Labor governments is more inaction, excuses and delays. It is clear that only the coalition is committed to building a safer and better road across the mountains.

The safety and wellbeing of the entire population of western New South Wales are at stake here. The population west of the mountains are sick of the traffic congestion, accidents and roadworks. We need safe, reliable and regularly maintained roads in our country areas and a commitment from the federal government to ensure they are provided.

Recent tours across the Calare electorate brought to my attention just how crucial the coalition's Roads to Recovery program and Black Spot funding were to regional communities. Just last week I visited the spectacular Capertee Valley at the foot of the Blue Mountains. After discussions with residents it was clear that the No. 1 concern in the area was the condition of the local roads. With difficult terrain and unsealed roads, safety is always a major concern for locals. What is more, the valley's vision for future development and tourism is heavily reliant on the upkeep of those roads. This is echoed in many other communities across Calare. With roads in most parts being the only point of access, we need to ensure that a safe path is provided, for the sake of both our residents and visitors. Calare is the engine room of New South Wales and our roads are key to opening up the whole of it. It is obvious that the coalition's initiatives were successful and that, again, only the coalition is committed to providing essential services and infrastructure to regional Australia.

I call upon the Gillard government to seriously reconsider its approach to the Bells Line Expressway. On Prime Minister Gillard's recent visit to Bathurst I invited her to take a drive over the mountains to experience firsthand the terrible state of the roads. My invitation was declined. It is clear that the Gillard government has little interest in regional Australia—certainly in that part of it. Roads are the lifeline of country Australia and are essential to the long-term prosperity of the regions. We need a federal commitment to funding for our regional roads. The Bells Line Expressway must be put back on the agenda now—immediately, not sometime during the next 25 years. The people of Calare, western New South Wales and regional Australia have had enough of the excuses and delays. We need commitment and we want to see real action.

Building the Education Revolution Program

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (9.48 pm)—I rise tonight to talk a little about school infrastructure and, in particular, the Building the Education Revolution. Much of this debate has become dominated by some of the headlines, the politics and the political attacks made by the opposition. What is often missed is what is actually happening in schools and communities.

I was very fortunate last Sunday to be able to drive up the Northern Expressway to the area around where I grew up, to a little town called Freeling. Freeling is a great town. It is predominantly a farming town. It is a town of farming families but it is increasingly a town that has a number of commuters in it. I know they will appreciate the Northern Expressway as well. The wonderful thing about Freeling is the great sense of community that you get there. I was very fortunate to go to Kapunda High School, where many of the kids from Freeling went to high school also.

I remember the town fondly. I remember going to 21sts and various other parties there. I remember playing footy there. We always got beaten when I played in the under-17s at Freeling. It was not a very successful year for the Kapunda Bombers. But Freeling was a great little town in those days and it continues to be so.

This year Freeling marked the 150th anniversary of its founding, and the primary school marked the 100th year at its current site. It was a great day to go up and celebrate those milestones. But they were also celebrating the fact that they had completed their project under the BER, which was a covered outdoor learning area and some school library refurbishments. The funding that was provided to the school, some \$925,000, was very gratefully received and has been put to tremendously good use. There were 200 or 300 people at the school—kids and families—there were a number of stalls run by the CFS and other community groups and there was a sausage sizzle, of course. It was great to see so many from the community out on a pretty cold Sunday to celebrate the opening of this very important piece of school infrastructure. The pride and the ownership that the town has for the school were both evident.

The project created 35 jobs in the community. The building of the project was done by Ahrens Design and Construction, which is a very prominent local construction company that is expanding out of its origins in Sheaoak Log and doing construction right around the country. It was tremendous to see the local community, the local school and the local construction company working together to deliver a project on time and on budget and that was gratefully received by the community. This kind of feeling in schools is often missed in some of the political rhetoric of those opposite and in much of the media.

Nobody wants to cover a good news story these days.

Many of those involved in the day need to be thanked. First and foremost of these is Bob Wildy, the principal, a person who is very passionate about primary school education. Also there were Robert Hornsey, the Mayor of Light Regional Council, along with his wife, Anne; Jason Swight from Ahrens Construction; Wayne Standish and Ron Kubisch from the local council; and Chris Heinjus, the chair of the school council. The MC was my old friend from Kapunda High, Dominic Sheppley, and his wife, Melissa Sheppley, worked on the sausage sizzle that day. It was great to see a lot of heart in that school, a tremendous commitment by the local community, a sense of ownership in the school and federal funding going to such a good use, providing jobs and local infrastructure to this great country town.

Serrated Tussock

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (9.53 pm)—I rise to speak on a threat to Australia's agricultural sustainability. That threat is the rapid and uncontrollable spread of noxious weeds, in particular *Nasella trichotoma*, or serrated tussock, as all farmers, graziers and rural landholders commonly know it. Serrated tussock is one of our country's worst perennial grass weeds. It invades pastures, native grasslands and urban areas courtesy of its amazing ability to disperse its seeds over great distances, and it is rife Australia wide. It is a native of South America and is a plant that has great capacity to survive and further expand its spread. It can tolerate extremes of temperature, low rainfall and low soil fertility, which makes it perfectly adaptable and comfortable in Australia. With its prolific seed production and ability to spread by wind, livestock, machinery and transport networks it is well suited to rapidly advance over new areas in the temperate zone, colo-

nising bare patches of ground and changing landscapes forever.

Serrated tussock has the ability to cause a greater reduction in livestock carrying capacity than any other species in Australia, reducing pastures that carry seven to 15 dry sheep equivalent per hectare to a carrying capacity of only 0.5 dry sheep equivalent per hectare. Add to this the ability of a single mature plant to produce more than 100,000 seeds per year with light seed heads able to travel great distances by wind, perhaps up to 20 kilometres, and you have a serious problem. While wind is the primary natural method of seed dispersal in the serrated tussock plant, human activity now plays a significant role in its spread. Seed heads can be caught and transported by vehicles, machinery, tractors, implements, spray units, mowers and slashers. Its seeds attach to the fleece and fur of livestock and other animals, and may also be picked up in the mud on animals' hooves.

Livestock will generally avoid eating serrated tussock. However, if they do graze on it while in seed, the animals can spread the seeds through their droppings and the seed can survive in the gut of ruminant animals for up to 10 days, making it possible for tussock to spread long distances. Serrated tussock seed can contaminate crops, hay, silage, grain and seed. Movement and use of contaminated produce can lead to the development of new infestations, as can the movement of soil from an infested area.

You may ask how this information is relevant to my opening statement of a threat to Australia's sustainability. The answer is quite simple: serrated tussock covers more than two million hectares of land in south-east Australia and has the potential to spread even further, with a potential distribution estimated at 32 million hectares across Australia. Given that Australia needs good arable land for agriculture to meet the country's food

needs, the spread of tussock during the drought and, more recently, increasing spread due to recent rains has seen the control of tussock become near impossible. Whilst the federal government has developed a Weeds of National Significance program, in which state governments and local councils are also involved, it is recognised that the responsibility for the control of all noxious weeds lies with the landowner. What is less recognised is the phenomenal costs associated with noxious weed control and that governments of all levels are landowners as well.

The Serrated Tussock Working Party for New South Wales and the ACT estimates that in New South Wales alone serrated tussock costs more than \$40 million per year in control and lost production, and when the majority of that \$40 million is spent by private landholders, most of whom are primary producers, it is easy to see why the problem never seems to reduce. Whilst governments provide some monetary assistance through their various programs, they are not able to manage noxious weed programs on their own land. This in turn impacts on private landholders, especially those neighbouring public land. They continually fight a losing battle when that neighbouring land is not always under a weed management program because of a lack of resources. The fault here lies with successive governments, both coalition and Labor, and unless they work more cooperatively with state and local governments and the private landholders in a proactive rather than a reactive way the menace will keep spreading, placing ever-increasing stress on our food bowl by smothering good productive pasture land.

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (9.57 pm)—On Friday, 15 October I attended the two public consultation sessions held by the Murray-

Darling Basin Authority in Renmark seeking community feedback on the authority's guide to the Basin Plan. Several hundred people attended each of the sessions and whilst their anger was restrained their genuine concerns about the possible cuts to their water allocations were clearly evident. The authority's guide suggests reductions of between 26 and 35 per cent to South Australia's River Murray water allocation. That equates to a reduction of water extracted from the Murray by South Australia of between 175 and 235 gigalitres each year. Seventy-five per cent of South Australia's Murray water allocation is used by primary producers—mostly in South Australia's Riverland region. In 2008-09 their produce was worth \$390 million. I also note that South Australia only takes about seven per cent of the Murray-Darling Basin water, with New South Wales taking 54 per cent, Victoria 34 per cent and Queensland five per cent.

I believe that the South Australian Riverland community raised some legitimate concerns about the proposed water reductions in the guide, concerns which explain and justify their anger and frustration. I take this opportunity to highlight two particular concerns raised on the day. Firstly, for the past 50 years Riverland growers have been investing their own money in efficient irrigation systems, and their opportunities to be more efficient are now very limited. Their draw on the federal government's \$5.8 billion set aside for water efficiency measures will be negligible. Nor can they make up the cuts to their water supplies by further efficiency investments. Secondly, since the late 1960s no new River Murray water licences have been made available to growers in South Australia because South Australia capped the issuing of licences. It was the first state to do so.

Overallocations of water from the river by the issuing of new licences occurred in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s in the upstream

states while South Australia was maintaining a cap. The cap had been imposed to ensure that water extractions in South Australia were sustainable into the future. Not having caused or been responsible for overallocation, the South Australian Riverland growers now quite rightfully ask why they should share the pain of returning the river to sustainable diversion limits. It is not an unreasonable position to take.

The South Australian Riverland region is Australia's oldest horticultural region. It is unique in that many of the growers have relatively small farm sizes which are intensively farmed and reliant on their full water allocations. Because of international competition, climate factors and water restrictions over the last decade, many growers have endured difficult times and are struggling. Any further impediments to their viability will bring many of them to their knees.

I well understand that the Murray-Darling Basin waters have been overallocated and that current allocations are unsustainable. I understand and accept that based on the best possible weather forecasts allocations will need to be cut if the river's health is to be restored and extractions are to be sustainable in future years. I also understand that it is important to all Australians, wherever they live, for the river system to remain healthy.

I am conscious, however, of the economic and social impact on regional Murray-Darling Basin communities if water allocations are cut. That is why it is important to work through the process methodically, rationally and free of populist political point taking. The government has invested heavily in a range of strategies to reduce water extraction from the Murray-Darling Basin area. I believe that water savings made through these measures should be assessed first and taken into account before any cuts are made to the allocations to growers.

In the case of South Australia's Riverland region, I believe that due allowance should be made for the water efficiency investments already made by growers in that region and for the fact that South Australia has operated under and respected the licence cap imposed in the late 1960s. I believe that it is possible, with the right strategies, to restore the environmental flows that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority believes are necessary with minimal impact on the Riverland growers, and I ask the minister to take into account the special circumstances of the Riverland community when considering the government's response on this matter.

I was most encouraged by the minister's response to questions on this issue asked of him today in question time. I also welcome the parliamentary committee inquiry, chaired by the member for New England, into the impact of water cuts on communities in the Murray-Darling Basin. I look forward to the committee's report.

Western Australian Department of Environment and Conservation

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (10.02 pm)—Tonight I wish to speak of enviro-nazis in the WA Department of Environment and Conservation, DEC, and how their lack of scientific rigour and simple bloody-mindedness threatens to destroy the very good Australian family business of Narrogin Beef, owned by Matt and Janet Thompson. Matt is a previous chair of the WA Lot Feeders Association. The Thompsons have a feedlot operation which, according to Barry Carbon, former EPA chair, is brilliantly run and the best he has ever seen.

In 2007, following changes to greenhouse gas reporting and an open forum on the transition from the National Pollutant Inventory to national environmental protection measures, Matt circulated materials sceptical about anthropogenic global warming. The

DEC decided to attack the Thompsons' business. They had the Environmental Defender's Office brief some residents in proximity to Narrogin Beef on how to take action against the Thompsons.

At the time, the Thompsons had approval to build a feedlot that would run 15,000 head of cattle, and the DEC cut this back to 6,000 pending the setting of various conditions. Six thousand head of cattle is uneconomic, something the DEC were very much aware of. According to Barry Carbon, this was a conscious decision to send the Thompsons broke. The Department of Agriculture and Food set up an independent odour trial, the most comprehensive ever undertaken in WA, which took place over a period of 15 months. Despite finding that the odour emissions were acceptable, the DEC ignored the advice. The minister set up a local community consultative committee under Barry Carbon which, after exhaustive consultation, found that the feedlot was extremely well run and had no unacceptable odour issues. Once again the DEC rejected this advice and came up with a set of conditions that had to be met for the Thompsons to increase their feedlot operation to 10,000 head.

The odour conditions, among other conditions, stated that:

- The licensee shall ensure that odour emitted from the premises does not unreasonably interfere with the health, welfare, convenience, comfort or amenity of any person who is not on the premises.

I have pointed out to the minister's office that if these same conditions were placed on noise standards it would result in the closing of every highway, freeway and airport in WA. Indeed, the Department of Education in their submission to the DEC stated that there should be objective measures put on odour requirements. The Thompsons and I agree with this—an objective standard would be fair to all concerned. As it currently stands,

the National Australia Bank says that it has problems as it believes that the requirements, given the lack of objectivity, constitute too much of a risk as the number of cattle could be cut back to 6,000 head again on a whim.

I have had dealings on odour issues with the DEC regarding the south metro recycling centre in my electorate, and I similarly found them to be completely unprofessional and unscientific in my dealings with them. They are, quite frankly, inept, intimidating bullies who take their power to extremes and they need to be heavily brought into line when it comes to acceptable behaviour and acceptable practice—never mind world's best practice—when it comes to odour emission standards. I implore the minister to pull this errant department into line and remove the odour conditions from the conditions placed on the Thompsons until such time that objective, scientific, world's best practice standards are implemented by this incompetent department.

Chisholm Electorate: Clayton Road

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (10.06 pm)—I rise tonight to speak about an issue of huge concern to my electorate—traffic congestion on and around Clayton Road. There is a desperate need for something to be done about the traffic congestion surrounding Clayton Railway Station. This area is a major thoroughfare, with tens of thousands of motorists utilising the corridor on a daily basis. The Clayton Road gridlock has been a problematic issue for many years. In recent times the problem has gotten much worse to the point that it is now completely intolerable. The time has come for something to be done.

The 2010 redspot survey conducted by the RACV gathered information from Victorians who nominated congested road locations across the state. The Clayton Road intersection was ranked the eighth most troublesome spot in Victoria. According to the RACV

analysis, 36 trains pass through the Clayton Road crossing between seven and eight o'clock each morning. The crossing can be closed for up to 50 per cent of the hour, causing long queues and delays for those travelling north and south along Clayton Road. I certainly observed this on freezing cold mornings during the recent election campaign—it is a nightmare to behold. Recently, commuters faced a horrific morning at the intersection when a man suffered a fatal heart attack on a city-bound train. The boom gates were down from about 7.15 am and thousands of motorists were delayed at the level crossing for more than 40 minutes.

This incident highlights the problems of having the rail line and Clayton Road traffic on the same level. Unsurprisingly, it has triggered fresh calls from the community for a grade separation of the rail line and the road. The problem is set to be exacerbated following the Victorian government's announcement of a new \$250 million children's hospital at the Monash Medical Centre in Clayton, literally minutes up the road from the intersection of Clayton Road and the train station. I commend the Victorian government for committing to the 230-bed hospital, which will service more than 27,000 children. This is a magnificent project. There are more than 330,000 children living in the south-eastern corridor, and the new centre will mean that more babies and children receive their care more quickly, closer to home and closer to their families. As a person who has been a 'frequent flyer' at the children's hospital, I know that it would have been much nicer to have my child in a facility closer to home.

Although this project has obvious merit, greater strain is going to be placed on the Clayton Road intersection when construction begins in 2012. Ambulance Employees Australia has already expressed concerns that the bottleneck is delaying ambulance attendance at Monash Medical Centre. The new chil-

dren's hospital will generate more traffic along Clayton Road and undoubtedly lead to even longer delays at the intersection. This has the potential to result in tragic consequences when it comes to emergency cases. Bus services such as the popular and high frequency SmartBus are also affected by these delays. The SmartBus takes students to Monash University, so it is a frequent service, and the hold-ups will affect bus timetables and lead to immense frustration for commuters.

The problems with congestion at Clayton Road are not confined to frustrated motorists. Local businesses and traders at the Clayton shopping strip are feeling the pinch, with the congestion affecting their businesses. Clayton Traders Association president Bill Pontikis summed up the feeling of local traders when he said, 'I'm not sure how much longer we can deal with this, because it's getting worse every day.' As the RACV and others have noted, the solution to Clayton's clogged roads is a grade separation whereby either an overpass or an underpass is created at the railway station.

While I welcome the Victorian government's commitment of \$1 million to examine options for addressing this issue along the Dandenong rail line corridor, more needs to be done. I also understand the complications of the issue given the freight and regional services that pass along this train line. It is not just the commuter services that are using it. That is why there is a greater frequency of trains in this spot. The grade separation of the railway line and the road is absolutely essential to address congestion and, more importantly, accident issues, which are only getting worse. I call upon the Victorian government to make this issue a priority in the upcoming Victorian election and commit to action which will ease the current gridlock. The case for action is clear. Motorists, commuters and local traders are fed up with the

delays and the ensuing accidents. It is time for the government to step up and address this issue. While I understand it will be costly, the community will benefit overall.

Middle East

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (10.11 pm)—Last Thursday the President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, travelled to southern Lebanon in a show of support for the terrorist organisation Hezbollah. The President stood within four kilometres of Israel to address a crowd of thousands of people at a stadium in Bent Jbeil. He was joined by his Hezbollah No. 2, Naim Qasim, along with Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah via video link. President Ahmadinejad took the opportunity to offer another of his now infamous denunciations of Israel. He said, 'The occupying Zionists today have no choice but to accept reality and go back to their countries of origin.' Not content for the state of Israel to be abolished, he added, 'The entire world should know that the Zionists are destined to disappear from the world.' This language comes as no surprise to anyone who is familiar with the President's speeches of hate. In 2005, in his 'World without Zionism' speech, he declared that Israel must be wiped off the map. In 2006, at the deeply offensive International Conference to Review the Global Vision of the Holocaust, hosted in Tehran, he stated, 'The Zionist regime will be wiped out soon.'

While some in the West suggest that Israel should shrug off the latest statements by the President, they ignore the reality of Israel's situation. Israel is a bastion of freedom and democracy in a region where both are highly undervalued by neighbouring regimes. It is a nation that faces the very real prospect of terrorism on a daily basis, with some of its neighbours committed to its very destruction. Israel has every right to defend itself against terrorist acts. Israel not only has the right to

defend itself but also has an obligation to do so. It is right to take action in self-defence. The right to do so is enshrined in international law under article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. Israel would be derelict in its responsibilities not to do so. Israel has every right to feel threatened by Iran's overtures. Moreover, such statements by the President cannot be ignored, especially given the precarious state of affairs in the region. President Ahmadinejad's trip is a clear sign that the Ayatollah regime is extending its influence in Lebanon. Hezbollah, Iran's close ally in Lebanon, shares power in a fragile unity government with the pro-Western coalition.

The President of Iran's comments are particularly disturbing in light of Iran's refusal to engage with the international community over its nuclear program. Just when Iran started to show a willingness to re-enter negotiations over its nuclear capability, it accused the US government of a range of conspiracies, including 9-11. At a United Nations meeting, President Ahmadinejad claimed that the US government planned the 9-11 attack on the World Trade Centre. He said that some segments within the US government orchestrated the attack to reverse the declining American economy and its grip on the Middle East in order to also save the Zionist regime. 'The majority of the American people as well as other nations and politicians agree with this view,' he said.

This sort of tactic is deliberately designed to frustrate attempts at a meaningful discussion and a meaningful level of scrutiny. Iran must not be allowed to pursue its nuclear ambitions without fear of rebuke from the rest of the world. It is disturbing to think that Iran's nuclear program is, by all accounts, very close to being fully operational and will begin producing nuclear energy at its 1,000-megawatt reactor in Bushehr by early next year. Despite its international statements, it is

unthinkable that Iran is set on a peaceful nuclear program when it refuses the scrutiny of the international community and sponsors terrorism through organisations such as Hezbollah.

We have an obligation to speak out against this increased nuclear capability. We have every reason to believe that the purpose of Iran's nuclear capability is the production, potentially, of nuclear weapons, and we must stand against this. The future of Israel and the future of peace depend on it.

North-East Tasmania: Development

Mr LYONS (Bass) (10.16 pm)—I rise to speak about the need for development in the north-eastern part of Tasmania. Too often the potential of areas in regional Australia is not utilised and business opportunities are missed. The north-eastern part of Tasmania is home to pristine beaches and to rich soil that produces top quality vegetables. It is also home to the world renowned Barnbougle Dunes golf course—Australia's No. 1 public golf course. Yet this area is struggling. As a result, there have been a number of business closures. Bonlac dairy manufacturers closed in 2000 and the Simplot vegetable factory in Scottsdale closed in 2003, followed by the Auspine sawmill in 2008. This saw the loss of many jobs in the area, which had a widespread impact on the local community.

Today Gunns announced the imminent closure of their Ling Siding sawmill at Scottsdale, within four months. Gunns's decision is most disappointing and further places unacceptable hardship upon the Scottsdale community, which has shown commitment to that company. It is inexcusable that commitment has not been forthcoming from Gunns, who now expect those workers to move to Bell Bay. We should expect such companies to act in a more acceptable and committed manner to the communities in which they operate.

I would like to ask: where are the businesses of Australia? Where is the white knight that is needed to ride in and save this community? It is time that Australian business widened their view and invested in and made the most of the opportunities that regional areas like Tasmania's north-east have to offer.

Tasmania's north-east has so much to offer. It has been identified as a key food production region in the state of Tasmania. Agricultural enterprises flourish, such as dairying, dryland grazing and horticulture including rhubarb, carrots, potatoes, onions, poppies and fodder crops. Other more specialised crops that are grown in the region include hops, wasabi, lavender and stone fruits. With a range of climate and soil types, it is suitable for a range of agricultural production, being the recipient of a significant and reliable rainfall each year. Forestry is another major sector for the region. In fact 26 per cent of the region's employment comes from the agricultural and forestry sectors alone. The Armed Forces Food Science Establishment is at Scottsdale, where food is researched and developed for the three services. This is another example of the range of extensive skills and opportunities available in the area.

North-eastern Tasmania has so much to offer, including rich 'red' soil, quality farmland, forestry, strong communities and hard-working people. This region must be attractive to businesses in Australia and around the world—but why is it that none have come to the area to establish themselves and make the most out of what is on offer? The National Broadband Network has been connected in the area, increasing business opportunities and connecting this region to the rest of the world. Not only have business opportunities been increased but educational opportunities, including new ways of learning, will be developed. It will also lead to improved access

to health facilities and services such as e-health, which will modernise the way that health services will be delivered.

The fact that Scottsdale was one of the first three towns to be connected to the National Broadband Network and the advantages that this brings with it speaks for itself. Scottsdale will be one of the first to experience the benefits of the NBN. Businesses should recognise that they will lead the field by investing in Scottsdale. They should think about moving to the infrastructure that already exists rather than waiting for the NBN to come to them. Make the most of the head start. Make the most of the wonderful opportunity and advantages on offer.

Broadband is just one of the drivers that will advance this region. It is not possible to list all of the positive aspects that this region has to offer; otherwise I would be here all night. As I mentioned at the start of this speech, this regional area has excellent farmland with quality soil and climate, a world famous golf course, the armed services food science laboratory, forestry, and strong and welcoming communities—so many positives yet so few businesses. Tonight, I call on businesses of Australia to take up the challenge to invest in this area and to support the people of north-eastern Tasmania and the people in their businesses.

Question agreed to.

House adjourned at 10.21 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Snowdon to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to veterans' entitlements and military rehabilitation and compensation, and for related purposes.

Mr Albanese to move:

That standing order 80 (Closure of a Member speaking) be suspended for the remainder of this

period of sittings, except when a motion is moved pursuant to the standing order by a Minister.

Mr Albanese to move:

That standing order 47 (motions for suspension of orders) be suspended for the remainder of this sitting, except when a motion is moved pursuant to the standing order by a Minister.

Mr Albanese to move:

That standing orders 207 and 209 be amended to read as follows:

207 Presenting a petition

A petition may be presented in one of two ways:

- (a) The Chair of the Standing Committee on Petitions shall present petitions and/or reports of that committee, and the Chair and one other Member of the Committee may make statements concerning petitions and/or such reports presented, in accordance with standing order 34 (order of business). The time provided may extend for no more than 10 minutes.
- (b) A Member may present a petition during:
 - (i) the period of Members' statements in the House, in accordance with standing order 43;
 - (ii) the period of Members' constituency statements in the Main Committee, in accordance with standing order 193;
 - (iii) adjournment debate in the House in accordance with standing order 31, and in the Main Committee in accordance with standing order 191; and
 - (iv) grievance debate in accordance with standing order 192B.

209 Petition may be referred to a Minister for response

- (a) After a petition is presented to the House, the Standing Committee on Petitions may refer a copy of the petition to the Minister responsible for the administration of the matter raised in the petition.
- (b) The Minister shall be expected to respond to a referred petition within 90 days of presentation by lodging a written response with the Committee.

- (c) The Chair of the Petitions Committee shall announce any ministerial responses to petitions. After the announcement, ministerial responses shall be printed in Hansard and published on the House's website.

Mr Albanese I give notice that, contingent on the motion for the second reading of any bill being moved, a Minister shall move—That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the resumption of debate on the motion that the bill be read a second time being made an order of the day for a later hour.

I also give notice that, contingent on any report relating to a bill being received from the Main Committee, a Minister shall move—That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the remaining stages being passed without delay.

I also give notice that, contingent on any bill being agreed to at the conclusion of the consideration in detail stage, a Minister shall move—That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the motion for the third reading being moved without delay.

I also give notice that, contingent on any message being received from the Senate transmitting any bill for concurrence, a Minister shall move—That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the bill being passed through all its stages without delay.

Mr Adams to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that pensions must keep pace with the cost of living;
- (2) recognises the significance and importance of the Labor Government's \$14 billion reform of the pension system after over 11 years of Coalition inaction;
- (3) understands that when there is a Commonwealth pension rise, some of it is likely to be absorbed into pensioners' rising living costs, often as a result of States and Territories lifting housing rents and power costs;
- (4) notes the danger that pensioners are at risk of becoming impoverished if State and Territory

governments do not allow the benefits of pension increases to flow through to pensioners; and

(5) demands that all State and Territory Governments commit to permanently quarantining last September's pension rise, in the calculation of pensioners' public housing rent levels and other State and Territory government controlled costs.

Mr Hayes to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that 25 November marks White Ribbon Day, the symbol of the United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women;
- (2) recognises that White Ribbon Day aims to prevent violence against women by increasing public awareness and education by challenging the attitudes and behaviours that allow violence to continue;
- (3) asks all Australian men to challenge these attitudes and behaviours, so that we can begin to drive real change in our community;
- (4) asks all Australian men to join the 'My Oath Campaign' and take the oath: I swear never to commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women;
- (5) notes with concern that one in three women will experience physical violence, and one in five will experience sexual violence over their lifetime;
- (6) understands that domestic and family violence are primary causes of homelessness;
- (7) acknowledges the cost of violence against women and their children to the Australian economy was estimated to be \$13.6 billion in 2008-09, and if we take no action to shine a light on this violence, that cost will hit an estimated \$15.6 billion by 2021-22; and
- (8) asks all Members to show that they are challenging violence against women by wearing a white ribbon or wristband on White Ribbon Day.

Mr Hayes to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes the importance of public libraries in communities across Australia;
- (2) recognises that:
 - (a) various state-based research provides clear evidence of the contribution and value of public libraries in terms of the triple bottom line: economic, environmental and social impact; and
 - (b) recognises that libraries provide access to information technology, research, educational resources and recreational materials for many people who otherwise could not afford them;
- (3) congratulates public library staff for their commitment to facilitating life long learning in the community;
- (4) supports the wide availability of public library collections as a way to help address disadvantage by ensuring free and equitable access to collections for all community members;
- (5) notes that in 2008-09, 7.7 million Australians visited a library and the total asset value of library collections in this country was \$4.3 billion;
- (6) expresses concern over the action instigated by Liverpool City Council to investigate the viability of closing Green Valley, Miller, Moorebank and Casula public libraries; and
- (7) specifically notes the community outrage and concern as a result of this decision, giving regard to the proven benefits of local public libraries as noted above.

Ms Hall to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that cardiovascular disease:
 - (a) is a heart, stroke and blood vessel disease;
 - (b) kills one Australian nearly every 11 minutes;
 - (c) affects more than 3.4 million Australians;
 - (d) prevents 1.4 million people from living a full life because of disability caused by the disease;

- (e) affects one in five Australians, and two out of three families; and
- (f) claimed the lives of almost 48 000 Australians (34 per cent of all deaths) in 2008—deaths that are largely preventable;
- (2) notes that cardiovascular risk factors include:
 - (a) tobacco smoking;
 - (b) insufficient physical activity;
 - (c) poor nutrition;
 - (d) alcohol consumption;
 - (e) high blood pressure;
 - (f) high blood cholesterol;
 - (g) being overweight;
 - (h) having diabetes; and
 - (i) kidney (renal) failure;
- (3) notes the importance of knowing the warning signs of heart attack:
 - (a) discomfort or pain in the centre of the chest;
 - (b) discomfort in the arms, neck, shoulders, jaw and back; and
 - (c) shortness of breath, nausea, cold sweat, dizziness or light headedness;
- (4) notes that recognition of heart attack and early response increases cardiovascular awareness, saving lives and preventing related disability; and
- (5) acknowledges that promotion of healthy eating and increased exercise will lead to healthier lifestyles and a reduction in cardiovascular disease.

Ms Hall to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) Australia has an ageing population;
 - (b) age discrimination exists within Australia and that this discrimination impacts on the strength of society, economy and the lives of older Australians;
 - (c) ageing should not only be considered as an economic and social cost to government, rather, the positives of an older

- population should be recognised and promoted by government;
- (d) all older Australians deserve to live with dignity; and
- (e) the knowledge, life experience and skills of older people provide enormous benefit to Australia and the social fabric of the nation;
- (2) acknowledges that:
 - (a) older workers have the ability to make an enormous contribution to the economic prosperity of Australia;
 - (b) most volunteer work is undertaken by older Australians and provides an enormous economic social contribution to Australia; and
 - (c) older Australians provide an enormous amount of child care which provides economic value to the nation; and
- (3) calls on the Government to consider:
 - (a) new and innovative approaches to engage older Australians and address their needs;
 - (b) encouraging Government departments to introduce senior friendly practices, such as dedicated seniors phone lines and customer service officers;
 - (c) Aged Care Accountants for all workers to fund their needs as they become older; and
 - (d) highlighting and promoting the advantage of employing older workers.

Ms Burke to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes:
 - (a) the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo continues to suffer from high levels of poverty, insecurity, and a culture of impunity, in which illegal armed groups and military forces continue to commit widespread human right abuses;
 - (b) that, according to a study by the International Rescue Committee released in January 2008, conflict and related hu-

manitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo have resulted in the deaths of an estimated 5 400 000 people since 1998, and continue to cause as many as 45 000 deaths each year; and

(c) the mismanagement and illicit trade of extractive resources from the Democratic Republic of Congo supports conflict between militias and armed domestic factions in neighbouring countries; and

(2) calls on the Government to promote peace and security in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo by supporting efforts of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo, civil society groups, and the international community to monitor and stop commercial activities involving natural resources that contribute to illegal armed groups and human rights violations.

Mr Ripoll to move:

That this House notes that:

(1) the Intergenerational Report predicts Australia's population may reach 35.9 million by 2050;

(2) population growth continues to be centred around Australia's capital cities;

(3) the electorate of Oxley contains parts of Ipswich East, one of the statistical areas that has seen the largest population increases in Australia between 2004 and 2009;

(4) continuing population growth is placing pressure on the sustainability of Australian cities and the lifestyles of their residents;

(5) a 'business as usual' approach to planning and development will no longer be sufficient for the future needs of Australian cities;

(6) building Sustainable Cities must become a policy priority for all levels of government; and

(7) the future sustainability of Australian cities must include a need to 'decentralise' the capital cities and encourage major employers, such as government department, to regional and outer urban centres.

Mrs D'Ath to move:

That this House recognises:

(1) that many lives have been saved through the research and the use of organ and blood donations throughout Australia;

(2) that one form of donation is cord blood from the umbilical cord and placenta, and that:

(a) research has shown that his blood is a rich source of blood forming stem cells known as haemopoietic stem cells;

(b) the use of these cells for transplantation to a sufferer of leukaemia, lymphoma, and some tumours, provides the best chance for a cure; and

(c) recent research has established that umbilical cord blood stem cells can demonstrate plasticity, suggesting a role for them in the treatment of diseases such as diabetes, cerebral vascular disease, and Parkinson's disease;

(3) that the collection of umbilical cord blood cells for research and for processing is a safe and non-invasive procedure, and that this procedure does not involve the destruction of an embryo given that the umbilical cord and placenta are usually discarded as waste;

(4) that the collection of umbilical cord blood is not available in all States and Territories or hospitals throughout Australia, and that:

(a) the collection, processing and storage of umbilical cord blood requires specialised techniques by appropriately trained and accredited professionals; and

(b) based on limitations on the collection centres that currently exist, not all permissions for donations given by women at existing collection centres results in the actual collection of the cord blood;

(5) that the Federal Government already funds the Australian National Cord Blood Collection Network; and

(6) the great work being done by the Australian National Cord Blood Collection Network, AusCord, the Australian national network of umbilical cord blood banks and cord blood collection centres.

Mr Danby to move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates Mr Liu Xiaobo for having been awarded the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize;
- (2) notes that:
 - (a) Mr Liu was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 'his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China';
 - (b) on 23 December 2009 Mr Liu was tried for 'inciting subversion of state power', and on 25 December 2009 sentenced to eleven years' imprisonment and two years' deprivation of political rights;
 - (c) Mr Liu was tried in the context of his advocacy for the petition known as 'Charter 08' which was initially signed by 350 Chinese intellectuals and human rights activists; and
 - (d) 'Charter 08' calls for 19 changes to improve human rights in China, including an independent legal system, freedom of association and the elimination of one-party rule;
- (3) calls for Mr Liu to be released and his sentence repealed; and
- (4) supports the right of Chinese citizens to call for political reform, greater protection of human rights and democratisation in their country.

Ms Hall to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) Pink Ribbon day is 25 October;
 - (b) breast cancer is the most common cancer in Australian women, accounting for 28 per cent of cancer diagnoses in 2006;
 - (c) this year alone, 12 000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, which is expected to increase by 22 per cent by 2015;
 - (d) one in nine women will be diagnosed with breast cancer by age 85;

(e) breast cancer is the most common cancer in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women;

(f) the risk of developing breast cancer increases with age, with the average age of diagnosis recorded as 60 in 2006;

(g) mammograms are vital to early detection, with 75 per cent of deaths occurring in women who have never been screened; and

(h) there has been a 27 per cent decrease in mortality rates due to breast cancer since 1994; and

- (2) acknowledges the:

(a) work of the National Breast Cancer Foundation;

(b) effectiveness of Pink Ribbon Day in raising awareness;

(c) work of the Jane McGrath Foundation;

(d) contribution of volunteers, staff and researchers; and

(e) importance of early detection.

Ms Owens to move:

That this House congratulates:

(1) Australia's Commonwealth Games athletes, coaches and support staff on a job well done in Delhi; and

(2) all our athletes who competed strongly, in good spirit and brought home 74 gold, 55 silver and 48 bronze;

(3) the Indian people for their generous hospitality to Australia's team; and

(4) the Indian people and the Indian Government for a well run Games, which kept all visitors safe, shared Indian-rich cultural traditions with the world and showed a glimpse of the future of Delhi as a truly global city.

Ms Owens to move:

That this House:

- (1) recognises:

(a) that the week of 17 to 23 October was National Carers Week;

- (b) that there are more than 2.6 million carers in Australia;
- (c) the caring role is one of immense social and economic value, with carers being the foundation of our health, aged, palliative and community care systems;
- (d) as health care increasingly moves away from 'institutional' settings into the home and community, family carers shoulder greater responsibility for managing complex conditions and providing the emotional and physical support for the person for whom they are caring;
- (e) without carers, no future health or community care system will be able to respond to changing demographics and health needs, clinical practices and societal influences, in the long term;
- (f) the Government's practical measures to improve the lives of carers through significant reforms across the disability, health, mental health and aged care service systems, including:
 - (i) delivering a \$60 a fortnight increase to the base pension plus an increase of \$5 a fortnight in the new Pension Supplement for carers receiving the maximum single rate of Carer Payment (a total increase of around \$100 per fortnight, after indexation increases from 20 March);
 - (ii) guaranteeing the certainty of an annual ongoing Carers Supplement of \$600 for each person cared for, benefiting around 500 000 carers;
 - (iii) overhauling the complex and restrictive eligibility requirements for Carer Payment (Child);
 - (iv) significantly boosting funding to the State and Territory governments for specialist disability services including supported accommodation, in-home care and respite; and
 - (v) commissioning the Productivity Commission to examine the feasibility, costs and benefits of a National Long Term Disability Care and Support Scheme; and
- (2) calls on the Government to renew its commitment to carers in this Parliament and to exercise all instruments of policy to support carers in their vital work.

Ms Parke to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that 24 October is United Nations Day which celebrates the entry into force of the United Nations Charter on 24 October 1945;
- (2) celebrates Australia's key role in the formation of the United Nations and the drafting of the United Nations Charter;
- (3) recognises that Australia has been a consistent and long term contributor to United Nations efforts to safeguard international peace and security and to promote human rights, for example, by:
 - (a) being the thirteenth largest contributor to the United Nations budget;
 - (b) contributing to many United Nations peacekeeping operations;
 - (c) firmly committing to increasing Australia's development assistance; and
 - (d) by continuing to push for real progress towards the Millennium Development Goals;
- (4) notes further the Australian Government's commitment to the multilateral system as one of the three fundamental pillars of Australia's foreign policy, namely that Australia is determined to work through the United Nations to enhance security and economic well being worldwide, and to uphold the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter;
- (5) notes that as the only genuinely global Organisation, the United Nations plays a critical role in addressing the global challenges that no single country can resolve on its own, and that Australia is determined to play its part within the United Nations to help address serious global challenges, including conflict prevention and resolution, international development, climate change, terrorism and the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction;

- (6) expresses its condolences for the loss of 100 United Nations staff lives in January 2010 as a result of the earthquake in Haiti, and expresses its appreciation for the ongoing work in difficult conditions of United Nations staff around the world; and
- (7) reaffirms the faith of the Australian people in the purposes, principles, and actions of the United Nations acting under guidance of the United Nations Charter.

Ms Saffin to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) 10 October was World Mental Health Day and many Australians, organisations and governments undertook activities to recognise this;
 - (b) many Australians living with mental health problems, along with the families, friends and carers, live with these each and every day of the year; and
 - (c) services are sometimes non-existent, not appropriate, or inaccessible;
- (2) supports measures to build a better way of responding to the myriad of needs for people who suffer mental health;
- (3) acknowledges the call of the Mental Health Council of Australia for Australians to check on the mental health of those they care about, not be afraid to put their mental health and well being higher on their own agenda, and to be active about mental health not just on 10 October, but every day of the year;
- (4) notes the words of the Mental Health Council in its public comments for World Mental Health Day: 'World Mental Health Day is a time to focus on what we have achieved and hope to achieve in mental health...With the personal commitment of the Prime Minister, a new Minister for Mental Health and all major parties talking about the need for increased investment in mental health, 2010 must be the year in which mental health reform ends some of the systemic discrimination against people who experience a mental illness.'(David Crosbie, CEO of the Mental Health Council);

- (5) applauds the fact that we have for the first time a Minister for Mental Health, a Shadow Minister for Mental Health and a Greens Spokesperson for Mental Health.

Mr Lyons to move:

That this House:

- (1) acknowledges and congratulates the over 153 000 volunteer members and staff of Surf Life Saving Australia;
- (2) notes that:
 - (a) Surf Life Saving Australia faces many challenges in looking after the nation's largest and most popular playground, our beaches, with over 100 million beach visitations each year; and
 - (b) in its 103 years of service, Surf Life Saving Australia is defying trends by increasing volunteer numbers, which is a great reflection of an organisation strongly connected to unique Aussie lifestyle, culture and adaptability;
- (3) supports Surf Life Saving Australia's efforts in advocating for nationally consistent standards for coastal safety services, systems and signage;
- (4) acknowledges Surf Life Saving Australia's international aid and development programs in 25 countries, mainly in the Asia Pacific region, playing its part in showcasing the nation's global goodwill; and
- (5) supports the establishment of bi-partisan 'Friends of Surf Life Saving' amongst Members of Parliament and Senators, providing the opportunity for Surf Life Saving Australia to keep the country's leaders informed about the humanitarian, social and economic value of Surf Life Saving Australia to the Australian community.

Mr Perrett to move:

That this House:

- (1) recognises the conclusion of a great television police drama, *The Bill*, and thanks the ABC for its long standing commitment to the program;

- (2) acknowledges that since 1983, *The Bill*, has kept many of us from fully engaging with the broader Australian arts community on a Saturday night;
- (3) recognises the broad contribution that our local arts make to Australian society and culture;
- (4) reaffirms our commitment to the arts and to engaging with our local performers, artists and writers (particularly on our now *Bill*-less Saturday nights); and
- (5) calls on the Minister for the Arts to lead Australia into a new era of artistic development and excellence and for all Australians to better support their local live performances.

Mr Craig Thomson to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) in 1950, the Wyong water catchment valleys on the NSW Central Coast were proclaimed a Water Catchment District, with the Wyong Shire Council as the consent authority;
 - (b) the implementation of Part 3A legislation by the NSW State Government has over-ridden the authority of local government to refuse consent for the Wallarah II (Wyong Areas Joint Coal Venture) coal mine proposal to proceed;
 - (c) if the Wallarah II coal mine was to proceed, it would have a significant and adverse impact on the environment, in particular, on the Wyong Water Catchment Valleys, which supply over 50 per cent of the potable water to the 310 000 residents of the Central Coast region of NSW; and
 - (d) local government authorities within the Central Coast region have, for a period of at least five years, jointed with the community in an ongoing fight to stop the Wallarah II coal mine and thereby protect the region's most valuable and major water resource; and
- (2) requests the Australian Government to consider refusing the grant of a coal export licence to the South Korean Government-owned company, Kores, in respect of the Wallarah II Coal Mine proposal.

Monday, 18 October 2010

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper) took the chair at 10.30 am.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Taxation

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (10.30 am)—I rise today to speak on an issue of concern to my constituents of Higgins, the issue of Labor government secrecy. My constituents are concerned that Labor government secrecy is increasing the waste and mismanagement of their taxpayer dollars. The Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, promised a ‘new paradigm’ in Australian politics and a new era of government transparency. This was mostly to allay fears that her government would be similar to the last one, the one responsible for the pink batts tragedy, the one responsible for the billion-dollar budget blow-outs and waste in the BER program and the one that broke its election commitment to be prudent economic managers, to be economic conservatives. After the government has been in office for only a few short weeks, the people of Higgins are asking, ‘How is the Gillard government any different from the Rudd-Gillard government?’ The answer is: it is not. Take the example of tax. Wayne Swan still will not release critical Treasury modelling behind the Henry tax review, a review so important, according to this government, that it requires its very own summit to debate it. But how on earth can the issue of tax, and in particular the mining tax, be properly debated if we do not know the assumptions that were fed into the Henry review? How can we be confident in the ever-shifting revenue predictions, or the impact on our economy, in circumstances where Wayne Swan refuses to answer the most basic questions about how he arrived at these figures?

Let us go through the time line. The Henry tax review was handed to the government just before Christmas in 2009, and Treasurer Wayne Swan promised that it would be released in early 2010. Seven months later the review and the government’s response to 2½ recommendations out of 138 were released. Rudd’s excuse for the Henry review delay was: ‘Each thing in its own season.’ With winter now behind us and with Gillard’s promise to ‘let the sun shine in’, my constituents of Higgins are hoping that now might be the right season to release important information. But how many seasons will we have to wait? The seasons may come and go but it seems that the Rudd, now Gillard, government remains in perpetual darkness. The modelling is important in terms of the impact of changes to current tax policy. It is important for all parties and Independents and, more importantly, for the Australian public to know what impact policy proposals will have on the budget and the economy. This has a direct impact on their jobs, their families and their future. The government claims it is implementing reform in a transparent manner. If this is so, then the release of Treasury’s modelling should have been the very first thing it did. There is no reason to sit on it other than to deprive the Australian public of information and to avoid scrutiny. In the last sitting period, the Senate issued an order requesting release of this information, yet Swan and Gillard still refuse, defying the Senate—(*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Before calling the honourable member for Fowler, I remind all honourable members of the provisions of standing order 64, which provide that members ought to refer to other members not by their name but instead by their title.

Mr Phil Tolhurst

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (10.33 am)—It is with great sadness that I rise today to speak about a great community servant who is no longer with us. Phil Tolhurst served the Liverpool City Council for more than 10 years before becoming general manager in 2007. Phil died suddenly and tragically on 18 September at the age of 52. Perhaps we can take some comfort from the fact that Phil died doing what he enjoyed most, and that was watching his son play soccer. Phil was a devoted family man and cherished his wife, Judith, and his twin sons, James and Matthew. He would often be seen cheering his sons on at the sidelines of their soccer or rugby matches. The Liverpool City Council, and the whole community of the south-west of Sydney, were deeply shocked by Phil’s passing. I had the honour of working closely with Phil for a number of years, and I cannot speak highly enough of this man and his commitment to the local community. His sole motivation and purpose were to ensure that the Liverpool area—the region and the community—and its residents thrived. For this reason he quickly earned the respect of his colleagues. When speaking of Phil, most people cannot help but mention his closeness to the staff of the Liverpool City Council. Regardless of whether they were managers of departments or working on the roads, Phil had time for all his employees—not just as a boss but as someone who cared.

Phil’s dedication to enhancing the lives of others was evident in his personal life as well. Even after his passing, Phil’s generosity to community organisations was evident in the family’s insistence that, in lieu of flowers, donations instead be made to the Woonona Boys Brigade. The Boys Brigade focuses on the training and development of young boys and men and builds them into balanced people through physical, spiritual, social and educational activities. Phil was a man of great integrity, one who had the interests of the local community at his heart, and a man who showed great warmth and compassion to all. Being from Wollongong, Phil was also a passionate St George Illawarra Dragons fan. It is a great shame that he was not there to see the Dragons lift the premiership trophy earlier this month. But, as someone who believes, I am sure that he was actually watching. To Phil’s friends and family, I offer my deepest sympathies at this very difficult time. On behalf of a very indebted community, I thank Phil for everything that he did. May he rest in peace.

Forrest Electorate: Tassell Park Wines

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (10.36 am)—I rise to once again ask the government to respond to a situation facing a winery in my electorate of Forrest as a result of the Labor government’s award modernisation. Ian and Patricia Tassell of Tassell Park Wines, a winery in Margaret River, contacted my office several months ago desperately seeking clarification as to whether their winery business entity is covered under the new wine industry award. Tassell Park Wines’s legal entity is a trust that has a corporate as a trustee. While the winery understands that corporate entities are covered by the new wine industry award, it cannot find an explanation as to whether trusts with a corporate trustee are covered also.

The single question Tassell Park Wines would like answered is: if a trust has a company or a corporate trustee, does the trust come under the new wine industry award? In trying to get a simple answer for what is a simple question, Tassell Park Wines visited the Fair Work Australia website and also contacted the Western Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. I was—and still am—seriously disturbed to hear the response given by both of these entities. Neither of the entities was able to provide a definitive answer, and Tassell Park Wines was

advised on both occasions to seek legal advice at its own expense, something that should not be necessary. Fair Work Australia should be able to give this company and this couple legal advice on their situation. The advice they were given was: go and get legal advice at your expense as to whether you are covered under this new award process.

Mrs Gash—Shameful.

Ms MARINO—It is shameful. Not surprisingly, Tassell Park Wines found this response not only astonishing but, in their words, increasingly frustrating, and frustrating now over a number of months. I just wonder whether this Labor government believes that it is acceptable for a small business to have to pay for legal advice for an answer as to whether or not they are covered under the government's own new wine industry award as a result of the Prime Minister's award modernisation process.

I have contacted the Prime Minister in her previous role. I have had three communications: one to the minister who was responsible, Minister Crean, and recently a further communication to Minister Evans. At this time, neither Patricia and Ian Tassell nor I have received a response. This has gone on long enough. I call on the government to contact Tassell Park Wines or me to advise them as to whether they are covered by the new wine industry award or not and give certainty to a small business that is getting on with their job. (*Time expired*)

Hindmarsh Electorate: Ascot Park Bowling Club

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (10.39 am)—I rise today to pay tribute to and to congratulate the Ascot Park Bowling Club within the electorate of Hindmarsh. Yesterday I had great pleasure in attending the 50-year anniversary of the bowling club. There were well over 100 people in attendance from many of the clubs in the surrounding areas. In attendance as well was the Mayor of the City of Marion, Mayor Felicity Lewis. Local councillor Irene Whennan, who is a very hardworking councillor for her ward, was also there. She is a great supporter of local communities in and around her ward in the electorate of Hindmarsh and in the City of Marion. Mary Lou Corcoran was also there representing the state member of parliament, the Hon. Patrick Conlon.

I would like to pay tribute to the club for their 50 years of contribution to the area. The club was started more than 50 years ago with an idea of forming a bowling green in the backyard of a particular person that had an interest in bowls. From there, the idea grew and eventually it moved to the premises where it is now and has been for 50 years. Think of the 50 years that the Ascot Park Bowling Club has been there and the contribution it has given and the lives it has touched. Yesterday just looking at the club's honours board, I saw there were hundreds of names of past presidents and secretaries. The club has touched many lives, contributed to the community atmosphere and provided exercise to members getting together once or twice a week by having a game of bowls and enjoying each other's company.

Great fun was had by all yesterday. Of course, President Paul Herreen was there. He is a very hardworking president. Currently, they are looking at renewing the building and getting some building works done to modernise the place. As I have said, the club rooms were built 50 years ago and they were built in bits and pieces as the club grew. We are looking at ensuring that we do all that we can to support them to get some funding—whether it be from local, state or federal government—so they can realise their plan. They have planned many special events throughout this year for their 50th anniversary. As I have said, one of those projects

will be to commence the rebuilding of the club rooms. These facilities have been built in various stages over the years, but I am sure that, with the leadership of Paul Herreen as president and secretary John McDougall and others, they will realise their dream and continue to service the community for many, many more years, whether it be through sporting events such as Night Owls or—*(Time expired)*

Gilmore Electorate: Dunn and Lewis Memorial in Ulladulla

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (10.42 am)—Recently I was privileged to have been invited to attend the opening of stage 1 of the Dunn and Lewis Memorial in Ulladulla. It was constructed as a memorial to two young mates who died in the Bali bomb blast in 2002. Speaking on the occasion was the sister of Craig Dunn and daughter of the memorial's strongest advocate and proponent, Gayle Dunn, mother of Craig. The sentiments expressed by Karlee Dunn are far more eloquent than I could ever hope to convey and I would like to share her words with the chamber. This is what Karlee said:

Today is more than just an opening ... of a bowling alley.

It's an opening of our living memorial.

Today I wish to thank everybody here ... to send my thanks to all the people ... who could not be here ... because without all of you donating ... and showing your support ... we would not be standing here today ... in the Dunn and Lewis complex.

There is one person ... who deserves the most thanks, ... and that would be Gayle Dunn.

To me she is an outstanding lady ... and I'm so grateful—

and so proud—

that she is my mum.

Unlike most people ... who lose someone they love ... she didn't hide away from the world and grieve; She worked with her grief ... to build something that this community ... and many other communities ... can benefit from.

She has spent hundreds of hours ... on the phone ... to thousands of different influential people ... trying to obtain funding ... in some way or another.

She has organised many fundraisers ... and she was always one of the first people there ... and would stay up until everything had ended ... and been cleaned up.

Without her ... this building and what it stands for ... would be a distant dream ... that none of us would be able to enjoy ... and embrace for many years to come.

The hours that some people ... put into this building ... is outstanding.

To me the passion of my mum ... and many others ... is amazing ... and inspires me everyday ... to be a better person.

Some of these people ... have spent countless hours outside shops and markets ... trying to fundraise ... and had the willpower to ignore the criticism ... that some people had shown towards them ... which I think ... is a very strong thing to be able to do.

This may have started off ... as a memorial for Danny Lewis and Craig Dunn ... but it was soon realised ... that they are not the only two people ... lost to the world.

So this is a memorial ... for everyone that has been lost in tragedies ... accidents ... it was their time.

This building is not only a bowling alley ... or memorial;

It is not just for youth or the elderly.

It is for children, teenagers ... adults and the elderly ... and it is to be a bowling alley ...a new workplace ...a hang out or sanctuary ... where you can just sit ... and clear your head.

So I thank everybody once more ... for all your help ... and coming here today ...to show your support.

I am so glad that today is finally here ... not only because this building is opening ... but because I saw the happiness in my mum's eyes ... over the past few months ... as it was all coming together.

Thank you and enjoy this ... to its fullest extent.

Needless to say, I am so proud not only of Gayle and her daughter Karlee for this inspiring speech but also of our good friend and Gayle's greatest supporter, Patricia White. It could not have happened without all those submissions you did, Patricia. Thank you; well done. The community is very proud of these ladies and now stage 2 will be commencing—so watch this space.

Werriwa Electorate: 24-Hour Fight Against Cancer

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa—Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services) (10.45 am)—I rise to congratulate the Macarthur region community on its activity over the weekend in regard to the 24-Hour Fight Against Cancer. My attendance there in support of Fred Borg and his committee exemplified very strong community activity and involvement in this effort. As well as me, Russell Matheson and Andrew McDonald, my parliamentary colleagues, were there with Aaron Rule, Paul Lake and Anoulak Chanthivong from the Campbelltown City Council.

It is interesting to note the effort of Fred and the way in which he has marshalled so much local commercial support. Amongst the sponsors were Clintons Toyota, Wizard of Oz, Sleeping Giant, the *Campbelltown-Macarthur Advertiser* and Bob Jane T-marts. The interesting point was that, when he made an announcement that all money from this anti-cancer effort would be locally expended, there was a huge cheer from the audience. I think that says something. This is very much focussed in the entire community, it is very regional and it does give a sense of that community feeling out in the Campbelltown region. Amongst the organisations that are being assisted are the Macarthur Cancer Therapy Centre, the Paediatric Ambulatory Care Unit at Campbelltown Hospital and the palliative care unit at Camden Hospital.

Last weekend was the culmination of six years work, and \$1 million was raised by their effort over the weekend. It is also worth noting the very substantial number of community organisations of a very diverse nature that had teams there over the weekend. I do salute them. Money went into state-of-the-art ultrasound equipment to reduce waiting times for tests, the purchase of texts and other materials for staff, the production of a DVD to explain palliative care to families, the printing of a memento book for children et cetera. They are also doing a significant amount of work locally with regard to avoidance.

At this stage I would also like to join with my parliamentary colleague the member for Fowler in saluting the effort of Phil Tolhurst from Liverpool City Council. His death was indeed a tragedy. I have had the opportunity over the last few days to be at various gatherings with people involved in local government in the state of New South Wales—for example, the manager of Canterbury, who is the longest serving manager in New South Wales at 28 years. It is a state-wide tragedy that a person of this stature has been lost and it is sad that in the last few months of his life he saw the deterioration of the Liverpool council after he left it, the internecine disputes that have affected that council, the lack of leadership, and the proposal at

the moment, which is very novel in Australian politics, to close down libraries. We have a person who was regarded as one of the leaders in local government administration in our state. I join with my colleague in saluting the massive efforts that he made and the emphasis he put on connecting with his workers. It is rare that the staff would go out on strike action in support of a manager of a council, but that is what occurred there.

Ryan Electorate: Broadband

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (10.48 am)—I want to place on record my congratulations to Brisbane City Council and the lord mayor, Campbell Newman, on their broadband announcement last week. This will provide all Brisbane residents and businesses with superfast optic broadband within four years with genuine open access. I know the families and businesses of Ryan realise the significance of this project.

I happen to know that this was not an overnight decision. The Brisbane City Council has been working for some time on developing a plan, developing a model and undertaking a trial—indeed, doing the groundwork that NBN Co. should be doing. What was the first thing the minister for communications said? He said he wanted to see a cost-benefit analysis. He wanted to see a cost-benefit analysis for a project that will see high-speed broadband fibre delivered to every residence in Brisbane at no cost to the rate payers. Indeed, there may even be an opportunity for a return. Yet he refuses to table a cost-benefit analysis for NBN Co., which proposes to spend more than \$43 billion of taxpayers' money. The emperor, in this case the minister, has no clothes. By the next morning the minister was congratulating the lord mayor and saying he is pleased that there is another Liberal who supports broadband. The problem we have is that the Labor minister and his overpaid failed Labor mate are the ones who do not understand broadband. As is the standard ALP reaction, when they do not understand things, they throw more money at it. It is the taxpayers and the economy that subsequently suffer.

You might think that Brisbane City Council had been keeping all this planning and research to themselves, that they had not offered to work with NBN Co., but that is not the case. From the day NBN Co. was announced, Brisbane City Council made submissions and wrote not just to Minister Conroy but also to Minister Albanese and to Minister Tanner, but no-one wanted to know. The council even appeared before the Senate inquiry. So why didn't NBN Co. want to know? Why didn't they want to talk to Brisbane City Council and perhaps even benefit from the years of work council and other industry experts had invested in their model? Because, as I referred to in my maiden speech, NBN Co. is not really interested in providing a level playing field. They are not interested in providing genuine open access. Their priority is not to ensure Australians have access to the best communications at the best rates. What they want to do is build another monopoly. Do they never learn?

I congratulate Brisbane for a sensible, low-cost, high-achieving broadband plan that by its very existence gives the lie to Labor's NBN spin. If we are genuine about bringing Australia's communications into the 21st century then the NBN Co. plan will not do it.

Moreton Electorate: Moorooka Community Hub

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (10.51 am)—I rise to inform the House about a major piece of community infrastructure that the Gillard Labor government is delivering in the Moreton electorate. We are partnering with the state and local governments, as well as the community sec-

tor, to deliver a community hub in Moorooka. The Gillard government has committed \$3 million towards this project, which will locate a number of community services at one location on the corner of Beaudesert and Evans Roads, Moorooka. Brisbane's south side is home to hundreds of active community groups who work to make this area better for everyone to live, work and play. These groups represent various interests. They include the Salisbury RSL, multicultural groups, sporting clubs, volunteers, charities and support groups, churches, seniors groups, disability groups and neighbourhood groups, just to name a few. The value of these groups to the south side cannot be underestimated. They are the heart and soul of our community. Whilst some more established groups, such as churches and sporting clubs, have their own facilities, unfortunately many—even the Salisbury RSL—do not have a place to call home. These groups have a pressing need for a public space where they can meet together, hold community functions, store equipment and resources, grow their organisations and, most importantly, engage with the rest of us on the south side for special events. That is why I took this plan for a community hub to the last election.

The Moorooka Ward Brisbane City Council representative councillor, Steve Griffiths, and the state member for Yeerongpilly, Simon Finn, have brought their enthusiasm and strong links with our local community to this project, making it a true government-community partnership. Brisbane City Council and the state government will be providing the land and then the community groups and the federal government will be providing some of the funding. Over the coming weeks and months we will begin consultation with the community about the exact kind of facility that we will build, but it is expected to include a 200-seat auditorium, a community hall, meeting spaces, storage facilities, a library and some commercial space. We are also working with the Brisbane Housing Co. to develop up to 60 units on the site, through a great blend of the experience of Brisbane Housing Co. in managing such projects and also their great expertise in delivering. So the community hub will be located on the corner of Beaudesert and Evans Roads, Moorooka, the former tram turning circle. It has excellent public transport access via the buses on Beaudesert Road and by the trains just down the road at Salisbury, Rocklea and Moorooka train stations. I will keep the House up to date on the progress of this important community project for Brisbane's south side. I travel past this little block of land every morning on the way to work so I am particularly keen to make sure that it takes shape, and as someone who lives in Moorooka I know how important the need is in this area.

Cowan Electorate: Postal Services

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (10.54 am)—Although Australia Post does not need any more bad news these days, I would like to raise the issue of the approach of Australia Post to services within postcode 6065, which goes from Wanneroo down to Hepburn Avenue, including the significant growth in recent years in the suburbs of Darch, Madeley and Landsdale. There are post offices in postcode 6065. However, we are talking about the needs of local people, and Australia Post certainly does make mention of them in a recent letter to me where they say they will continue to monitor their facilities in this area against the requirements of the local community to ensure that their services match changing needs. That is basically what Australia Post said to me in response to a request for a street posting box, a red postbox, in the area of Darch near a seniors village.

So Australia Post say that they are very keen to make sure that their services match the needs of the local community, yet we have not seen any favourable reaction from Australia Post when we have submitted petitions. We have not seen consideration of the needs of local people with regard to the Wanneroo Post Office as to whether it needed to be moved from its current location, with its access issues, to the new shopping centre 150 metres away. We have not seen any great reaction there. We have not seen a reaction to petitions to do with street posting boxes in Darch and in Madeley. I wonder whether we will see a reaction to the petition that is being raised in Darch for a licensed post office to be established there. Also there has certainly been no reaction to the petition that was raised for a licensed post office in Landsdale. Given that Australia Post say they will continue to monitor their facilities against the requirements of the local community, I ask how they are going to determine what the needs of the local community are if they refuse to acknowledge petitions favourably. If the people are saying these are the needs of the local area, why does Australia Post say they will monitor the needs of the local area but then ignore petitions, so ignoring what the people actually want on the ground? Maybe a lot of Australia Post's problem is that they seem to be out of touch with what local people need. It might be all very well for some areas to have their post boxes at every 500 metres, but in the outer suburbs of Perth there is a need for far better services, and it is time that Australia Post started listening to people when it counts. *(Time expired)*

Page Electorate: Clarence River

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (10.57 am)—I have a message on behalf of my community in Page that I want to give to the parliament and everybody who is going to be involved in the Murray-Darling Basin plan and debate. The message from my community, which is home to the Clarence River—and a lot of people seem to be talking about wanting to get their hands on it and are looking at it for diversion—is this: not a drop. Right across my electorate thousands of cars have that on their bumper stickers: not a drop. In effect it is saying hands off the Clarence River. The idea that the Clarence River can be diverted is one of those issues that have been around for quite some time. Everybody has raised this issue at different times. In particular, there was some engineering plan that it could be done. My message to the two Tonys is: not one drop will be taken out of the Clarence River. I have also been told, and I do not want to verbal the honourable member for Kennedy, that on the member's website he talks about those not in favour of looking at some sort of diversion as being political pygmies. While I am not going to comment about my size and whether that is correct, I would say to the honourable member that the people in the Clarence Valley and in Page are certainly not political pygmies. The catchment area of the Clarence River falls within 100 kilometres of the New South Wales coastal strip. Our industries are fishing—we have a huge commercial fishing industry—and agriculture, and the economy is heavily underpinned by that commercial fishing. There is also forestry and tourism. It is all worth a lot to us. This debate is one of those debates that come up every now and then. Engineering wise, we can do anything—we can do marvels—but in terms of the environment and also the viability of the Clarence it would be a disaster. They can look all they like but—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! In accordance with standing order 192, the time for members' constituency statements has expired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**Asylum Seekers**

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mr Morrison**:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugees Convention) states that 'contracting States shall apply the provisions of this Convention to refugees without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin';
 - (b) the Government suspended the processing of asylum seeker applications from Afghanistan on 9 April 2010; and
 - (c) there are more than 5000 persons currently being detained by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship on the mainland and Christmas Island; and
- (2) calls for the:
 - (a) immediate lifting of the discriminatory suspension of processing of claims by Afghan asylum seekers;
 - (b) immediate processing of asylum claims of all Afghans held in detention; and
 - (c) Minister for Immigration and Citizenship to provide subclass 449 safe haven visas to successful refugees, to accommodate potential changes in refugee status resulting from changed conditions in the country of origin.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (11.00 am)—by leave—I move the following amendment:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugees Convention) states that 'contracting States shall apply the provisions of this Convention to refugees without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin';
 - (b) the Government suspended the processing of asylum seeker applications from Afghanistan on 9 April 2010; and
 - (c) there are more than 5000 persons currently being detained by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship on the mainland and Christmas Island; and
- (2) condemns the Rudd Gillard Government for their imposition of a discriminatory freeze of the assessment of asylum applications for persons from Afghanistan arriving in Australia; and
- (3) calls for the introduction of proven policies proposed by the Coalition to address unprecedented irregular maritime arrivals to Australia, including:
 - (a) the application of temporary visas for all persons who have arrived illegally in Australia;
 - (b) the reopening of a third country processing centre in Nauru for irregular maritime arrivals to Australia;
 - (c) being prepared to turn around boats where the circumstances permit;
 - (d) streamline the appeals process by removing the panel system and replace with a review by a single case officer as practiced by the UNHCR;
 - (e) presuming against refugee status determination for persons who are reasonably believed to have destroyed or discarded their identity documentation; and
 - (f) return unsuccessful claimants for refugee status to their country of origin.

The asylum freeze was a discriminatory election fix when it was announced on 9 April by the then Rudd government. It was a fix designed and produced by a panic within the government, and there was an absence of policy and a bankruptcy of position when it came to their handling of this issue. Instead of understanding that there were other measures to deal with the fact that people's refugee status can be affected by changing conditions in their home country, and adopting the policy that was put forward and practised by the coalition where a person was given a temporary visa recognising that their refugee status could change over time, this government as a matter of political convenience decided not to embrace that policy but, instead, imposed a discriminatory and harsh policy that separated not only Afghans but Sri Lankans from having their claims assessed.

We had a policy in this country that discriminated against a person who had come to this country and who subsequently sought asylum. We said that because you were Afghan we will not assess your application. Those on the other side and others who participate in this debate may wish to moralise over their position on this issue and criticise the coalition for our consistent stand on this issue all they like. But when it comes to the decision to impose a discriminatory policy of freezing applications for people who had come—believed to be from Afghanistan—it is beyond defence. This is an indefensible policy borne of panic and a political motive to try and put a fix in before the election. So unconvincing was the announcement of this policy back in April that the then minister, Senator Evans, was so incapable of delivering the political message that his Prime Minister wanted delivered that the Prime Minister himself had to go out later that afternoon and deliver a press conference to try and sheet the message home.

This was an election fix. It was a fix borne of the absence of any view by those on the other side of how to deal with this issue. They cannot agree necessarily with the Greens—we will see in due course how much they agree with the Greens on this matter—who at least have had a consistent position on this matter. They believe everyone should come, that there should be no controls and that people should be able to move directly into the community, which of course would produce the result we all know. The government cannot embrace that and the government will not embrace the proven policies of the coalition. They stand in this bankrupt middle ground that has produced the farce that we see today.

Let us assess the freeze through its outcomes. During the freeze of some 25 weeks, 58 boats illegally arrived in Australia bringing 2,872 people—more than 100 a week—so it certainly did not stop the boats. The number of people detained increased from 2½ thousand at the end of March to almost 5,000 at the end of September—4,991—with a few more at sea at the time that the freeze was introduced. The number of Afghans in our detention network increased by around 1,200 over the course of the freeze with more than 750 now being detained in the re-opened Curtin Detention Centre. The appropriated cost to date is \$136 million with an annual operating budget each year of \$98 million.

The percentage of people held in detention for more than three months as a result of this freeze increased from 30 per cent of the detention population to 71.3 per cent at the end of September. That figure probably more than any other—except one I am about to mention—is probably the greatest condemnation of this government. It is a government that said they were going to keep people in detention longer and that increased the percentage of people in deten-

tion for more than three months from 30 per cent to more than 70 per cent over the course of this discriminatory and ridiculous policy.

The number of children in detention over this time rose from 245 at the end of March to 677 by the end of September. As we know from reports in the last few days, the number of children in detention today has risen to over 700. Let us be clear about the reason there are children in detention today. There were only 21 children who had been detained at the time the coalition lost office in November 2007 and none of those had arrived illegally by boat, so there were no children being detained. As at November 2007 and since the middle of 2005 children, were not detained in detention centres as a result of changes that the coalition introduced. There are more than 700 children being detained today by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship because more than 700 children have got on boats.

Until this government gets serious about introducing proven policies to discourage the practice of people arriving illegally in this country by boat and then seeking asylum—which is legal—or arriving in Australia without a visa—which is not a legal mode of entry—and for as long as it refuses to deal with the issue, children will continue to get on boats and our detention centres will continue to fill up. I make the point that sections 197AB and 197AC of the Migration Act currently permit the minister to make a residence determination to remove children from places covered by the definition of immigration detention. That power exists in the hands of the minister today, and if he has proposals to go and act on that then he should come clean with the Australian people about what they are. And he should also explain today what discussions the government held with charitable groups and other organisations in relation to its mooted policy—it was suggested in the weekend press—that it was preparing to abandon the system of mandatory detention across all of these groups.

I also make this point on the proposals that we have put forward relating to East Timor. This is a never-never solution that will never, ever happen. Amazingly, this government cannot take a hint. The government of East Timor has deferred this matter for discussion by the Bali process. So not only does the government have to convince the East Timorese who have already passed a motion in their parliament saying they had rejected it but also now it has to convince up to 50 other countries before East Timor will even consider giving it a green light. Not only does it have to convince the East Timorese but it has to convince its own Minister for Foreign Affairs because the Minister for Foreign Affairs in this country has run a mile from this proposal and the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship has been left as the person at the end of the line who has to carry yet another can for this government of failed policy when it comes to these issues.

We had the abominable policy of an Afghan asylum freeze, introduced because this government did not have the mettle to deal with what essentially is often the temporary nature of someone's refugee status. Now we have, instead of embracing the coalition's policy of re-opening the Nauru processing centre—a place where there is no razor wire, a place where children can be accommodated with their families and a place where people can move around the island freely and openly without the need for other forms of restraint that are imposed on children and families that are detained under the arrangements here in Australia—the government abolishing that policy, walking away from it, because it is a political inconvenience to embrace it. The government goes off with this nonsense notion of a processing centre in East Timor that we will never see happen in this parliament. There is no timetable for action,

there is no timetable for this centre opening; there is only a timetable for more talk. As long as this government keeps talking, it will not be acting when it comes to this issue. Those who have come and have had their asylum claims rejected should also be returned home. (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Before I call for a seconder to the motion, under the arrangements of the House there has to be leave given for the amendment, given that the mover of the amendment, the honourable member for Cook, was seeking to amend his own motion. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

Mr Keenan—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak later.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (11.11 am)—Mr Deputy Speaker, I am glad you recognise that spirit of bipartisanship in which I assented to the amendment to the motion on asylum seekers. However, in rising to speak to the motion put forward by the member for Cook, it would have been nice to have had a copy of the amendment. I am sure one is coming over, but unfortunately I am a bit hamstrung in speaking to the amendment because I do not have a copy of it. None has been provided to me. However, I do have a copy of the original motion of the member for Cook. In speaking to that, I welcome the lifting of the suspension of processing Afghan asylum seekers at the end of last month. As I have said, I do not actually have a copy of the amendment, but in a way it does not really matter because this is not about the substantive motion that the member for Cook articulated but about mischief. There is no vision that we need to explore or policy that we need to explore. This is about the mischief that comes from those opposite when it comes to immigration. I am sure he is facilitating the handing over of a copy of the amendment to this side of the chamber.

As the government explained at the time of the suspension—when it was put in place during a fluid situation in Afghanistan last year—things have changed a little bit. Why did we do that? Let us go back to the facts and look at the Sri Lankan and Afghani situation. The overriding basis is to ensure that every claim for asylum is processed fairly and to do that we had to make sure that we knew all of the facts in Afghanistan. As the member for Cook would know, Afghanistan is a country that has been experiencing some difficulties of late and without up-to-date country information it was not possible to make a fair assessment of the claims that were put forward. I am not as familiar with Afghanistan as the Leader of the Opposition. He spent a significant amount of time there recently—on the firing range. I did not get to do that, but I am sure he would admit in his discussions with Alan Jones and others that Afghanistan has some particular challenges. That is why the Department of Immigration and Citizenship needed time to look at the circumstances on the ground in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.

The department now has a much clearer picture from the Australian Embassy and from other governments around the world that are involved in Afghanistan and the government has therefore been able to lift the suspension of the processing. Each individual claim will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the individual circumstances—certain legal criteria, the relevant policy considerations and the comprehensive and up-to-date country information. This is the case with all immigration matters.

In accordance with our international obligations and humanitarian spirit, we will not return asylum seekers to a place where they are likely to be persecuted. I say that in particular be-

cause many of my community are Hazara. They have particular concerns about being returned to Afghanistan. In fact, there are some suggestions from Amnesty International that up to 60 per cent of the Hazara community are being persecuted in Afghanistan. That is why I put that on the record. I have a strong relationship with the Hazara community in my electorate and I just wanted to assure them of that.

Four minutes into my speech I still do not have a copy of the amendment. In responding to the original motion put forward by the member for Cook, he quotes the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. It is great to see that the opposition immigration spokesperson has finally found a copy of the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. He quoted it accurately. Unfortunately, for the last 20 years the one copy which the coalition have has been gathering dust somewhere over at coalition headquarters. Thankfully, the member for Cook found it and even read it, and he is able to articulate some of the things in the convention. He well knows the progression from a convention, to a treaty and legislation, to practice on the ground. There is a progression there, which he seems to be ignoring. I thank the former member for Kooyong for sending him a copy of the United Nations convention. Either way, it seems the member for Cook has had a close read of it. Of course it does not mean that they will change their policy because, as we heard in his speech, the coalition are still committed to processing asylum seekers on Nauru, a country which is not a signatory to the refugee convention.

Mr Morrison—Why is that relevant? You don't know, do you? It's not in the notes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! Members of the opposition will contain themselves.

Mr PERRETT—Even though he went over there to try to facilitate the signing, we still have a country that is not a signatory to the refugee convention. It makes the member for Cook's sudden fondness for the UN refugee convention seem a little bit insincere. It is a far cry from the days of 'turn back the boats'. As I said to many of my constituents, especially those from the Hazara community who spent years languishing in detention centres under the Howard regime—

Mr Morrison—They've just spent six months because you froze the process.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I draw the attention of the honourable member for Cook to standing order 66A, if he wishes to make an intervention during another member's contribution.

Mr PERRETT—too many genuine asylum seekers, including children, spent years behind razor wire, waiting, waiting, waiting. These people are now good, honest citizens and taxpayers. I have in my hand a reference which I wrote for one of them, someone who spent three years in detention, who had almost no English when he arrived, who ended up at Milperra, a facility formerly in the ward of the member for Ryan—I am sure she would know the Milperra State High School, which does great work for students with limited language facility. He went on to Yeronga State High School, a great school which also takes a lot of kids who do not have strong English. He was able to obtain a scholarship to attend university. I will not name him because I was not able to get him on the phone this morning when I found out that I was talking on this matter. He graduated with a degree, a Bachelor of Applied Science, and currently works as a laboratory technician for the Australian Laboratory Services.

These are the sorts of people who arrive on boats. They are good, hard-working, tax-paying citizens. Therefore, I find a little disingenuous the member for Cook demanding that asylum seekers be processed immediately, as in his amended motion. The Gillard Labor government is committed to protecting our borders, but we will not shirk our international obligations or our humanitarian obligations to asylum seekers. We are committed to a regional solution to issues of people smuggling and irregular migration in the region.

A regional problem demands a regional solution and that is why, through a regional protection framework, we will remove the incentive for people to risk their lives at sea. That is what we are trying to avoid. A regional processing centre will remove the incentive which people smugglers use to sell a ticket to Australia. It will destroy the market. The Gillard government will continue to develop a regional protection framework through the Bali process and through bilateral negotiations with our neighbours.

Apart from our Indigenous brothers and sisters, Australia is a country built by immigrants. Some 6.6 million people, including 700,000 refugee and humanitarian arrivals, have come to Australia since World War II. Australia has a proud record of welcoming those who come across the seas. It is even in our national anthem in the second verse—not a lot of people sing the second verse—that ‘For those who’ve come across the seas, we’ve boundless plains to share’, but I am sure the member for Cook would like that excised from the national anthem.

There is something in the Australian character that makes us terrified of small wooden vessels filled with people who come with hope. Is it because we are a nation formed by people from vessels which ran up a flag saying to the Aboriginal people, ‘This is now our land’? Maybe that is why it is a big part of the Australian psyche. If you go back through history, you see it. Initially when Captain Phillip landed in Botany Bay, six days before the French, he was able to say, ‘We just beat them.’ A few years later it was the Russians, then the Chinese and the Japanese and now it is Afghans and Tamils. For some reason politicians are able to latch onto this fear and cultivate it as much as possible. As every Christian person and every humanitarian would know, these boats are filled with people who are full of hope and aspirations for a decent life for their kids. Unfortunately, on their arrival we still have politicians who use fear to define the national response. It is a shameful aspect of the debate and hopefully will be changed. *(Time expired)*

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (11.21 am)—I appreciate that the member for Moreton arrived in his office this morning to be told by the Prime Minister’s office that he had to come into the Main Committee to defend the indefensible. I really could not take any points out of his speech that would constitute a legitimate defence or a policy rationale for why this Labor government froze asylum claims by people from particular countries in this most discriminatory way. The motion today is about doing something completely indefensible. If the member for Moreton’s defence is any guide, then we will not hear much from the government by way of anything sensible about what needs to be done to address this issue. I am very pleased to support the motion by my good friend the member for Cook. Labor’s failure to protect our borders is, without doubt, one of their most significant failures since coming to office. I say that because there are areas in which they have changed policy and done things which have turned out to be absolute disasters.

When they came to office in 2007 all they needed to do to maintain a robust system of border protection was just to leave well enough alone and leave in place the system of border

protection they inherited from the previous government. If they had done that, if they had not made any changes to that system, then Australia would not subsequently have had this conversation. We would not subsequently have spent a billion dollars of taxpayers' funds. We would not subsequently have had mainland detention centres overflowing with people and we would not have been discussing here today why the government felt the need in the pre-election climate to freeze the asylum claims of particular nationalities in this most discriminatory way.

When Labor came to power they pretended that they cared about border protection but they could not leave it alone. They had to pander to the left wing within their own party and they made changes that weakened the robust system that the Howard government had put in place. Subsequent to that, the changes gave a big green light to people smugglers to go back into business. We have seen borders become incredibly porous, where people smugglers decide who comes to Australia and the circumstances in which they come.

In the years leading up to the change of government, from 2002 to 2007, this problem was essentially solved. We had an average of three boat arrivals per year. The then opposition, led by its then immigration spokesman, the now Prime Minister Julia Gillard, used to go into a fit every time a boat arrived, which happened on average about once every four months. She used to put out press releases saying 'another boat, another policy failure'. That was when there were three boats in a year. We can now have three boats arrive illegally in Australia on one weekend. The government's response is that they do not know how to respond. The only answer they had was a political stunt in the pre-election climate and that was to do this most shameful of things—pick out particular nationalities and freeze their asylum claims rather than dealing in a non-discriminatory way with people who come to Australia and ask for our protection.

Labor's asylum freeze was nothing but a very cynical ploy to pretend that they cared about this issue. They do not have a policy response to this issue; the only thing they could manage was a political response. When it happened, the member for Cook rightly warned that the result would be overflowing mainland detention centres, and that is, of course, exactly what has happened. I think the *Australian* summed it up very well in a cartoon when the government announced it was going to lift this freeze, and that was, 'Look, we have had this test for six months,' and the cartoon said something along the lines of, 'Now we have worked out that the result is that you get a lot more people in detention.' That is exactly what has happened. We have had these overflowing detention centres as a direct a result of the government's failure to have a comprehensive policy and instead to deal with it in its way of a quick political fix prior to an election.

Mr Deputy Speaker, there is actually an answer to this. The idea that Australia is going to be subject to the whims of people smugglers controlling our immigration system and that that is forever going to be the case is complete nonsense. If the government had the resolve—the courage—it would implement the coalition's program as contained within the amendments to this motion and drive those people smugglers from business.

The coalition's policy is simple. We know that it works because it has worked in the past to tame the people smugglers. We would reintroduce temporary protection visas, or a form of temporary protection visa; we would go to third country processing, actually in a country that is prepared to host such a facility; and we would turn the boats around. If we were to follow

that prescription, we would not need to have this ongoing conversation because the people smugglers would know that the government in Canberra was serious and they would turn their attention to another soft target. *(Time expired)*

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (11.26 am)—I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak about asylum seekers through the motion presented today by the member for Cook. First of all, it is important to record that on 30 September this year, as announced by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, the government lifted the suspension on processing of Afghan asylum seekers.

Since the 2007 federal election, the Labor government has honoured pre-election commitments, including closing the offshore processing centre at Nauru; putting an end to the condemned temporary protection visa system; abolishing the 45-day rule bar on asylum seekers access to work rights and basic health care; abolishing the cost of detention charged to immigration detainees; made legislative changes to increase the penalties for those people convicted of people smuggling and providing material aid; as well as increasing the total refugee and humanitarian program from 13,000 places in 2007 to 13,750 places.

These are examples of major changes the Labor government have made to the coalition's immigration policy that we inherited in the first term of government. With respect to my friend the member for Cook, I remind coalition members that their approach to asylum seekers was labelled by a member of their own party as 'cruel'. Further, the Leader of the Opposition stated that he would simply turn the boats around, which was reminiscent of the former Howard government's policies that are known as the 'dark years'.

In stark contrast, the Gillard government are investing in a long-term approach to this very serious issue where the lives of men, women and children are at stake. We must take a holistic approach to processing and assisting displaced persons. We recognise that asylum seeker claims are not only an issue for our region to work through together but also a global issue that many other countries, particularly in Europe, are also working to improve. Through our humanitarian program Australia has assisted some of the worst-affected people from Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The government have already stated that refugees from these regions will remain our resettlement focus.

Australia does not shy away from its international obligations under the United Nations Refugee Convention. However we also recognise that it is extremely important to rigorously assess refugee claims to ensure we continue to provide the appropriate protection to those who need it most and adhere to our international obligations under the United Nations Refugee Convention. It must be emphasised that the suspension of the processing of new applications from asylum seekers from Afghanistan did not include those already held on Christmas Island or those who were en route to Christmas Island, having been intercepted by the Royal Australian Navy. Further, the minister clearly stated that all irregular maritime arrivals would continue to be treated fairly and humanely. The decision was made in light of changing circumstances in Afghanistan which could have had an effect on the outcome of assessments.

It is important to record that the government believes it is now better positioned to assess asylum claims from Afghans seeking asylum in Australia. Assessments of each individual's claim will be made by independent decision makers on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, the announcement of the lifting of the suspension was welcomed by stakeholders, including the

Australian Human Rights Commission, the Refugee Council of Australia, GetUp!, the Migration Institute of Australia and the Edmund Rice Centre.

The Labor government continues to work towards a holistic approach, not the sort of piecemeal, politically expedient approach many refugees suffered under the former coalition government. Indeed the Labor government is seeking a regional approach to reviewing and addressing the challenges posed by the continual displacement of millions of people around the world. Last week it was widely reported that the Minister for Immigration, the Hon. Chris Bowen, travelled to East Timor to continue discussions with President Jose Ramos Horta on this very important issue. I commend the minister for his recent efforts in furthering discussions with our regional neighbours on this issue. I welcome the announcement on the lifting of the suspension and so does the Afghan community that I represent in my electorate of Reid—they are very appreciative of that initiative.

I conclude by confirming that I believe that all asylum seekers should be treated with dignity, respect and compassion and know that the government will continue to ensure that we adhere to our international obligations under the refugee convention.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (11.31 am)—I rise to also support this motion by my colleague the member for Cook that criticises the six-month freeze and demands that the coalition's long-known responses, which have been taken to an election and were actually proven to work back in 2003-04, be implemented again today by this government. Already covered are the measures that we introduced: temporary protection visas, that we move to using Nauru rather than the never-never East Timor solution, that we turn boats around where feasible, that we streamline review by using case officers as the UNHCR does rather than panels, that we return unsuccessful applicants and, particularly, that we deem individuals who destroy their materials intentionally not to be refugees.

It has been an issue of great pride that Australia is a nation based on immigration, but that actually has no part in this discussion today. It is always interesting when government members start to pull out references they have written for fine Hazara individuals—it means that they are getting close to the bottom of the barrel when it comes to looking for solutions to international people movements. Of course we acknowledge that there are great people who arrive here irregularly and that has never ever been questioned on this side of the debate. This is fundamentally about the fairest way to identify refugees from among those who move for other reasons, including the economic.

As we know, the situation in parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka is extremely complex, but this government has failed to prove that any explicit factors arose over the last six months to make it easier to assess Afghanistan. What has happened in the last six months that you could not assess given that, since our forces are deployed in Oruzgan province, we are intimately connected to all the conditions in Afghanistan? And how has that changed in six months? The only thing that changed was that there was a federal election.

The Orwellianly named 'tough and humane' strategy was actually the weak and perversely inhumane idea of locking these people up without any form of processing. It simply led to massive queues in processing which will now, of course, have to be dealt with when this freeze is lifted. There is no evidence that this government could not have processed people in that six-month timeframe. There is no argument why a genuine refugee could not have been recognised almost immediately under standard UNHCR processing. Let us be honest—there

are individuals who fled having had immediate relatives assassinated in front of them in their own household—we are talking horrible, horrible stories. To simply sweep them up in one large group and say we will not process them for six months is utterly inhumane. It is way more inhumane than the conditions that the former government imposed in 2000 and 2001, when there were large numbers of arrivals.

One of the reasons we are extremely strong on this issue is that those on this side of the chamber sat through the previous Prime Minister smugly responding to every question about this issue by simply reading out numbers from the Howard era, stating that the arrivals were greater then. Only slowly was that smugness wiped off the face of the Prime Minister who had unpicked all these laws, when the numbers arriving were finally even larger than for that period under the Howard government. I agree that there are a large number of arrivals now, as there were in 2000-01, but the difference is that the former Howard government came up with solutions. Not only is this government not coming up with solutions, they are patently turning a blind eye to solutions that worked and absolutely avoiding implementing them for no reason other than that they were our solutions.

Poor old Nauru has a completely constructed place for processing to occur and the only reason Nauru is not used is because the government need to find another nation to avoid actually going back and using something that worked, using something that was used by the previous government. That is bloody-mindedness, as is them saying, 'We need a regional framework' to avoid using the solution available to us—the one that worked—because it came from the previous government. This notion that we need a regional framework which involves a whole host of countries simply virtually guarantees that we will never see East Timor as a valid solution, and it is terribly unfair that that nation was singled out. It will now appear to many that East Timor's leadership are heartless if they do not accept this current Prime Minister's solution. Where was the negotiation? It was a glass of wine with the ceremonial president, with none of the hard and adaptive work that would have taken weeks. No, this government needed to go to an election and they needed a get-out-of-jail-free card.

It is tragic that the excuse that East Timor is a signatory to the convention and the protocols from 1951 and 1967 means that the government cannot consider Nauru, but will consider any other nation. It is wrong that Australia does not take the lead—as the former Indonesian president said: we provide the sugar. We should be doing way more than talking about vague solutions with a whole host of countries. We should be getting on and doing what the coalition did effectively after 2001, and that was TPVs, using a nation that was already set up for processing refugees, turning boats around where applicable and, of course, returning unsuccessful claimants for asylum promptly. (*Time expired*)

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (11.36 am)—All of us who are rational are pleased that the issue of Afghan asylum seekers is being addressed by the government, and I certainly support the processing of those asylum seekers who were previously under suspension. We are considering today a motion from the opposition which I must say I find unbelievably hypocritical, given the opposition's stance during the election. I never thought I would see the day when I would rise to speak on a motion moved by the coalition which noted Australia's obligations under the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. It surprises my colleagues and I to suddenly learn the coalition is concerned about Australia contravening UN conven-

tions—after all, they were so concerned during their 12 years of government that they locked children behind barbed wire and held them in detention indefinitely.

I would have been more surprised had it not been for the fact that the member for Cook and the coalition had been using the complex asylum seeker issue as a political football to score points with the electorate. This motion shows faux concern for the Afghan refugees from a coalition that, during the last election season, used these poor people as their football. Now they come in here and pretend to be concerned—

Mr Morrison—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member for Melbourne is reflecting on my motives and the motives of other members of this chamber in moving this motion, suggesting they are somehow politically based. I ask the member to withdraw.

Mr DANBY—Mr Deputy Speaker, I was talking about the opposition's faux concerns about the treatment of Afghan asylum seekers after what they had said about these people during previous months.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—There is no point of order. The member for Melbourne Ports has the call.

Mr DANBY—The member for Cook was at the forefront of coalition fear mongering during the election, when the Leader of the Opposition said that Australia was experiencing a passive invasion of boats.

Mr Morrison—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a further point of order. On this occasion the member has accused me of fear mongering—directly, as being at the forefront of fear mongering. I ask that you ask him to withdraw that comment, as it is offensive to me.

Mr Hayes—On the point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: it is not a point of order. He can rise to ask a question, if the member cares to take it, but let us not make up standing orders as we go.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I call the member for Melbourne Ports.

Mr DANBY—I think the member for Cook's concerns about my remarks reveal that I have got to the heart of the matter—the faux concern revealed in this motion versus what they actually did during the election period. It is clear to anybody who examines the record that this is a motion invented solely for the purpose of trying to score a small political point.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! It being 11.40 am, the time allotted for the debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Page Electorate: Telstra

Debate resumed, on motion by **Ms Saffin**:

That this House:

(1) notes with grave concern:

- (a) Telstra's stated proposal to close its Business Call Centre in Grafton, with the loss of 108 local jobs, and the relocation of some of these jobs to Brisbane and Melbourne;
- (b) the damaging flow on effect to a regional economy from such significant job cuts;
- (c) the perception that Telstra is abandoning regional Australia; and
- (d) Telstra's claim that it can improve customer service while carrying out a program of job cuts;

- (2) acknowledges the Clarence Valley community's strong support for the campaign to save local Telstra jobs evidenced by the actions of Mayor Richie Williamson, the Grafton Chamber of Commerce and the 5559 people who signed my petition calling for Telstra to keep the Call Centre open, and not abandon regional Australia; and
- (3) calls upon Telstra's Chief Executive Officer David Thodey to stop the closure of the Grafton Call Centre to demonstrate a commitment by Telstra to Regional Australia.

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (11.40 am)—I am deeply concerned by the behaviour of Telstra and its decision to announce the closure of its Grafton call centre. It is a call centre that responds in Australia with Australian employees to help business—it is a business call centre. It enjoys a wonderful reputation for being very responsive and very helpful to the business community. The call centre is part of Telstra Business, as it is called, and this behaviour is not in accord with what I expect and what regional Australia expects, and there are three particular reasons that this galls me even more.

The first reason is that, when we first heard about this closure from Telstra, it said it was consolidating call centres and that the 108 employees in Grafton, in the Clarence Valley, would be consolidated and offered redeployment to Brisbane and Melbourne. So it was not only that they were taking jobs away from us but also that they were consolidating them to the major cities. Nobody anywhere, whether it be in the regions or the major cities, wants to lose their job, but if they are losing a job in regional Australia, country Australia, it is even more difficult to find another one. There may be far more scope to find jobs in the major cities.

The behaviour of Telstra is not what I expect. It is a major corporation. It makes big profits out of all of us. It makes big profits out of regional and rural Australia. I expect it to give some loyalty to regional and rural Australia, and keep the call centre there. Call centres can operate absolutely anywhere—that is the beauty of them. They do provide jobs in regional and rural Australia; they can provide new jobs in rural and regional Australia. People are asking if we are sure they are going to Brisbane and Melbourne; are we sure they are not going offshore. That is what some people feel too—that the jobs will not be consolidated to Brisbane and Melbourne but will go overseas. We do not want them to go to the cities, but some say that at least the jobs would still be in Australia. People are deeply concerned that these jobs are being sent offshore.

So the first thing that galls me is moving jobs to the major cities, and the second is that Telstra's rationale is that it is going to cut jobs to improve service. That is absolute bunkum; it is nonsense.

Mr Hartsuyker—Sir Humphrey Appleby!

Ms SAFFIN—That is exactly what it sounds like—*Yes, Minister*. Not only are Telstra saying this; they are putting it out in media releases—I have copies of them here. It is the stuff of nonsense. Thirdly, I have a letter here from Mr David Thodey, the CEO of Telstra. In that letter he actually says to me that, yes, they are going ahead and he knows I will be unhappy about it, but then he talks about how help is being offered to the 180 employees by the Department of State and Regional Development. That is a state entity. That galled me further because the day that this move was announced I said we would fight the good fight. I wanted to make sure that we tried everything we possibly could to keep the call centre open. I mobilised our local jobs coordinator, first of all to make him aware of the situation, secondly to ask

whether there was anything he could help with and, thirdly, if Telstra did close the call centre could he see whether that call centre could be used to bring other jobs to Grafton.

The jobs coordinator then mobilised with the Department of State and Regional Development. It had nothing to do with David Thodey. It just really annoyed me that he had put it in his letter to me when I was the one who was responsible, along with other people in the community, for mobilising every possible resource we could around the staff and the community. It was really quite insulting to get that letter. It is better to be short and sweet and just say, 'We are going ahead with the closure,' even though I do not like it. Those three reasons really did not go down well.

There were a few other things that happened in this story. There has been widespread support in the community with a petition receiving over 6,000 signatures in just over a week and a half from people in the Clarence Valley. I got the petition organised and I hit the streets. There were people lined up in the main street queuing to sign the petition. Then we were in the Grafton Shoppingworld. I was there along with the member for Cowper, who is sitting opposite me, and the state member, Steve Cansdell. The Independent member for Lyne, Rob Oakeshott, put out a media release joining us in not supporting the closure.

We had the support of the Mayor of Clarence Valley Council, Richie Williamson. The whole council was mobilised. Richie was out on the street with me. We also had the support of the Mayor of Coffs Harbour, Keith Rhoades; the Mayor of Lismore, Jenny Dowell, who is also president of Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils; and the Mayor of Ballina, Councillor Phil Silver. So there was a whole lot of mobilisation. Unions were also involved, with the CPSU on the ground. We had a rally in the town square of Grafton, which was chaired by Ron Bell, the proprietor of 2GF, the local radio station. The *Daily Examiner* also joined the campaign to try to stop this.

Everybody was absolutely mobilised. There was a campaign ran called 'Hang up on Telstra'. That is what a lot of people are doing and that is what we are saying to Telstra: you deserted us as a community in regional Australia, so we can desert you by hanging up on you. Some people have closed their accounts. The mayor, Councillor Richie Williamson, has done that and so have others. I have received lots of letters from people who are saying publicly that they are doing that.

I would like to acknowledge the sterling efforts of Shirley and John Adams, who sat at Grafton Shoppingworld over the week we had the petition out. They sat there and talked with everybody, and they got signatures on those petitions. It also went out to a whole lot of businesses. It was just wonderful that they did that. It took a lot of effort and we were all mobilised. You can feel a bit helpless in that Telstra will still go ahead but we were not going to take it lying down. It is a resourceful community and it will find other things to do, but it is very harsh to be treated like this in regional Australia.

The other thing I found out was that they had known about it for some time. Remember, we had a federal election and they obviously did not announce during that, but they had known about it for some time. I attended an event in Lismore to celebrate 10 years of Telstra Country Wide. We had a great breakfast celebration where Telstra said: 'Isn't it wonderful? We look after country New South Wales and we service country New South Wales.' I said that I felt like I was there under false pretences. The Mayor of Lismore, Councillor Jenny Dowell, was

in some of their promotional material about that and she also made a comment that she felt similar to how I felt and that she did not want to be in it.

The other thing that happened, which really showed how seriously we take this issue, was the Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry, headed by Jeremy Challacombe, actually downing tools. One day, at a certain time, they came out into the main street. They closed their doors and all the businesses came out and protested as well. They got the support of the New South Wales chamber to try to organise meetings with David Thodey, the CEO of Telstra. It just showed how seriously we took this particular issue. We then got told that the call centre is going to close on 23 November. That is a month before Christmas; that is a bit heartless.

You may have all received an invitation to have cocktails with Catherine Livingstone, the Chairman of Telstra, and David Thodey, the CEO, tomorrow night between 6pm and 8pm. I answered them and said, 'I do not want your cocktails; I want 108 jobs in Grafton.' I will be going to the cocktails tomorrow night and I am going to have a sign up that says exactly that. I hope that other members will join me and hold that sign up because I think that is what we have to do. I do not want to say anything that is unparliamentary but that one really got to me when I received it. (*Time expired*)

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (11.50 am)—I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion by the member for Page. Coming, as we do, from opposite sides of the House, we clearly have our differences but I am pleased that we have been able to come together on this very important issue, which is an economic threat to our electorates—the move by Telstra to close the call centre at Grafton. I should say from the outset that the provincial City of Grafton does not lie within my electorate of Cowper but the call centre does draw employees from right across the lower Clarence and the surrounds, and it is a very important issue for the people of Maclean, Tucabia, Ulmarra and all of the settlements around Grafton on the north coast.

The loss of 108 jobs is a huge issue for any regional centre. It affects not just those who have lost those jobs but also those whose jobs are dependent on the income coming in from those 108 families. There is a loss of confidence in a regional centre when a major employer closes its doors. Certainly, this has had a detrimental effect on the community. There will undoubtedly be further job losses from businesses as a result of this closure when the income from those 108 jobs no longer permeates the economy. There will be an obvious knock-on effect. Certainly, the community is in no doubt about the impact of this closure and the way that the effects will ripple through the community.

I am pleased to join with the member for Page on this issue, but we are just two amongst many, as the member has pointed out, who have taken up the cudgels in this case. The state member for Clarence, Steve Cansdell and Mayor Richie Williamson have been involved. All three levels of government have been involved and there has been strong support from the community. As the member mentioned, Shirley and John Adams sat all week in Grafton Shoppingworld collecting signatures—6,000 signatures in fact. That is a huge local effort, showing the local passion for an important local employer. Hundreds attended a rally that was held in Prince Street, Grafton—all supporting this very important issue. Some 1,800 members of a Facebook group have been calling on Telstra to reconsider this ridiculous decision.

Commercially, I think this decision flies in the face of practical experience. Look at what has been achieved in Coffs Harbour. The Centrelink call centre in Coffs Harbour is the largest single-purpose Centrelink call centre in Australia. Some years ago it had only 120 employees, but it has been expanded and now has 408 staff. That shows the competitive advantage that can be delivered by operating a business unit in a regional centre. With modern technology there is no need for these centres to be located in metropolitan areas. I find it curious that cost savings can be involved in centralising these jobs back to Brisbane or Melbourne where it can be difficult to recruit staff and where people seeking a job have so many more employment options. In a regional centre, the workforce tends to stay in a job longer, staff turnover tends to be lower and there tends to be a strong community ethic, which helps to make for a good workplace. There are far greater reasons to locate call centres in a regional area than in a metropolitan area, and the Centrelink call centre is proof positive of that. It has expanded in size, it is doing good work and it has won awards for its productivity. It is the example that should be followed. Rather than Telstra relocating their staff to Brisbane or Melbourne, they should be creating jobs in the regions and expanding their call centre in Grafton. If the claim is that it is too small to achieve an economic critical mass, make it bigger. I do not accept the statement that the workforce in a regional area is not available. If you can find 408 workers in Coffs Harbour to man a Centrelink call centre, you could certainly find a very similar number to man a call centre in Grafton. It is just nonsense.

The biggest piece of nonsense I have heard is something that the member for Page touched on earlier—that is, the statement by Telstra that they are going to provide better service to their customers with fewer staff. I would like to know how that is going to happen. I would welcome Mr Thodey pointing that out to us at the cocktail party tomorrow night. Perhaps he could show us how they are going to produce higher productivity and better service for their customers through fewer staff. It is clearly ridiculous that we should see these jobs go from a regional centre to a major metropolitan area where there are problems with traffic congestion and overcrowding. In regional areas, we have the ability to provide the workplace and we have the land for new developments. We have all that is needed to provide an efficient call centre. It can all be provided in a regional area. But I think there is one thing missing—that is, the will to make it happen.

There is a city-centric notion amongst some corporates. There is talk about Telstra Country Wide servicing the regions, well Telstra should reinvest in the regions—not just in telecommunications but in employment opportunities. Let us not have equity of access to communication services alone; let us have equity of access to employment opportunities. A call centre would clearly be an excellent way for Telstra to demonstrate its commitment to regional and rural Australia—keep it open, make it bigger and create more opportunities, particularly for our young people. Call centres are a great place for a first job for school leavers after an entry-level job. It is a great introduction to corporate Australia. It is a great way to work within guidelines. Young people could benefit from many lessons learnt from employment at a call centre. We should be expanding this centre not making it smaller. I certainly commend the effort of the member for Page and our colleague Steve Cansdell, the state member for Clarence, and the entire Grafton and lower Clarence community for getting behind an important local employer. The rationale that Telstra uses is clearly ridiculous and does not pass muster. There are competitive advantages and we can see them in Coffs Harbour. I commend this motion to the House.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (11.57 am)—I rise to support this motion. I also come from a non-capital city regional area and it is important that we recognise that what is happening in Grafton is not just about Grafton; it is about regional Australia generally. We need to be encouraging corporates to keep jobs in regional Australia and move jobs to regional Australia. Firstly, I want to talk a little about the situation in Grafton—where over 108 jobs are going to be cut. One hundred and eight families are going to be affected in a small community and uprooted either to Brisbane or to Melbourne. They will not be moving close; they will be moving a long, long way away for these jobs. The flow-on effect on the Grafton community will be immeasurable in terms of the economic side of things and the social and community side of things.

When you rip out 108 jobs from a town the effect is immeasurable. It is something that small communities take a long time to get over. It is no small surprise that the community in Grafton have rallied so strongly around this issue. For the member for Page to get over 6,000 signatures on a petition in less than two weeks is not only a tribute to her hard work in the area but also shows just how widespread the feeling is on this issue. It is important not only for those who will lose their job but also for the whole community in Grafton. In such a short period of time 6,000 people signed a petition that says to Telstra: ‘You should not make this decision. You should keep these jobs in Grafton.’ I think we have a slogan from today’s contribution from the member for Page: ‘Jobs not cocktails’. We need to make sure that Telstra gets that message loud and clear. I certainly endorse her comments that we should all be going to this Telstra function tomorrow night and that all of us from regional Australia deliver the message loud and clear that it is not good enough to take jobs away from regional Australia, and that we need to be putting more jobs into these areas and making sure that these communities are supported.

In a more general sense what we have here is an example we are seeing far too often of corporates looking at the bottom line and using it as an excuse to cut services and jobs in regional New South Wales. This is neither in the interests of regional Australia nor in the interests of those who live in regional New South Wales. But it is not in the interests of Australia either. At the moment we are having a debate about sustainable population. Let us make it clear that we have big populations already in metropolitan areas which are overburdened in terms of their infrastructure. One of the prime areas where new population growth can occur, and which can be of benefit both to the country and to the area in which it occurs, is regional Australia. Corporates need to take their responsibilities more seriously and look at the options and at the decisions they are making. Moving 108 workers back to Melbourne or to Brisbane would not only damage the community of Grafton, as it would damage any rural community, but also place an added burden on big metropolitan areas that are already struggling to meet the demands on their infrastructure. We need to be looking at that in a much wider debate, which I think this parliament has already foreshadowed is an important debate for us to have throughout the country.

If a corporate took 108 jobs out of my area on the Central Coast it would devastate the Central Coast, not just because of the number of jobs but because of the money that would leave the economy. The member for Page has pointed out that over \$6 million will be ripped out of the Grafton economy by Telstra taking this decision. It is not a good decision and it needs to be reviewed; we need to make sure that Telstra gets the message loud and clear. Tel-

stra also need to be talking to the heads of their fellow corporates. Regional Australia needs more jobs. It does not need fewer jobs. We need to make sure that regional Australia gets a fair go. We need to make sure that Grafton keeps its 108 Telstra jobs.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (12.02 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to comment and to also support regional Australia. I thank the member for Page for bringing this motion before the House. It might be 30 years since I was in Grafton. My mother's family comes from further south, in the New England district of New South Wales. I have many fond childhood memories of visiting and staying for holidays in that part of the world. Indeed, it was the sport of rowing that took me to Grafton 30 years ago—

Ms Saffin—You are still good at it!

Mr SIMPKINS—I am still living the dream. I note that there is a lot of support here for the Clarence River. To me it is a real shame to lose over 100 jobs in a nice town like Grafton. If anything you would think that Telstra would be looking at the opportunity to do even more in a centre like Grafton. Grafton is not big by capital city standards, but it is a place of opportunity. It is a place where young people have so much to give. You would think that the leadership of corporates like Telstra would embrace that opportunity, that they would think there are a lot of young people going through those schools and there are a lot of people that could add value. You would think they would take that opportunity and also provide those opportunities to Telstra to improve their service. As the member for Cowper said: how do you reduce the number of workers and then improve the level of service? It just does not really make sense at all.

I think what has been achieved in Grafton, with over 6,000 names on the petition, is great. As I said already today with regard to Australia Post, these organisations talk about their customer service and what they are doing for people but, when the people speak, where are they? One of the best shows of what people want, of what is important to local people and to people in regional Australia, in fact to people anywhere across Australia, is in the form of a petition. When they are completely ignored it is ridiculous. It is a shame and it is ridiculous.

I look upon the situation as endemic; it is a major failing of organisations such as Telstra that do not see the opportunities. They do not see what people really need and do not see what could be achieved in these areas. I look at this situation and think this is just another case where you just have to shake your head about what Telstra has been up to. I look forward to opportunities in the future to be able to say, 'Telstra is doing a great job.' In three years I have not been able to do that, and at this rate I cannot see any of us really being able to give any great endorsement on what Telstra is planning for the future either. This is such a great opportunity for Telstra to say: 'We believe in regional Australia. We believe in Grafton as a centre of great consequence. We believe in what the people of Grafton and the district can do through this call centre.' They could say that. They could tick the box and show that endorsement. Yet they have not. They have ignored what 6,000 local people want, and, in my view, they so often ignore what everybody in this country wants. So it is hard to have a great deal of confidence. I would hope that in the future we would have reason to be confident in Telstra. They are an organisation of great ability which could deliver a great deal for this country, but there have been too many opportunities that they have missed, have passed up, on which they have not displayed any vision. I think that Grafton is just another example of that lack of vision and that lack of belief. You start to wonder what they are really all about. Where has the

customer service gone in Telstra? It has been a long time but it is very hard to see what they are achieving. It is hard to see very many positives at all.

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (12.07 pm)—I speak in support of this private member's motion moved by the member for Page. I certainly note her great concern about further job cuts at Telstra. It is also good to be able to come into a debate and listen to those on the other side actually talking about an issue that I care greatly about. It seems that we are in agreement on this issue. That is a good thing. As we all know, Telstra is a very large Australian employer. The jobs that it provides, and the skills that it fosters and grows, keep Australia competitive in telecommunications. The research it does is top rate, it has talented staff and it has second to none ownership of telecommunications assets. That, of course, is quite well-known now that we are debating the NBN in another forum here. But, in terms of job cuts, Telstra does not perform so well. I really wonder about the future of a company like Telstra when its priority seems to be stripping away the good parts of the company so that there is really only a shell left.

This seems to come down to Telstra management. We now have a new set of managers at Telstra following on from Sol Trujillo and his American amigos—I think that was the right description for them when they were here. Telstra has been going backwards the whole while. Even worse than that, the workers and customers who use that company are usually the last to find out this news. Imagine if you were an employee and you found out about the future, or not, of your job through the newspaper. I do not think that is a very fair and reasonable way of dealing with employees—telling the share market first and the employees later. I do not think that really builds company morale.

Many times over many years this has been the fate of Telstra staff. You can see why morale slips in a large company when that becomes the modus operandi. On 1 October this year the *Australian Financial Review* reported Telstra plans to slash 15 per cent of its workforce, cutting over 6,000 jobs, for a planned total redundancy cost of close to \$600 million. The paper also went on to report that thousands more jobs would go through natural attrition, thereby making the rate of job cuts similar to that experienced under the last Telstra CEO, Sol Trujillo. Of course, this was the very same person being paid \$13 million a year and who left with a payout of \$3.76 million after throwing those 12,000 employees on the scrapheap. Telstra's project, dubbed Project New, is apparently about cutting jobs and yet increasing services. I think that the jobs that they are planning to cut are actually the jobs that provide the services.

With Telstra going through another round of job cuts, we see managers claim they have achieved various goals. But I really feel for the Telstra staff at the sharp end of that, the ones who will go. It is not upper management that goes in these rounds of job cuts; it is staff on the front line. These staff, as I have said before, are the ones with the skills; these are the people you need to talk to if you phone up. If you have a fault, you need them to come out and fix your service. They are the ones at the front line of job cuts. Call centres are no different. Call centres in regional areas particularly provide local jobs that are badly needed in many cases. My electorate of Deakin is totally suburban but it is a huge calamity when we have factory closures and lose a hundred jobs. I cannot even begin to imagine how bad that could be in a regional town. It would be enormous. As Len Cooper, national president of the CEPU Communications Division, observes:

Every Telstra CEO has used mass redundancies and promised greater efficiency and better customer service and they haven't achieved it, so why haven't they learned a lesson?

I do not know why they have not. I can say they should listen to their customers, they should listen to their workers and they should—as a large employer—show some real corporate and social responsibility and look after the towns and cities that they serve, not only in terms of direct phone lines but also in terms of back-up services and support, so that when customers need it they can talk to a real person and can have their problems fixed easily and quickly and be back on the line.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Sidebottom)—The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Special Disability Trusts

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mrs Moylan**:

That this House:

- (1) acknowledges the work of carers, and in particular ageing parents caring for profoundly disabled dependents;
- (2) recognises that ageing parent carers remain deeply concerned about the diminishing capacity to care for their dependent children;
- (3) appreciates the special challenges faced by families, and in particular ageing parents, who wish to make provision for the needs of their disabled dependents;
- (4) notes that:
 - (a) disability trusts were established in September 2006 by the Coalition Government to assist families make provision for the future housing and care needs of dependents with severe disabilities;
 - (b) despite the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs estimating that over four years, 5000 people with severe disability would benefit from Special Disability Trusts, as at 31 March 2010, 423 people have been assessed as eligible, and only 91 trusts have been established; and
 - (c) since establishing Special Disability Trusts, it has become apparent that the conditions governing eligibility and management, as well as direct and wider taxation implications, have limited the workability and uptake of the trusts;
- (5) acknowledges that conditions diminishing the attractiveness of the trusts include the:
 - (a) complex application of taxation rules;
 - (b) inflexibility in what trust funds may be used for;
 - (c) inability for beneficiaries, through Special Disability Trusts, to claim the first home owners grant and other home saving initiatives;
 - (d) high initial eligibility threshold requiring a beneficiary to be eligible for at least a Carer Allowance, the regulations of which state, *inter alia*, that care for a 'significant period' must be given, defined as at least 20 hours a week of care;
 - (e) eligibility requirements disfavouring mental impairment disabilities; and
 - (f) attribution of Capital Gains Tax to transferors where, in particular, houses are placed into Special Disability Trusts;

- (6) condemns the Government for not taking seriously the recommendations outlined in the October 2008 Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs report entitled: Building Trust, Supporting Families through Disability Trusts; and
- (7) calls on the Government to fully examine the viability of implementing the Senate Committee's recommendations with a view to assisting ageing parents to adequately address the future needs of their profoundly disabled dependents.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (12.12 pm)—At the outset I would just like to acknowledge the members for Stirling and Gilmore and thank them for their support for this motion, and I thank all who participate in this debate today.

A few years ago I took a phone call from someone in one of the country towns in my electorate. The call haunts me to this day because that person was calling to say they were desperate, that a 90-year-old woman had been admitted to the local hospital with a serious illness and sadly subsequently passed away. She was admitted to hospital with her 60-year-old profoundly disabled son for whom she was the sole carer. Two weeks after the death of this woman, her disabled son was still living in the hospital and staying in a hospital bed. He had nowhere else to go. Along with the then mayor of this town we were eventually able to find accommodation and suitable help for him, but the thought of that situation happening to other families is deeply concerning, especially as more than 15,000 people over the age of 65 care for severely or profoundly disabled individuals according to the latest ABS data, from 2003.

Special disability trusts were established in 2006 under the Howard government to assist families to make provision for the future care and accommodation needs of their profoundly disabled dependents. Concessions were built in so as not to adversely impact Centrelink payments, such as the disability support pension, or the pensions of family members contributing to the trust. In a later written submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, Wendy Verhagen, President of Winaccomm, a disability housing organisation, recalled her initial joy when she said:

I remember talking to a group of parents at Ashwood Special School about this proposed legislation, and mentioning that they could start such a Trust and put savings into it, together with perhaps grandparent's bequests, so that when the youngster was in his or her 30's, there could be sufficient funds in the Trust so that they would not be dependent on the Government for accommodation or support. One parent actually described such legislation as "life-changing."

Initially it was estimated by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs that over four years 5,000 people with severe disability would benefit. But that is far from the reality because, as at 31 March 2010, only 423 people had been assessed as eligible to enter into one of these trusts and only 91 of those 423 people had actually established a trust. Clearly something is wrong.

In 2008 the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs investigated special disability trusts, producing a report entitled *Building trust: supporting families through disability trusts*. That report clearly sets out the impediments to greater uptake of the trusts. How these drawbacks have come about was illuminated by Ian Spicer, who acted as chair of the original advisory group on the establishment of the trust. In evidence to the committee he noted:

... the rules proposed for establishing a trust were drafted cautiously, being a first step only, with the hope that they could be revised and extended in the light of further evidence and experience.

That opportunity is now upon us. We have the report. Fourteen recommendations were made in the report to improve the uptake of the trust, yet many of these have been ignored or only implemented in part. For instance, recommendation 5.2, which calls for the transfer of property to the trust to be exempt from capital gains tax, was not agreed to by the government. The practical impact is profound.

Brian and Jean O'Hart from Western Australia bought a property in 1988 in their names for their severely disabled daughter to live in. An accountant has calculated that by transferring that property to a special disability trust before their death so that they have the certainty that their daughter will have accommodation they will be liable to pay \$126,000 in capital gains tax—just to change a name. It is shocking that the government would want to strip such a vast sum from self-funded retirees looking after a profoundly disabled child. That money would be better directed to the care of their daughter.

General taxation of the trust continues to be a significant barrier. When legislation was brought forward as part of the budget, my office inquired with the department about specific cost examples, including different interpretations sent in by members of the public. The department did not confirm which variation was correct. What confidence does that give the trustees, who are most likely going to be the same people caring for the beneficiary? Parents and siblings struggle enough caring for their severely and profoundly disabled dependants; wading through complex tax administration should not be lumped upon them by the government as well.

The high eligibility threshold is also a problem. One of the few special disability trusts in existence is the Deb Trust established by Brian Broughton for his daughter Debra, who has Down syndrome. In his submission, Brian recalls:

The first problem we encountered was the “Care” test when our daughter failed to reach the required points level, the first time around. ... Thankfully we had very supportive members of [the Perth Centrelink] team who advised us to fill in another “new” application and ‘think outside the square’.

It is telling of the difficulty of establishing such trusts when parents looking after a profoundly disabled person—exactly who the trusts were envisaged for—must, for the sake of an application form, creatively reinterpret the care they currently give. Robyn Kleber investigated a special disability trust for her daughter Jessica. She decided against one because, as her daughter’s income cannot be contributed to the trust, Jessica’s savings will accumulate until eventually her pension is reduced according to her bank balance and Centrelink limits. Robyn pointed out:

The use of a trust for all expenses (such as holidays and household items) as well as accommodation would be much more useful. This would also necessitate only one financial return ([which are] time consuming!)

A similar view was espoused in the report with recommendations that the trust be able to cover all day-to-day expenses related to health, wellbeing, recreation and independence of the beneficiary.

Instead, in its new legislation the government has plucked out an arbitrary \$10,000 a year discretionary spending figure. Although being an improvement, the government is effectively dictating how much can be spent on a person’s wellbeing, recreation and independence. We know that amongst the profoundly disabled community there are many different needs. Surely

this is best determined by the trustees and the family of the individual—that is, the people who constantly care for them.

The government has even rejected the recommendation that it simply review appropriate options to provide additional assistance to families establishing and maintaining a special disability trust. I understand that a trust template was originally envisaged to help minimise the legal cost but has never eventuated. I would ask particularly that the government follow up on this matter. As Wendy Verhagen points out:

The thousands of parents who continue caring for their disabled son or daughter in the family home, often into their 80's, save the government \$30 billion a year.

The thousands of parents who continue caring for their disabled dependant in the family home, often into their eighties, do make a major contribution and everything should be done to try to ease that burden. Yet the government will not even review the options to provide additional assistance that will allow families to look after their dependants. Much more can be done and much more should be done and I urge the new parliamentary secretary, Senator the Hon. Jan McLucas, to take up the cause and to implement the recommendations as outlined in the *Building trust* report. I ask that she implement those recommendations in full in the interests of showing that we can build trust within the disability community and that we are taking a responsible position in assisting the families of those parents who are ageing to make provision into the future for their profoundly disabled dependants. This parliament should take responsibility and should make sure that these recommendations are fully implemented.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (12.23 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion put to this House by the member for Pearce. I support parts (1) to (5) of the motion but do not support parts (6) and (7) as, in fact, the government does take very seriously the report of the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs and has responded quite appropriately. I am sure that the minister will take note of the other matters that have been raised by the member for Pearce today. As someone who has had personal discussions with members of my community about this very matter, I well understand the importance of it to those families. In fact I have relatives who are also in the very situation that this motion is addressing. Again I well understand the importance of both this legislation and the work that carers throughout our community do in whatever role of caring they are in.

Special disability trusts were established in September 2006 to assist immediate family members who have the financial means to do so to make private financial provision for the current and future care and accommodation needs of a family member with severe disability. Special disability trusts attract generous social security means-test concessions for the beneficiary and eligible contributors. The principal beneficiary's immediate family members who are of age-pension age can gift up to \$500,000 into the trust without having the social security gifting rules applied. In addition, a special disability trust currently can have assets worth up to \$563,250 without these funds impacting on a beneficiary's social security pension, such as the disability support pension. Special disability trusts are available to all people with severe disability including people with mental health conditions. To be eligible to be a principal beneficiary of a special disability trust, a person must meet the definition of severe disability under section 1209M of the Social Security Act 1991.

While the number of special disability trusts which have been set up is lower than originally anticipated, the number continues to grow. As at 30 September 2010, 119 special dis-

ability trusts were in operation. The total value of contributions to special disability trusts was \$17.7 million, with \$8.9 million of this amount receiving social security means-test considerations. That is effectively since 2006. This is a relatively new law that has come into place and a relatively new opportunity for people who wish to take advantage of it.

The government in fact welcomed the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs report *Building trust: supporting families through disability trusts*. The government tabled its response to the report on 14 May 2009 and it agrees with many of the recommendations. The government has already moved to make changes to encourage more families to establish special disability trusts. As announced in the 2009-10 budget and starting from the 2008-09 financial year, the unexpended income of a special disability trust will be taxed at the beneficiary's personal income tax rate rather than the highest marginal tax rate. From July 2009, subject to the passage of legislation, the capital gains tax main residence exemption will be extended to include a residence that is owned by a special disability trust and is used by the beneficiary as their main residence.

As announced in the 2010-11 budget, from 1 January 2011—again subject to the passage of legislation—a beneficiary of a special disability trust will be able to work up to seven hours a week at or above the relevant minimum wage. A special disability trust will be able to pay for the beneficiary's medical expenses including private health fund membership and maintenance of the trust's assets and properties, and a trust will be able to spend up to \$10,000 in a financial year on discretionary items not related to the care and accommodation needs of the beneficiary of the trust. In two years the government will undertake a review of the amount that can be held in a trust on a concessional basis and the amount that can be gifted and who can request audits of special disability trusts. This review will commence in January 2013 and will take into account the impact of the 1 January 2011 changes.

In our first term of government, this government has delivered more financial security for carers. Our achievements include record pension rises. Over the past year the pension has increased by \$115 per fortnight for singles and by \$97 for couples combined on the maximum rate, including through more generous indexation arrangements. A new annual and ongoing \$600 carers supplement has been introduced. New rules to make it easier for carers of children with disability to get income support have been brought in. Recently we made a number of commitments for people with disability which will help to provide relief to carers. Those commitments include the Better Start for Children with Disability Initiative, which will provide more than \$122 million over four years for early intervention services for children diagnosed with sight and hearing impairments, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and fragile-X syndrome. The government will also establish a new capital fund of \$60 million to build up to 150 new innovative, community based supported accommodation places for people with disability.

The government are implementing significant reforms across different service delivery systems to improve arrangements for both carers and the people they care for. We have implemented the National Disability Agreement to improve and expand services for people with disability, their families and carers, and we have doubled our funding to state and territory governments by providing more than \$6 billion over five years for more and better specialist disability services. We have released a draft National Disability Strategy which outlines a 10-year plan to improve the lives of people with disability, promote participation and create a

more inclusive society. And we are developing a National Carer Recognition Framework which includes national carer recognition legislation and a national carer strategy to place carers' needs at the centre of government policy.

The national Carer Recognition Bill 2010 is the first element of the National Carer Recognition Framework. The bill was introduced into parliament on 29 September 2010. The legislation recognises and acknowledges the valuable contribution that carers make to Australian society and complements carer recognition, which is in place in some states and territories. The bill establishes a definition of a carer, sets out a statement for Australia's carers, identifies obligations of Commonwealth Public Service agencies and service providers in respect of the statement, and sets out the reporting and consultation responsibilities of Commonwealth Public Service agencies. The statement for Australia's carers is the cornerstone of the bill. It sets out the 10 principles about how carers should be considered in the development, implementation, provision and evaluation of policies, programs and services relevant to them and to the persons for whom they care. My understanding is that the bill is to be debated in the spring session of parliament, and I will take the opportunity to speak on that bill when it is debated in the parliament.

The National Carer Strategy, to be delivered in the first half of 2011, is the second element of the National Carer Recognition Framework. The strategy will seek to improve coordination across government so that programs and services for carers of people with disability, medical condition, mental illness and the frail aged are more responsive and targeted.

Minister Macklin has already announced that the strategy will consider the training and skills development needs of carers and the adequacy of case management and care coordination for carers. Addressing the needs of young carers and carers in rural and remote communities will also be priorities of the strategy. The strategy will be developed in consultation with state and territory governments and with input from carers, key peak organisations, advocates and service providers.

Mr Deputy Speaker, as you would probably know, we are also supporting the strategy by putting \$102,000 into National Carers Week, which is happening right now. This government has done more for carers since coming to office than the previous coalition government did. We are dealing with new legislation and I have no doubt that the effects of that legislation will be carefully monitored by the minister.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (12.33 pm)—I rise to second and support the motion of my Western Australian colleague the member for Pearce. I acknowledge that she has been a very passionate advocate for people with a disability for a long time and for the whole time that she has been in this parliament. I have been in this parliament for a much shorter time but over that time it has certainly become apparent to me that the provisions the government makes for the most vulnerable members of our community fall short of what the Australian people would expect if they looked into it. We live in an age where the government spends a lot of money on many things. For Australians with a disability there is a fundamental disconnect between their needs and what the government provides for them.

I have been fortunate to be part of a very successful scheme in Western Australia, which is the Adopt-a-Politician Scheme. I understand that it only runs in Western Australia but I would recommend that it run nationally. As part of that scheme politicians who put their hand up to be part of it are paired with a family who cares for a disabled person. In my case I have been

adopted by the family of Jodie Quarmby who is cared for by her mother Jenny. Jodie has a very serious brain injury that she acquired as a teenager and has a very serious disability.

I have had discussions with Jenny and it is very easy to understand—and I know this through talking to other families as well—that one of the things that families who are caring for somebody with a disability fear the most is: what is going to happen when they, inevitably, are unable to care for the person that they are caring for? Clearly, if you are a mother or a father caring for a disabled child, the idea of what is going to happen when you are unable to care for them or, of course, even when you inevitably pass away is something that weighs very, very heavily on their minds. Those families would like to create arrangements for the person that they are caring for to have care once they are no longer able to provide it.

That was the whole rationale behind establishing special disability trusts. They were established in 2006 by the Howard government with the hope of ensuring the future wellbeing of people with a disability and also to provide relief and reassurance to carers and their families that, when they were unable to provide that care, it would be provided through another means. The trusts were established to bring benefits, including tax exemptions and concessions, which would make it much easier for parents in particular to plan for their children's future.

Ageing parents of a person with a disability are, as I have said, rightly concerned about what is going to happen when they cannot provide care. Who will make provisions for that care, who will support the person with the disability, who will provide them with accommodation and who will care for them are tough questions that weigh very heavily on the minds of these families.

The aim behind the special disability trusts was to make the life of a person with a disability and their parents a little bit easier by alleviating those pressures. Sadly, they have not been able to fulfil those objectives because the government refuses to take action on the unnecessary bureaucracy that is stopping these special disability trusts from being effective. A parliamentary Senate committee looked into why the take-up rate on those special disability trusts was so low and came up with some sensible proposals for ways that will make it easier for families to access the trusts.

But, sadly, the government has not taken those recommendations seriously and it has not acknowledged the serious challenges that are facing families with someone who has a disability. The defining characteristic of a special disability trust is that it is proactive in nature. It is the family making provision for things that are going to happen in the future when family circumstances change and, of course, as the family ages. The framework of the trust reflects these values and that is how they were designed—to help these families assist over time. They were introduced to achieve what parents and families had been unable to secure under the then arrangements, and that was to create a secure future for the person they were caring for. It is my firm hope that this parliament can do a lot better than previous parliaments have done to provide for the needs of families and Australians with a disability. *(Time expired)*

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (12.38 pm)—I will begin my contribution by first congratulating the member for Pearce. She is a good person and somebody who gets on well with everybody in this place and in the parliament and I have a lot of respect for her. I acknowledge the good work she has done in a range of areas including this motion, which has many good parts, which I think we can all agree on. Acknowledging the work of carers is, I think, very important because carers are really the unsung heroes in our community. They are the people who

not only because of a family link but also because of a friendship link or other reason have become a carer and have chosen to do something. This is an extraordinary task for someone to carry out. It is a very special job, which requires people to give completely of themselves for somebody else. People who do that work are typically parents of children with a disability. Of course, we ought to recognise them and do everything we can in this place to make their lives a little bit easier and a little bit more comfortable in any way we can.

I think it is also important to recognise ageing parents. I have spoken to many parents, and I am sure that other members of the House have as well, who care for their disabled child and sometimes that child is 40 or 50 years of age. It has cost the parents a lot, physically, emotionally and financially. It is something they obviously willingly do and will continue to do. I believe it is our job in parliament to make sure that our regulations, our systems and the structures we put in place actually assist them in whatever way possible. So I do congratulate the member for Pearce for putting this motion forward. However, I have got to say that although there are many good parts, I just simply cannot agree with the last two parts in which she condemns the government for not taking seriously the recommendations that are outlined in the October 2008 Senate standing committee report *Building trust: supporting families through disability trusts*. I cannot agree for the simple reason that it is not the case that this government is not taking seriously either that report or the work of carers or the special disability trusts themselves, because we do take them seriously. We care very deeply about the mechanisms and systems to assist carers regardless of their age.

In fact, the government have a good record of doing that. We have got a good record in a range of areas, particularly in the last parliament, with the then Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services looking at specific ways we can make the job of carers easier, looking at the financial security of carers very specifically and other people who are on pensions, by having record pension rises and increases—real increases—that matched the cost of living and expectations that people have. We have increased the annual and ongoing carer supplement—a permanent increase. We have ensured there are new rules to make it easier for carers of children with a disability to get income support.

I congratulate the former government which, back in 2006, introduced the Special Disability Trust, because its intent was good, it was right and we support that. But like a lot of things, we do not always get it right straightaway. More work needs to be done to make sure that these disability trusts match what happens in the real world and match what happens when it comes to actually caring for people and that the intent is right. That is what we want to do while we are in government. These are the things we want to make sure we get right. There are 2.6 million carers in this country. That is a lot of people who actually rely on government assistance. Very few people would be in a position to fully fund or provide support out of their own income. Often they give up the opportunity to have an income in order to care for a disabled family member, a child or other relative. So I think it is important that we acknowledge the work of carers, that they are ageing and that it is difficult. But I think it is important that we also do not play politics with this particular issue. It is important that we also acknowledge that all governments work towards these same objectives and goals, and certainly this government does. Our National Carer Strategy has worked to improve coordination across the states and territories and to provide better services to make sure that government is not a burden or a barrier but that it is there to assist. We have done that particularly by consid-

ering special training and skills needs of carers, ensuring that they have got the right skills and the adequate knowledge to do their job properly. Carers Week this year, coming up between 17 and 23 October, is a real opportunity for everyone to—*(Time expired)*

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (12.43 pm)—I rise to speak to the motion put forward by the Hon. Judi Moylan, the member for Pearce, and seconded by Michael Keenan, the member for Stirling. I thank the member for Oxley for his comments on carers. I could not agree more. This motion seeks to remove some of the barriers to entry which parents of children with a disability currently face if they consider establishing a disability trust. At the moment there is unnecessary red tape that has led to a relatively low uptake of these special trusts, which is disappointing because they were introduced by the coalition government in 2006 to help families who have one or more dependants with a severe disability to plan for the future. I also thank Senator Kay Paterson, the then health minister.

The fact is that point 1 of this motion recognises that there are far too many ageing parents in our community who are caring for their child with a disability and are worried about what will happen to their child when they are gone. I also recognise there are many younger families facing this predicament and are concerned about how to access what we proposed in 2006. We have a large number of these families in Gilmore and the numbers are growing each year as our special needs schools will testify. These parents have enough to worry about without spending their last days being anxious about the future needs of their dependants. It is almost a case of *deja vu* for me, as I have been advocating for the needs of people with disabilities and their families and carers since I came into parliament in 1996. Several of my first speeches were on the subject and I concur, again, with the member for Oxley that we should not play politics with these motions.

This motion is about governments helping parents to help their children, making their lives easier. That is the No. 1 concern here. A Senate report released in 2008 by the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs titled *Building trust: supporting families through disability trusts* dealt with just this. It made 14 recommendations to improve the current model, which the government has failed for the most part to pick up. By introducing this motion, we are seeking to put this issue back on the agenda and make some relatively small changes which will make a huge difference to many families. These changes include but are not limited to examining the complex tax laws surrounding disability trusts and their wider implications. As points (4) and (5) of this motion highlight, the complexity of the current system is thought to be responsible for the very low uptake. Anyone who has tried to work out the rules and conditions of a trust will know what I am talking about.

Families should not need to spend thousands of dollars on legal fees to take advantage of a trust. They should not need a law degree to work out whether or not it would benefit their family. There are also serious discriminatory issues which should be addressed. For example, beneficiaries of disability trusts cannot claim the first home owners grant or other incentives, as stated in the motion. There are financial barriers in some cases which make trusts not only unattractive but also unaffordable. It makes sense that some parents would like to transfer their home into a trust for the future benefit of their child. Parents who want to transfer their property into a trust are shocked to learn that they will be up for thousands of dollars in capital gains tax.

The last point I would like to touch on relates to the eligibility criteria for special disability trusts which require a beneficiary to first be eligible for a carers allowance. There is no doubt that this approach disfavours those with a mental disability who might still benefit from family members helping them plan for the future but who currently do not meet the restrictive criteria.

To sum up, the hard work has already been done. The Senate committee has looked long and hard at this and the recommendations need to be taken more seriously. I wholeheartedly support this motion, as do the families in Gilmore affected by this issue. I certainly commend it to the House and thank all members for participating in the debate on this motion. I thank particularly the member for Pearce for putting forward the motion.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (12.47 pm)—I commence my contribution to this debate by acknowledging previous speakers and the work of the member for Pearce in putting this motion before the House. The member for Pearce is committed to carers. I also acknowledge that the member for Gilmore has made many contributions in this area and in the wider area of disability.

This is a very important motion. It deals with the work of carers and acknowledges the enormous contribution they have made to our community. It also highlights the fact that ageing parents who have profoundly disabled children constantly worry about their future and have great concern for what will happen to their children once they themselves are no longer here. It goes on to recognise how deeply concerned they are about their capacity as they age to look after their children. I believe most members of this parliament would have had parents visit them to express their deep concern for their children when they are no longer here.

Families with children who have disabilities face special challenges. One of those challenges is how children will be cared for when the parents are no longer here. The 2006 legislation which makes it possible to set up disability trusts is one way of addressing this issue. With all legislation we do not get it right first time and that is the case with the disability trust legislation. I have been dealing with a constituent who has been having enormous difficulty putting a trust in place, to a large extent related to red tape. They were having difficulty with conflict between legislation of different jurisdictions and how this impacted on the disability trust for their son, who has Asperger's syndrome and an intellectual disability and has been deemed suitable to be a beneficiary of a trust.

Like my colleagues on this side of the House, I agree with points (1) to (5). I think there needs to be more work done to make trusts workable. It is a work in progress. The government is very mindful of issues that impact on the lives of carers who have children with disabilities. It is very wrong to say that we did not take the recommendations seriously. We take very seriously any report which looks at issues that impact on the lives of people with a disability and those caring for them. It is because of that that the Carer Recognition Bill 2010 will be introduced into this parliament during this session. I can absolutely be certain that the member for Gilmore will speak on this legislation. It sets out the definitions of 'disability' and 'carer' and 10 principles which will come into play in this area. It looks at the relationship between different levels of government and is a very important step forward. *(Time expired)*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas)—Order! The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Sitting suspended from 12.53 pm to 4.00 pm

CONDOLENCES

Private Nathan Bewes

Trooper Jason Brown

Private Tomas Dale

Private Grant Kirby

Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney

Debate resumed from 28 September, on motion by **Ms Gillard**.

That the House record its deep regret at the deaths of Private Nathan Bewes, Trooper Jason Brown, Private Tomas Dale, Private Grant Kirby and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney while on combat operations in Afghanistan and places on record its appreciation of their service to our country and tenders its profound sympathy to their families and friends in their bereavement.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (4.00 pm)—Death is not a topic that I find easy to talk about, but that is what we are speaking about today as we honour these brave Australians—Private Nathan Bewes, Trooper Jason Brown, Private Tomas Dale, Private Grant Kirby and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney. The stark finality of the sacrifice of these young men can never be properly expressed by mere words because words alone seem to belittle the sacrifice these Australians have made on our behalf. Of course, members of this House have spoken and will speak to this condolence motion. They, like me, seek to properly and justly honour these men.

The sheer tragedy of these deaths should remind us that war is not something remote. For many Australians our connection to these young men, to war and to Afghanistan is through today's interface—television and internet news. War by television is close enough to touch yet far enough away that it is just not seen. I say this not as a criticism but rather to showcase the distance between our remarkably cohesive, vibrant and safe community and the harsh reality of this war where young Australians do their absolute best for us and often pay the ultimate price for us. Sadly the remoteness of this war and the 15-second-grab nature of television news mean that many Australians do not see that reality, do not see the pain and suffering.

Over the last two months I attended the funerals of Private Grant Kirby and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney. The Prime Minister was at those funerals, as was the Leader of the Opposition. They were there, like me as the local member for the Gallipoli Barracks, the home of 6RAR, to pay their respects and those of this nation to these brave men. As important as that is, those funerals serve to remind us all that death is not a solitary thing because not one of us is alone. We have families, wives, partners, children, mums and dads, grandparents, good friends and colleagues. They all share the burden of this sacrifice made on our behalf, made in the name of our nation. Their pain will not go away. At each of these funeral services I saw evidence of that—wives, children and Noah MacKinney, who was born only a matter of hours after his father's funeral. That is the price that is paid as fine Australians, so many of our best, go to war.

Our soldiers do not choose their wars; we do through our government. Those decisions are not made easily, no matter the political persuasion of the government of the day. The stark

reality of war hits home most harshly to those whose loved ones have paid the ultimate price for us. In saying this I ask that we all reflect on the challenge and burden that we place on our armed forces and acknowledge the sacrifice they make on our behalf, willingly going into battle fully understanding the risks they take of death, injury, pain and mental torment. We as a nation ask so much of these Australians and we ask it of their families as well.

So my challenge to my fellow Australians is to take the tragedy of these deaths, think of how you would cope if it were your son, your partner, your father or your friend, and open your heart to these brave Australians who died for you. In particular, open your heart to their families whose lives and responsibilities must go on, having themselves made this enormous sacrifice for all of us. As we pay our respects to these courageous Australians, let us never forget the debt this nation owes to those who go to war, to those who do not come home, to Nathan Bewes, Jason Brown, Tomas Dale, Grant Kirby, Jared MacKinney and their families. How our nation repays that debt is a matter of honour, not of accounting. As the families consistently said at the funerals: do not let their deaths be in vain.

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond—Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (4.06 pm)—I also rise to record my sympathy at the deaths of Private Nathan Bewes, Trooper Jason Brown, Private Tomas Dale, Private Grant Kirby and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney, all of who died whilst on combat operations in Afghanistan. I would like to express my deepest sympathy to their families and friends and to their communities, and to acknowledge my appreciation for their service to our country. Today I would like to speak in particular of Private Nathan Bewes, who was from Murwillumbah in my electorate of Richmond. Nathan Bewes was serving with the First Mentoring Task Force when he tragically lost his life from an improvised explosive device on Friday, 9 July. Whilst Nathan Bewes was from the Brisbane based 6th Battalion RAR, he grew up in Murwillumbah and his family and many friends still live there.

Nathan was just 23 years of age when he died. Born in Kogarah, Nathan, like his dad, Gary, loved the St George rugby league team. His family moved to Murwillumbah, where Nathan attended Mount Saint Patrick School. Nathan joined Murwillumbah's Army cadet unit at the age of 13. He joined the Army in 2005, at the age of 18, and was part of the 6RAR. He was on his third tour of duty after first serving in East Timor in 2006, then in Afghanistan in 2008 and again this year. He had been awarded six service medals.

Speaking with his family it was clear that Nathan was always keen on joining the Army. Gary Bewes said that his son had always wanted to follow in the footsteps of his grandfathers: Cliff Gill, who served in New Guinea in World War II, and Jack Bewes, who served with the Royal Air Force in England. As his family have said, the Army was his lifelong passion. It was all he wanted to do. When he was on leave from Afghanistan in June all he could talk about was getting back to the deployment and to his mates.

Nathan's family said that he was a born leader and loved the comradeship of the armed forces. He thrived on the lifestyle, the adventure and the mateship. His mother, Kay, said, 'He was very proud of the job he did and we were very proud of the job he did as well.' For him that was what he was joining the Army for—to serve Australia, change the world and to help other people.

On the day of Nathan's funeral the town of Murwillumbah paid tribute to a son and a brother who made the ultimate sacrifice for his country. Nathan was remembered by his family, friends and fellow soldiers as a man of great courage and as an outstanding soldier. He

was also remembered as a man of humour, mateship and compassion. At the end of the service a guard of honour was formed outside the Sacred Heart church with members of the 6RAR, Army cadets, and local school children. And the town of Murwillumbah came to a standstill and more than a thousand people lined the streets as a mark of respect.

We will be forever grateful and indebted to our soldiers for the work they do in protecting us, our interests and our nation. We must always remember those who have served and who continue to serve our nation with such bravery.

Our thoughts are especially with Nathan's parents, Gary and Kay; his sister, Stephanie; and his partner, Alice. Our thoughts are also with all the families of those whose loved ones have died while serving our country. We thank them for their sacrifice and dedication and their service to our nation.

I commend the motion to the House.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (4.10 pm)—I rise today to speak on the condolence motion for Private Bewes, Trooper Brown, Private Dale, Private Kirby and Lance Corporal MacKinney. It was on 24 June when I last stood in this committee room under similar, joyless circumstances and recounted the lives and tragic deaths of Private Timothy James Alpin, Private Benjamin Adam Chuck and Private Scott Travis Palmer. It was only two days prior to that, on 22 June, that I stood here and spoke on the condolence motion for Sapper Moerland and Sapper Smith.

I remember standing here and thinking that, indeed, it had been a very dark fortnight for our Australian Defence Force, who had lost five of their own in very quick time. Let us not forget the grief-bound families who must still be coming to terms with the very personal loss of their loved ones. Today all here in this place again pause to remember those that have given their lives for their country. I am sure that those here today will agree that, while a lot has happened since I was last standing here, the one thing that remains unchanged, unmoveable and unrepenting is our collective support for our troops and our collective sadness in remembering those we have recently lost.

Since the parliament was prorogued only a few months ago Australia has continued to suffer casualties in Afghanistan. In fact, in two short months Australia lost five fine soldiers who gave their all in the name of their country. They were doing only what their government had asked of them and it is therefore entirely appropriate that we take their measure of sacrifice and reflect on that here today.

I now wish to briefly recount the lives of each of the five fallen soldiers as well as some of the moving tributes paid to each of them by those who knew them best. I believe it is important to have those very moving sentiments read into the *Hansard* so that they remain on record in this parliament for ever and a day.

Private Nathan Bewes was from the Brisbane based 6th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment and was serving with the First Mentoring Task Force in Afghanistan when he was killed by an improvised explosive device on 9 July 2010. It was Private Bewes's second appointment to Afghanistan, having already been deployed to East Timor once previously, and he knew the dangers of undertaking a dismounted patrol in the Chora Valley region of Uruzgan Province more than anyone.

I am reminded of Thucydides, the Ancient Greek historian and author who said:

The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, and yet notwithstanding, go out to meet it.

In fact, 7 Brigade Commander Brigadier Paul McLachlan said of Private Bewes:

He held the welfare and safety of his mates more dearly than he held his own life and he revelled in this responsibility.

In a society that has a tendency to overuse the concept of a hero, here is an example to us all. A knock about bloke, who day in and day out, clearly understanding the consequences, chose to put his life on the line to do his job and protect his mates.

Private Bewes was born in Kogarah, New South Wales, and joined the Army in 2005. He was posted to 6RAR after completing his recruit and infantry basic training the same year. He was only 23 when he was killed.

Private Bewes was awarded the Australian Active Service Medal with clasp International Coalition Against Terrorism, the Australian Service Medal with clasp Timor-Leste, the Australian Defence Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, NATO medal with clasp ISAF and the East Timor Solidarity Medal. Private Bewes was also awarded the Infantry Combat Badge, and for previous deployments the Returned Active Service Badge.

Private Bewes is survived by his parents, Gary and Kay; his sister, Stephanie; and his partner, Ms Alice Walsh, who released a statement about Nate that I would like to read:

Nate was my best friend, my soul mate, the one I knew I'd be with for the rest of my life. He was an amazing mate to our many friends and was loved by everyone. He always made me laugh and I have never loved anyone so much.

He was an excellent soldier who was willing to put his life in danger along with his mates from Team 3 for the people of Australia. I will miss my Bewes for the rest of my life.

While your loved one comes home to you every day there are others who are worrying if there will be another day. Soldier's families be proud, as they are out changing the world, making history and putting their lives on the line for Australia.

Take one minute out of your day to pray or wish upon a star for a soldier so that they may all come back home safely one day to his or her family.

I love you and miss you Nate.

Private Nathan Bewes was truly an Australian soldier, dedicated to upholding the values of the Australian Defence Force, but, more than that, he was committed to the very end to looking out for his mates.

Trooper Jason Brown from the Perth base Special Air Service Regiment was serving with the Special Operations Task Group in Afghanistan when he was sadly killed by insurgent gunfire on the morning of 14 August 2010. Trooper Brown was born in Sydney in 1981 and joined the Army on 13 June 2000. In 2004 he joined the 4th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (Commando) and on successful completion of the 2007 selection course Trooper Brown became a member of the Special Air Service Regiment. This was Trooper Brown's first tour of Afghanistan but he had considerable experience on the ground, having been deployed to East Timor on three previous occasions as part of Operation Tanager, Operation Citadel and Operation Astute. His colleagues spoke of an outstanding career soldier who was dedicated to his job and always went the extra mile for his mates. They spoke of a professional and committed soldier and one that will be sorely missed by his closest friends, as well as the entire ADF family.

Trooper Brown has been awarded the Australian Active Service Medal with clasp ICAT, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the Australian Service Medal with clasp Timor-Leste, the United Nations Medal with ribbon UNTAET, the NATO ISAF Medal, the Australian Defence Medal, the Infantry Combat Badge. Trooper Brown has also been awarded the Return from Active Service Badge for an earlier deployment.

Trooper Brown is survived by his parents, Graham and Ann, along with his sister, Stephanie. In a statement they released, the family said:

Today we were advised of the tragic death of our son, brother and mate while he was serving in Afghanistan.

Jason was a career soldier who dreamed from a young age of being nothing else. Everyone who knew him knew his dream. He strived to be the best he could be at his job and was successfully accepted into the elite Special Air Service Regiment.

He was born to be a soldier, and believed in what he was doing. He died doing what he loved. We are all very proud of him.

We will miss him dearly, as will his army mates, who were his second family.

We ask at this time you respect our privacy and allow us our space to grieve the loss of an exceptional soldier, mate, brother, son and most of all Australian.

In a subsequent statement his family also thanked friends, the ADF and the local community for the:

... wonderful and overwhelming support, care and compassion we have received during this most difficult time following the death of our dear son and brother, Trooper Jason Thomas Brown.

...

The army was his life and his second family. He died serving the country he loved so well and his advice to his military mates would be to stay focused and stay strong.

This sentiment was echoed by the Commander Joint Task 633, Major General John Cantwell, who said that Trooper Brown will be remembered by his mates in both the Special Air Service Regiment and 2nd Commando Regiment as a professional soldier who strived to excel in everything he did. He said:

It was a warrior's send-off by our nation's finest warriors—something I'm sure Jason would have been extremely humbled by, but something he truly earned with his dedicated and selfless service.

Trooper Brown will be sorely missed by his family, his mates and his brothers-in-arms, who I know will be doing all they can to help Trooper Brown's family cope with this immense loss of their son and brother.

I am sure the deaths of Sapper Moerland and Sapper Smith are all too fresh in our memories, not least of all because their deaths represented the first time Australia had suffered multiple casualties during one operational incident since the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, on 20 August 2010, Australia again lost two soldiers—two exceptional soldiers—during one operational incident. Once again, the culprit was the insidious and indiscriminate improvised explosive device. The incident occurred at approximately 10.30 am on 20 August 2010 during a joint counter-IED operation that Australian troops were conducting with the Afghan National Army personnel near a position in the Baluchi Valley. The two soldiers killed were Private Tomas Dale and Private Grant Kirby, and their loss so soon after the loss of Trooper Brown

serves as a very real reminder of the dangers that our troops face on the ground every day in Afghanistan.

Truly the dangers cannot be underestimated, nor the bravery and dedication of the Australian soldiers doubted. Private Tomas Dale, who was 21, and Private Grant Kirby, who was 35, were from the Brisbane based 6th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment—the very same regiment that bore the loss of Private Nathan Bewes only a few weeks prior. Although Private Dale and Private Kirby were separated by a few years in age, they were described as being truly brothers-in-arms. Commander of the Joint Task Force 633, Major General John Cantwell, spoke of the two soldiers who had naturally fallen into the role of youngest and oldest brothers in their sections. He also spoke of the hardship experienced by their mates at having to deal with the loss of two comrades. He said:

Losing anyone is hard, but losing two people close enough to be considered as brothers, in every sense of that word, is especially difficult and it will be a real test for those who need to continue with this fight in their honour.

It is a testament to their unwavering commitment to one another that Private Dale and Private Kirby's section mates were transported in from their outlying patrol base to attend the ramp ceremony in Afghanistan and bid a final farewell to their mates.

Private Dale's life and service, his courage and, ultimately, his selfless sacrifice will be forever remembered by his parents, David and Karen, along with his brothers, Sam and Joe. Of their beloved son and brother, they said:

Tomas loved the Army and it was all he wanted to do from an early age. He knew the risks from going overseas but he was willing to take that risk for the cause he believed in.

Tomas loved his family, brothers and girlfriend and we all loved him very much and are very proud of him.

Tomas was a great bloke and will never be forgotten. His brothers Sam and Joe will greatly miss him.

Tomas would want his colleagues to keep fighting the cause and hope they come home safely. His mates meant everything to him.

At Private Dale's funeral service, it was perhaps his father, David, who best reflected the terrible sense of loss that the family felt. In but a few short words he said:

The thought of spending the rest of our lives without you is scary, you were our world ...

Private Kirby will also be sorely missed and his absence will be forever felt by his family. In a statement they put out soon after the news of his death, Private Kirby's family said:

Grant was part of a close and loving family, father Gary and mum Dianne, brothers Shaun and Luke, sister Lauren, and former wife Edwina and their two daughters Isabella ... and Madeleine ...

"While Grant and I were no longer married, he was very much a part of our family," said Edwina, "he was a dedicated father and my very close friend."

"Grant was always there for our girls and was totally involved in their sports and school events when he was not deployed."

Edwina said Grant was an incredibly honourable person who had an immense amount of pride in his job serving the country.

Grant's father Gary said that his son had always been keen to be in the Army.

"In fact after suffering shin splints in his first attempt to join, he stuck with it and successfully tried again."

"He was very passionate about health and fitness and kept himself in very good shape," Gary said. "Grant was one of the boys," said his sister Lauren, "and being older was often called 'Dad' by the boys in his unit.

"He was a role model at times and often a mentor to them."

Gary said the family was incredibly proud of Grant and it will take time to come to terms with his loss. These sentiments were echoed in a statement released by Miss Joanne Matthews and the extended family of Private Kirby, which said:

Grant was also part of another family with me, his mother, Joanne and my former husband, Gavin Matthews and his other brother George and wife, Belinda and son Nate and other sister Avy. We are all brokenhearted and we find his death difficult to accept or understand. On their behalf and on behalf of the extended families we wish to say that we are so very proud of the way Grant carried out his responsibilities in life and the way he died serving his country. We send our condolences to Grant's former wife, Edwina and their beautiful girls Bella and Mattie. We also wish to express our deepest sympathy for the family and friends of Private Thomas Dale and other members of the unit.

At Private Kirby's funeral service his family spoke of a man that will be sorely missed. His sister spoke of an eternal optimist, no matter what the situation, and said that he was the biggest, best brother in the world. Ten-year old Isabella spoke of the love for her daddy while his brother Sean read a moving poem describing how much he will be missed.

It will of course take time for the family, Private Kirby's section and Private Dale's section to come to terms with the loss of their brothers-in-arms. Although I am sure they have gotten on with the job at hand, the loss of two fine soldiers and mates from within such an obviously close-knit section will take its toll. However, I am confident that those mates will be the first to lend their support to the families of Private Dale and Private Kirby and will ensure that their service was not in vain and their sacrifice is never forgotten.

A little over one month ago, on 24 August, another Australian soldier was killed in Afghanistan. Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney was conducting a dismounted patrol in the green zone when he and his section were fired upon by insurgents. Lance Corporal MacKinney was moved out of danger by his mates and was provided with first aid but tragically succumbed to his wounds. Lance Corporal MacKinney is the latest Australian soldier to be killed in Afghanistan and his death takes the total number of Australian casualties in Afghanistan to 21. The Chief of Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Houston, recently noted:

The last couple of months have been a particularly trying time for members of the mentoring task force, particularly as Lance Corporal MacKinney's death came while other soldiers were still coming to terms with the loss of Trooper Jason Brown, Private Thomas Dale and Private Grant Kirby.

Lance Corporal MacKinney was also from the Brisbane based 6th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment and the fourth member of that rotation 6RAR to have been killed in Afghanistan in just a few short weeks. Lance Corporal MacKinney was a popular soldier in the 6th Battalion and had recently taken on extra responsibility within the section following his promotion to the rank of lance corporal. 'Crash', as he was known by his mates, was regarded as a soldier's soldier, a consummate professional and someone willing to do anything for his mates. At home he was a loving husband to wife Becky and a loving father to their daughter, Annabel. In a statement released by Becky, she said :

The long journey without Jared has begun for Annabel and me and will soon begin for little Noah Jared, who is due to come into the world in a fortnight. Noah will never get to meet his father but he will come

to know him for the incredible man he was through our love and memories. So many people have helped our family through the dark times of the last few days, people we know and also so many people we have never met, who all wanted to help ease our pain. On behalf of the family I would like to very sincerely thank them for their best wishes and generous support. I would like you to know that it has made a very real difference. In the next few weeks I hope I can personally thank as many of you as I can. To Jared's mates in Afghanistan and back home: we were all very proud of Jared and the work he loved doing. I want to thank you for your caring and incredible messages of support. I know Jared would want me to tell you that we are all very proud of you and fully support you in the job that you are doing for all of us. I would also like to express my appreciation to the media for the very sensitive manner in which they have covered the tragic events over the past few weeks and also their ongoing respect for our privacy. We have reached the deepest depths of despair since we were told of Jared's death and we are also being helped and comforted by the support and extraordinary generosity of the spirit of old friends, new friends and strangers who care.

In a heartbreak twist of fate, little Noah Jared MacKinney was born two weeks early and only hours after his father's funeral. Although Noah will never get to meet his father, in time he will get to learn about him from those closest to him. From his unwavering love for his family to his courage and devotion to his mates, Little Noah will forever embody the spirit of his father and forever keep his memory alive.

I conclude by saying that this nation has a very heavy heart when one of its sons is killed in combat, but losing five in such a short period of time only compounds the feeling of sorrow. I would only say to those families who have lost their sons, their husbands, their brothers, their fathers or their mates to remember them as the heroes they are. Keep a place within your hearts to forever remember them for all that they did for the country they loved so dearly. Hopefully, in time the knowledge of their sacrifice and courage will bring some small peace.

I visited Afghanistan in April and I may have met some of these people when I was there—I had met Sapper Smith. I say to those families that these men are making a real difference. That is what I told them at the funeral because that is what I truly believe. That is what our men and women on the ground in Afghanistan understand and believe. They are making a real difference in the lives of Afghans. They are making a real difference in halting terrorism, addressing it at its very access where it begins and to think otherwise would be to disrespect their lives and their contributions. Australian soldiers, whether male or female, when they pull on that uniform and wear that flag patch on their shoulder all grow to over 10 feet tall. They are courageous, they are dedicated, they are locked into supporting their mates no matter what and they never leave their mates behind. The mates of those five diggers will never leave behind their memories or their families as they respect their contribution to this nation for the freedoms that we would all want and encourage for those in Afghanistan. *(Time expired)*

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (4.30 pm)—I too rise to pay tribute to five very brave, courageous Australians who were obviously very committed to their work and to their country. Private Nathan Bewes, Trooper Jason Brown, Private Tomas Dale, Private Grant Kirby and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney are now Australian heroes. I do not want to speak this evening in personal terms. I did not know any of these soldiers, although it is possible that as Minister for Defence I might have met some or all of them—when I was minister I had the privilege, on a regular basis, of making personal contact with many of the men and women of the Australian Defence Force. But, although I did not know these men, I can be confident in

saying a number of things about them and about their families—and, of course, tonight I also extend my deepest sympathies to all the families and friends of each of these soldiers.

It is always distressing to lose a soldier in theatre, but it is even more distressing that four of the five soldiers we pay tribute to tonight lost their lives to IEDs, improvised explosive devices. It is only a personal thing with me, but I think it is even more distressing—if that is possible—when a life is lost to an IED than it is when a life is lost in a firefight. Notwithstanding the fact that the insurgents in Afghanistan do not play by the rules, to me there seems something fairer and more equal about a firefight than the insidious use of explosive devices like roadside bombs. The use of such devices is such a callous act, even in a time of war. It is excessively distressing to see so many soldiers fall to these devices in theatre.

I said I can be confident about a few things, and I can be. The first is that each of the soldiers to whom we pay tribute tonight believed in what they were doing and wanted to deploy. They understood the risks absolutely and were prepared to take those risks. I can also be confident that their families understood that as well. They understood their commitment. They too had a full understanding of the risks involved and were prepared—although, I am sure, often reluctantly—to support these soldiers in the taking of those risks. That is a very, very important point, because it goes to the broader debate about our participation in Afghanistan. People are right to say that this has been a terrible and tragic waste of life. Of course it is. But in the minds of those who have given their lives, and in the minds of those who are closest to them, it was something they believed in doing and, on that basis, a risk worth taking.

The best thing that this parliament can do—and this is important in a week when we will commence a debate about our participation in Afghanistan—for these five soldiers, and those who have gone before them in Afghanistan and those who have been injured permanently in Afghanistan, is to stay the course, to finish the job. We should not allow their contribution, the sacrifice of their lives, to have been in vain. We are doing very important work in Afghanistan. The international community is doing very important work in Afghanistan. Afghanistan goes to the heart of our own national security. It appears we need to be constantly reminding the broader electorate that Australians did lose their lives in places such as Bali and Jakarta at the hands of people who were trained by insurgents in Afghanistan. In addition, in stabilising the country we are not only helping Afghans but also helping to stem the flow of refugees, which is a topic of some debate in this country at the moment.

This is not a job that should be left to one country alone and certainly it is not a job that should be left to the US alone. It is important to give this mission moral authority by making sure it is a truly international campaign. Australia's contribution in Oruzgan province is important but relatively small in the greater scheme of things. But more than anything else it helps to give the mission that moral legitimacy and that moral authority. It shows the world that this is not just one country acting against another country or indeed an ideology; this is the broader international community doing what it believes it needs to do to protect people everywhere from the sort of people the Taliban were prepared to give safe haven to prior to the intervention.

So tonight, in addition to paying tribute to these five soldiers, more than anything else I want to pre-empt the debate that is coming before us later in the week and remind people that we are there for important reasons. The people who we have there are doing important work and they all do so as volunteers. If anything comes out of the debate in the parliament this

week, I hope it is twofold: first, I hope it forces us to become better at explaining our participation in the mission to the broader Australian people—and I am confident it can do that; and, second, I hope that it returns the parliament to an absolutely bipartisan position on Afghanistan. Cracks have been appearing in that bipartisan approach—I know they are, in a sense, at the margins, and there has been no suggestion that the opposition is now questioning our involvement in the project—and I think it is very, very important, if we are going to continue to maintain the support of the Australian community for this mission, to really hold tight in our public pronouncements about the campaign.

I also think we need to start being more transparent and open with the Australian people. We need to be talking about the challenges as much as the successes—and there have been many successes—and we need to better define what it means to win in Afghanistan. I do not think the Australian people understand that. They cannot understand how likely success is if they do not understand what the definition of a win is. I look forward to the coming parliamentary debate providing some of those answers for the Australian people, but more than anything I look forward to that debate reinforcing in the minds of the family and friends of all those who have given their lives in Afghanistan that they retain the support of the parliament and all of its representatives and that those same representatives will be eternally grateful not only for the very significant sacrifices those soldiers made but also for the significant sacrifices made by those who were closest to them.

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (4.39 pm)—I want to be associated with this condolence motion on the deaths of Private Nathan Bewes, Trooper Jason Thomas Brown, Private Grant Walter Kirby, Private Tomas James Dale and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney. The reason I particularly wanted to speak to this motion was that it related to a family in my own electorate whom I have had the opportunity to know over a long period of time because of their very significant level of engagement within the Westleigh community in particular.

I had only in July spent some time in Tarin Kowt as a parliamentary observer of our mission and I had the opportunity of visiting and speaking with many of our troops, particularly our troops of the special services. Trooper Jason Brown was the son of Graham and Ann Brown and the brother of Stephanie, his 25-year-old sister. I do not know whether, on that day when I had afternoon tea with the troops, Jason was there, but I know from speaking to many of his colleagues that they were very proud of the mission in which they were engaged and what they were doing for Australia. They were young people who recognised that there was a very significant risk but, I think, were conscious that our engagement in Afghanistan was for the very proper reason of ensuring that Australia and Australians are protected.

There is no doubt that what was happening in Afghanistan, and I will say this in another debate, was that people who were prepared to engage in terrorism operations abroad were being trained, and trained in very large numbers. That operation of al-Qaeda needed to be brought to an end. Certainly, when you look at the tragedy that happened in New York, when you look at the tragedy of the bombings in Indonesia, where Australians tragically lost their lives, and when you look at the situation that occurred with people trained by al-Qaeda coming back to Australia—some of them Australians through migration and some Australian-born but nevertheless training with that organisation—this is a situation in which the risk to Australians is either incurred there or here.

These young troops are the people who have taken up the task of defending their fellow Australians through their work in these operations that are designed to ensure that the Taliban do not re-establish themselves in Afghanistan. For all Australians, I think it is important to recognise that these people are undertaking a very, very dangerous task in our collective interests and we very much owe them not only a condolence motion but a continuing debt for the willingness with which they undertake actions which put their lives at risk and, tragically in many cases, lead to them losing their lives.

Jason Brown became the 18th soldier to lose his life during these operations in Afghanistan. He was 29 years of age. He was based in Perth with the Special Air Service Regiment and he died as a result of multiple gunshot wounds sustained during an engagement with Taliban insurgents on Saturday, 14 August. Members of his patrol gave him first aid. He was evacuated, but unfortunately he did not survive. His parents, whom I have met and whom I must say I greatly admire for their stoicism, reflected on the life of Jason:

Jason was a career soldier who dreamed from a young age of being nothing else.

Everyone who knew him knew his dream. He strived to be the best he could be at his job and was successfully accepted into the elite Special Air Service Regiment.

He was born to be a soldier, and believed in what he was doing. He died doing what he loved. We are all very proud of him.

We miss him dearly, as will his army mates, who were his second family.

Jason's father was an Australian who served in Vietnam. The funeral, which took place in my electorate at one of our very well-known Catholic churches, was conducted by his uncle, Father Paul Fitzpatrick, who came especially from Ireland to conduct the service. It was a celebration of his life and a recognition of all that he had done for his fellow Australians. He was a young man very significantly awarded during his lifetime. He had the Australian Active Service Medal with clasp East Timor and with clasp International Coalition against Terrorism; the Afghanistan Campaign Medal; the Australian Service Medal with clasp Timor-Leste; the United Nations Medal with ribbon United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor; and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Medal for the International Security Assistance Force. He had the Australian Defence Medal, the Timor-Leste Solidarity Medal, the Infantry Combat Badge and the Returned from Active Service Badge. He was a young man of whom we can all be very proud. He was deployed in operation Tanager in East Timor, Operation Citadel in East Timor, Operation Astute in East Timor and Operation Slipper in Afghanistan. I am very proud that, as a constituent of mine, he was able to serve Australia in this way.

As I said in my remarks earlier, these sacrifices have not been in vain. This is not an operation about which any of us should be ashamed. All too often, in my judgment, if we are not prepared to deal with these issues further afield we will inevitably have to deal with them here, with even far greater consequences for the Australian community. We owe each of these young men a significant debt of obligation. They have served Australia well and their families can be very proud of them.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (4.48 pm)—I rise to pay tribute to five Australian soldiers who gave everything, sacrificed all, in the service of their nation and in the defence of Australia's interests in the region. This week we are preparing to debate Australia's involvement in Afghanistan, and this motion of condolence is a timely reminder of the work being done, the sacrifices being made and the risks being taken by our troops each and every day.

Woven through the fabric of the electorate I represent is a rich military heritage, and that is why I speak today. It is a home for many members of the Defence Force and their families. It is the home of the Richmond RAAF Base, and can I briefly commend their service in communications and transport, with the C130s. The men and women who serve on that base certainly have a lot to do in assisting our deployments, and they have certainly assisted in the repatriation of those we have lost. On behalf of my electorate and those particularly who serve in the Defence Force, I express our most heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of these fine young men and to those who served with them and continue to serve. I will touch briefly on each of these men. They have a story and a life that they lived and it is important that we honour them today.

Private Nathan Bewes was killed in action serving with the First Mentoring Task Force in Afghanistan on Friday, 9 July this year. Aged 23 years, Private Nathan Bewes was from the Brisbane based 6th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, which we all know as 6RAR. He was known for his love and passion for the Army, having joined the cadets as a teenager and continuing to serve loyally until his life was tragically cut short. I have a few short words from his family, and I would like to quote from that statement:

Nathan was inspired by the family's history of military and community service. He joined the Army Cadets at age 13 and by 15 years old he was a cadet under officer. The army was his lifelong passion. It was all he wanted to do.

Later on the statement says:

Nathan was a loyal friend and always cared for his mates. He just loved to look after people. At his 21st birthday party we could not get over such camaraderie between the young men. We could not believe that such mateship could exist between young men in this day and age.

Trooper Jason Brown was killed in action during contact with Taliban insurgents on 13 August this year. At 29 years of age, Trooper Brown was from the Perth based Special Air Service Regiment, known as the SAS. This was his first tour of Afghanistan. Trooper Brown was known for his professionalism, his committed approach, and his drive and determination in every task at hand.

Private Tomas Dale was killed in action when an improvised explosive device was detonated while he was on patrol in Afghanistan on Friday, 20 August. As we can see, the dates are so close together. This 21-year-old was also from 6RAR. This was also his first operational deployment. Private Dale's family said that he loved the Army and that he would want his fellow soldiers, his mates, to continue the important work that they are doing in Afghanistan. Time and time again, as we hear the stories of these young men, this is a theme that flows through every story—their commitment to the task at hand, their love and passion for this nation, and their commitment to our freedom and the freedom of those who live in Afghanistan.

Private Grant Kirby was killed in action, again by an IED, while on patrol in Afghanistan on the same day, Friday, 20 August. Thirty-five-year-old Private Kirby was also from 6RAR and this was Private Kirby's first deployment to Afghanistan. He was considered a role model to his younger comrades. They looked up to him for guidance and he led by example.

Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney was killed in action during a firefight whilst on patrol in Afghanistan on 24 August. Twenty-eight-year-old Lance Corporal MacKinney was also from

6RAR and this was his third deployment to the Middle East. He will be remembered for his patriotism and dedication.

These five young men demonstrated what it means to be part of the Australian Defence Force. They were courageous and incredibly honourable young men who displayed immense fortitude throughout their military careers. These were our finest. These were elite soldiers, Australia's best. They were willing to put their hands up to volunteer. They were aware of the risks. They were aware of the sacrifice.

Each individual was a man who had contributed significantly to the lives that he touched. They were sons, brothers, partners, husbands and mates. The loss to all who loved, played and fought with them is no doubt still felt very deeply. I particularly extend my condolences to their comrades, who are continuing with the task at hand while dealing with the loss of their mates as they continue to fight for what they believe in. I also want to express my deepest sympathies to the wives, partners, sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and friends that are experiencing the loss of these special Australians firsthand.

Today is an opportunity for us in this place to acknowledge their contribution and to make it clear that they will be remembered in our hearts and minds. The journey ahead for all who have been connected with these young men will not be easy. Our support, our continued prayers and our thoughts will remain with them. More will be said in the coming week as we discuss and debate the significance of the war in Afghanistan and the significance of the contribution of all our men and women in the armed forces.

It is important that, as we debate our involvement in Afghanistan over the coming days and weeks, it is remembered that today we have our men and women who have chosen to commit to improving Afghanistan laying their lives on the line for the cause of keeping Australia safe. As has been said by the member for Berowra, this is about ensuring that the fight happens there and not here. To their families, to their comrades, to their mates—your sacrifice and the sacrifice of those who you love and who you worked with, your mates, is indeed honoured and recognised. We are a grateful nation.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (4.57 pm)—Since the conclusion of the 42nd Parliament, there has been no clearer reminder to our nation that the world goes on than the deaths of five more of our soldiers. While we think we struggled with the election campaign, more importantly our soldiers were out there struggling in the war and in a fight for their lives that five of them did not win. It is best that we keep in our minds that, as we pursue the national interest by having our soldiers fight in Afghanistan, the pursuit of our objectives is sometimes paid for in more than money, equipment and expended ammunition. It is the nature of war that some will end up paying with their lives, and so it was for Private Nathan Bewes, Trooper Jason Brown, Private Tomas Dale, Private Grant Kirby and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney.

I am taking this opportunity to honour these five men and give thanks to their families for their sacrifice and dedication to their nation's service. Before I speak specifically of them and pay a tribute, I will speak of the war in Afghanistan. I say that because I believe in this war and I am happy to have that on the record. I believe that the Taliban and their supporters must be stopped, and that if they are not stopped in Afghanistan they will take the fight even more into Pakistan, using Afghanistan as a base. They will then also take the fight to the Western world, just as they did on 9-11 in New York and Washington. They will use their home base of Afghanistan not only to destabilise and radicalise moderate Islamic nations but also to foster

home-grown terrorism wherever they can. I believe in this war because we must attack their home bases to stop these murderous and evil people.

We should remember that the Taliban and these sorts of terrorists have no standards of human decency. Remorseless killers who think nothing of hiding behind civilians as they engage our soldiers, there is literally nothing good that can be said of them. They are not reasonable. They cannot be reasoned with. They are driven on by a belief that their religion justifies their actions and they are the haters of democracy. They do not believe in the equality of women. They believe in sending Afghanistan, and whatever other places they can control, back to the Dark Ages. They are not misunderstood. Turn the other cheek and it will be slapped. Offer the hand of friendship and it will be cut off. Take a step back and they will take two steps forward. There is only one way to deal with them, and that is this war. Some people talk about the war by saying that Afghanistan has never been conquered and we should not try. They say that Alexander failed, the British failed, the Russians failed—everyone has failed and it will never be achieved. What I say is that this is not a war of conquest. This is not a takeover. This is about securing a reasonable, effective and democratic government. This is about having a system of government where women have the same rights as men, a system of government where you are not persecuted because of personal decisions about religion and freedom of speech, or, if you are female, seeking an education or even deciding who you associate with.

I am in favour of this war but not an endless commitment. I expect that the Afghan government will be doing everything in its power to establish an effective government, supported by the people and a military that can protect the population to allow the withdrawal of allied forces. I believe in strong expectations and the strong delivery of outcomes in the quickest possible time frames. Clearly there is a long way to go in winning the hearts and minds of local people. I say that because I understand that there have been situations where our soldiers have been blamed for the deaths of civilians. I recall there is a certain military rule that says women and children should not be used as cover when shooting at other combatants. That is a basic rule of warfare that the Australian Army abides by because we value life.

The Taliban do not value human life. They do not care about the safety of women and children, in the same way that they did not care about the defenceless women, children and civilians who died in the 9-11 attacks. While we would not use women and children as human shields, the Taliban would. As a result of the Taliban specifically using women and children to protect their own cowardly hides, those women and children end up being killed or wounded. In those circumstances, some Afghan people blame our soldiers and not the Taliban. Clearly there is a way to go in winning the hearts and minds of local people. I really wonder why more has not been done in the pursuit via warrants and orders of every known Taliban in Afghanistan or elsewhere. I think we are sometimes too willing to judge those willing to submit to international laws while forgetting about those who live by no laws apart from the brutality of certain religious beliefs.

I would now like to turn to the main reason I join with my colleagues and pay tribute to the ultimate sacrifice of Private Nathan Bewes, Trooper Jason Brown, Private Tomas Dale, Private Grant Kirby and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney. Private Nathan Bewes was with the 6th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment. Unfortunately that battalion has taken more casualties than most in recent times. Private Bewes was killed by a roadside bomb on 9 July. He was originally from New South Wales. He was born in 1986 and joined the Army in 2005.

That was the same year he completed his recruit and infantry basic training before he got posted to the battalion at Enoggera. Private Bewes was no stranger to Afghanistan. He was on his second deployment there when he lost his life. He had also been deployed to East Timor. He is survived by his parents, a sister and his partner, Alice. My condolences go to all his family, especially his partner, who is now alone.

Trooper Jason Brown of the SAS was killed during sustained gunfire with the Taliban on 13 August. The member for Hunter made an interesting point when he said that there is a certain extra tragedy involved when a soldier is killed by improvised explosive devices rather than by direct fire with combatants, where the fight may be considered a little more honourable. Certainly in the case of Trooper Brown at least he had that, although it does not diminish from the tragedy and the loss that his family and his colleagues have suffered as a result of his death. He leaves behind his parents and a sister.

Private Tomas Dale was just 21 when he was killed on 20 August, by an improvised explosive device. He was another member of the 6th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment. His circumstances are interesting. He was born in the United Kingdom in 1989 and it was just in 2003 that he and his family moved to Australia. He joined the Australian Army in 2007. Unfortunately, Afghanistan was his first operational deployment. He leaves behind his parents and two brothers. Having joined the Army in his adopted nation, he certainly made the greatest sacrifice for Australia.

Private Grant Kirby was 35 when he died. He was also from the 6th Battalion. He was a native-born Queenslander. Having joined the Army in 2006, he was posted to the 6th Battalion. Although he was on his first deployment to Afghanistan, he had previously been deployed to East Timor and Iraq. He leaves behind his parents, brothers, a sister, his former wife and two daughters. It does not get much worse when you see the children directly impacted by this situation.

Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney was 28 when he was killed on 24 August in a firefight with the Taliban. Again, he was from the 6th Battalion. He was born in Canberra in 1982 and joined the Army in 2002. Lance Corporal MacKinney is survived by his wife and his daughter Annabell. We have heard the fact that his second child was born just after his funeral.

The loss of every soldier is a great tragedy for this country. The loss of those who have been willing to get out there and put their lives on the line for the nation is a terrible tragedy. But, when you see the children of deceased soldiers directly impacted, it really brings home the consequences of decisions we make in this place for the best possible reasons. It had better be for the best possible reasons, because the decisions we make could result in people being killed and families being devastated. I often wonder whether we should, every time we walk into the House of Representatives chamber, walk past some sort of board that reminds us of the names of those people who have lost their lives in the current war, so that every time we endorse the war or make decisions about the war we are reminded that there is a consequence that goes beyond budget costs and considerations, and that is the devastating impact on families.

As I said before, I believe in the war. We have to stop these people getting a hold again in Afghanistan so that they do not then take the war beyond Afghanistan and into Pakistan, with the implications of the weapons arsenals in Pakistan, and have the opportunity to operate from that base to take their terrorism to our shores. But we should remember always that when we

make these decisions, as right as they are—and, as I said, I believe absolutely that they are right; that we should be involved in this war—we do not do it lightly. We should remind ourselves that ultimately soldiers will die and families will be devastated.

We should never forget those soldiers. Today I honour them for the important work they did and the supreme sacrifice they made. It was not in vain. It was and is to make the world a safer place. I hope their families know that this nation is grateful. I honour those soldiers, and their families, for their great service to our nation.

Dr STONE (Murray) (5.09 pm)—I too rise to support the condolence motion on the deaths of Private Nathan Bewes, Trooper Jason Thomas Brown, Private Grant Walter Kirby, Private Tomas James Dale and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney.

This in fact is the second time that I have publicly talked about the sadness associated with the deaths of our Defence Force personnel in Afghanistan. The first time—it was just a short time ago—was at the request of the Goulburn Valley Vietnam veterans who, on the Battle of Long Tan commemoration day, asked that I pass a special motion of condolence at their commemorative service and that I list all of those who died in Afghanistan under the Australian flag. Of course, our Vietnam veterans are the Defence Force personnel in Australia who know best how a country can turn on its own personnel and cause enormous grief and sadness if what those personnel have done on behalf of the nation is misunderstood and condemned. We all remember how the Vietnam veterans suffered when the Australian media in particular but also a lot of younger adults, students of the day, condemned them. They were spat at when they returned. They were told to get out of their uniforms quickly. They were called baby killers. They were told the war in Vietnam was a dishonourable war.

When we debate the Afghanistan war today and tomorrow, may it be well understood—so no Australians can imagine otherwise for a moment—that we in parliament, of all political backgrounds, honour and understand the courage of our Defence Force personnel and the supreme sacrifice that some of our men and women in uniform make. In the case of the Afghanistan war we have had 21 killed since 2001, when we began what is called Operation Slipper. There have been 52 wounded just this year but 152 wounded since that operation began. It is an extremely dangerous place, Afghanistan. It is a war a little like Vietnam in that the enemy do not necessarily wear uniforms, they are great exponents of guerilla warfare and they manufacture personnel mines of all different types that make it almost impossible for Australia and its allies to know from day to day what they might encounter when they are out on their patrols. I want to make sure that the Australian public understand that, even if they do not necessarily agree with why we are deploying our troops in Afghanistan, they should never cast aspersions on the quality of the men and women in uniform who represent us in that war zone.

I am proud of course to be the mother of a major in the Australian Army, who is currently in the United States. He has served in Iraq and East Timor. I note that four of the five soldiers who we honour today were themselves in more than one deployment, which of course means that they were seasoned soldiers, but that one of the soldiers whose loss we are saddened by was in his first operational deployment. The war takes no special notice of how long a soldier has been trained or for how long he has been deployed. It is really an accident of life, in a sense, as to who steps on that mine or who comes under fire from the enemy.

I want especially to acknowledge today Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney. He was killed in an intense firefight against the Taliban in Afghanistan on 24 August 2010. He was 28, born in Canberra and based in Brisbane. He was a seasoned soldier, having served in East Timor, Iraq and once before in Afghanistan. He leaves a wife, a daughter, Annabell, and a newborn baby who will never know him but who will of course be immensely proud that his father was a soldier of the Australian Defence Force who was honoured in this place and whose bravery, commitment and patriotism will never be forgotten.

We also acknowledge today Private Tomas James Dale. He was a member of the First Mentoring Task Force and was killed in action on 20 August 2010. He was only 21. He was in his first operational deployment. He was born in the UK but was living in Adelaide. He joined the Australian Army, something that he had wanted to do since he was a very young man, and he leaves behind his parents and brothers, Sam and Joe.

We honour Private Grant Walter Kirby, who was also with the First Mentoring Task Force and also killed on 20 August 2010. He leaves behind two daughters and a loving family. Private Kirby was born in Nambour, Queensland, and had already served in East Timor and Iraq.

Then there is Trooper Jason Brown, who was killed by gunshot wounds after battling insurgents on 13 August 2010. He was 29 years of age and leaves parents and one sister. Trooper Brown was born in Sydney and had served in East Timor three times before his death in action in Afghanistan.

We also recognise and grieve for Private Nathan Bewes, who was killed by an improvised explosive device on Friday evening, 9 July 2010. He was also serving with the First Mentoring Task Force. He was born in Kogarah, New South Wales, and he leaves his loving parents and sister and his partner, Alice. He was on his second deployment to Afghanistan. He had been there previously in 2008 and had also served in East Timor in 2006.

So 21 of our brave patriots have been killed in Afghanistan in a war which is, as we know, complex and difficult. There is of course no question that it is our intention to try to make that part of the world a safer place, to try to push back the evils of the Taliban and other terrorist forces like them to bring a safer place to people who live in that area of Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan.

I am reminded very much of the war memorials that are scattered all around the 52 towns in my electorate of Murray. Some of them stand alone because the towns have disappeared. These small towns gave up their finest in the First World War. I think of Campbells Forest, a little community with one hall left, and inside that hall there are just war memorials. Some of those memorials show half of the people who left for the First World War did not return. So we say, generation after generation, 'This will be the last time that we have to march out of Australia with our finest and best to try to bring peace in other parts of the world.' Indeed in the Second World War we tried our best to make sure that we were not overtaken by the Japanese, and we succeeded with those brave militia men who had done their training in Australia for such a short time and who marched into New Guinea and did a miraculous task fighting a hidden enemy much greater in number than they were on the ground.

I have often been told by the people left in these small communities, often the older people, 'Look, our brightest and bravest and best were in the First World War; those diggers set the reputation for Australia for all time.' I know that for generations, perhaps, that has been un-

derstood. Who could ever be as brave, as willing, as innovative and as tenacious as those old diggers in the First World War? I recently had the honour of going to Al Minhad, in the Arab Emirates, to the army base that Australians deploy from as they move forward into Afghanistan. Some of them go to Iraq but mostly they now go to Afghanistan. I looked at those soldiers sitting in the plane, ready to fly into Afghanistan, and I can tell you that they are the echo of the diggers. There is no doubt that they have the same fortitude and patriotism of their forefathers. We have lost 21 of our magnificent young men, but none of them would ever have imagined that the task they did was not honourable, and they have not died in vain.

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (5.19 pm)—I want to pay tribute to the contribution just made by the member for Murray. It was truly a moving and heartfelt contribution to this very sad condolence motion. I take this opportunity of honouring Private Nathan Bewes, Trooper Jason Brown, Private Tomas Dale, Private Grant Kirby and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney. No greater price can any man or woman pay than to lay down their life for their country. Like the member for Murray we all hope and pray that their deaths were not in vain. They were clearly very courageous and brave young men. I think it is very timely that the parliament is to debate the war. All of us in this House support freedom and the right to free speech. We know that the contribution these young men have made for all of us is something that can never be repaid. Sadly, they leave young families behind to mourn their passing as we too do in this House. I too thank them for their service to their country.

One thing that is always raised in this place is the need to have peace throughout the world. If all of us who come here can make some contribution to peace, not only in our own land but anywhere in the world, we have done something and have made the world a better place. Sadly, these young men paid a dreadful price. They will never know and realise their own hopes, aspirations and dreams. We will never know what they experienced, but we thank them. We also hope that the families they leave behind will be supported by today's government, future governments and their families and friends. I salute these very brave men.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (5.22 pm)—I rise to offer my heartfelt condolences to the families, friends and Australian Defence Force colleagues of the five soldiers who lost their lives while on combat operations in Afghanistan and to honour and express my greatest respect for Private Nathan Bewes, Trooper Jason Brown, Private Grant Kirby, Private Tomas Dale and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney. These five fine, dedicated soldiers—four infantrymen from the 6th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment and one trooper from the Special Air Service Regiment—will forever be remembered for their ultimate sacrifice of giving their lives for their country.

Private Bewes was just 23 years old on his second deployment following a previous deployment to East Timor. Trooper Jason Brown was just 29 years old on his first deployment to Afghanistan following three previous deployments in East Timor. Private Tomas Dale was 21 years old and was on his first operational deployment. Private Grant Kirby was 35 years old, having previously deployed to Iraq and East Timor. Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney was 28 years old on his third deployment to the Middle East and his second to Afghanistan. These men leave behind their wives and partners, their children, their parents, their brothers and sisters and other family members. They also leave behind many friends and their close-knit mates, their fellow ADF members. They are essentially the families and friends of our fallen and those whose grief and loss mean that their worlds will never be the same again.

I listened to the member for Cowan and the member for Murray and none of us in this chamber could have failed to have been moved by their contributions. The member for Murray spoke about small halls in communities. In my hometown of Brunswick, the name of my mother's husband who was killed in New Guinea is on the wall. So it is a very real issue; it is a very real grief. My two sisters who were Alma and Jack's children will carry the grief and loss of their father all their lives, as will the families of these five young men and all of our other servicemen and servicewomen. It is something that goes with them. It went with my mother to her grave. One of the last things my sister who died last year said to me was, 'I will never forget my dad's arm around my shoulder.' I think she was only three. But my other sister has no memory at all of her father and she says to this day it is a loss she bears all her life.

There are many of us, like the member for Murray, in this place who well understand not only the sacrifice of these young men but also what is ahead for the families and the friends of these wonderful young men. As I said, these are people whose grief and loss will mean that their world will never be the same again. I know from my mother's experience of 60 years in placing a floral tribute every Anzac Day on the memorial at Brunswick even when there was not an Anzac service that Anzac Day will become a very important symbolic but very dreadfully sad day. It will be a day when they and thousands and thousands of Australians right around the nation will come together every single year to show never-ending respect for these five young men and all those who fought for our nation, all those who will fight for our nation and all those who are fighting for our nation and are in uniform today as part of our Australian defence forces.

Private John Bewes, Trooper Jason Brown, Private Grant Kirby, Private Tomas Dale and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney all embodied the Anzac spirit of an inherent commitment to their mates, of bravery, of courage and a determination to serve their country—and serve it well they did. Their professional skills and capability made them incredibly valuable members of our defence forces. However, they were very, very well aware of the dangers they faced. These men will never leave the thoughts or hearts of their family and friends and the nation will forever honour them.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I understand it is the wish of honourable members to signify at this stage their respect and sympathy by rising in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I thank the Committee.

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (5.27 pm)—I move:

That further proceedings be conducted in the House.

Question agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 5.28 pm to 6.30 pm

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Overseas Trained Doctors

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mr Bruce Scott**:

That this House calls for:

- (1) an inquiry into the role of Australia's medical and surgical colleges in the registration process of medical graduates and overseas trained doctors; and

(2) the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship to delay the revocation of 457 visas for those doctors who have been deregistered due to failure of the Pre Employment Structured Clinical Interview, to allow adequate time for a review of their case and reassessment of their competency.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (6.30 pm)—The reason I have brought this issue to the attention of the House is that it has been causing great distress for a number of doctors in my electorate of Maranoa and I know across many parts of Australia, particularly in Queensland. My LNP colleague the member for Leichhardt, Warren Entsch, who is seconder of this motion will talk further about the particular case in Cairns in his electorate. But, for now, I will talk generally about the need to ensure that we provide our international medical graduates with the support they need to serve our rural communities. There is much concern that the current process to assess the competency of overseas trained doctors is discriminatory and that the process to approve registration for these doctors lacks transparency. Five years ago, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission published a report into its review of Australia's specialist medical colleges. The purpose of this review was to investigate whether Australia's colleges were upholding the principles of transparency, accountability and stakeholder participation, and whether there was evidence of restrictive trade practices. The report of the ACCC mentions that the authority had received complaints about medical colleges and the perceived lack of transparency in their assessment processes. The report made recommendations to improve transparency and the provision of more information on how competency assessment decisions are made. Many of Australia's colleges have moved to improve their practices. It has now been five years since that report was published and I think it is timely to conduct a parliamentary inquiry into the assessment practices of Australia's medical colleges so that we can see what has been improved and what needs further improvement, particularly in relation to transparency.

Another complaint that has been brought to my attention is the inappropriate use of the pre-employment structured clinical interview, the PESCI, in assessing the competency of overseas trained doctors. Recent decisions made by COAG mean that the goalposts have changed and doctors who want to practice in Australia are asked to undertake the PESCI. However, there are complaints that the PESCI was never intended to be a pass or fail test of competency per se but, instead, was simply meant to be used to identify weaknesses and lack of knowledge in some areas and to identify areas needing improvement. However, there have been reports that some doctors are finding that they are passing their college clinical exams but failing the PESCI, which is administered by the Medical Board of Australia and a relatively new organisation, the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency—AHPRA, which came into effect in July of this year.

For many doctors the goalposts have suddenly and dramatically changed. A recent example was the Queensland doctor from Lowood in the Lockyer Valley who was deregistered after failing his PESCI. He had been practising for six years and from the email I received over the weekend from one of his patients he is well liked and well respected. The decision is going to court so let us hope some common sense prevails. I also read in the *Courier Mail* last month of the New Zealand born nurse who has been refused her nursing registration because she must prove that she can speak English competently, despite being born in New Zealand and undertaking her diploma in nursing at a Gold Coast college. In this case, it seems that the bureaucracy has just gone mad and unfortunately it is impacting the supply of much-needed doctors and nurses, particularly in rural and regional communities.

I acknowledge that there is a lot of fear in some areas, particularly in Queensland, that has arisen from the tragic situation in relation to the Dr Jayant Patel bungle. We must find the balance between ensuring our registration processes and competency assessments are rigorous and ensuring our medical fraternity can provide the necessary support for competent overseas trained doctors to stay in Australia, and in particular work in our rural and regional areas. It should not be a case of one rotten apple ruining the whole barrel of apples. Another issue with the current problem of assessing overseas trained doctors is that the current visa process is not flexible enough to allow doctors to stay in the country while they appeal decisions that they believe are wrong. One such example includes an ophthalmologist on the Gold Coast who was originally given just 28 days after his registration was revoked to leave the country. Thankfully, he was granted a reprieve and his visa has been temporarily extended. But his future treating his patients on the Gold Coast is still very much in limbo.

I acknowledge that there has been a significant increase in the number of medical students currently being trained so that in the future we can meet the demand of Australia's health needs, but it will be another decade at least before the supply will match demand. Until then, international medical graduates are vital in filling gaps. Even when we are turning out more doctors from our own universities, how many of these new graduates will want to move out of the cities and live and work in rural and remote Australia? Many constituents in my electorate of Maranoa rely on overseas trained doctors to provide medical treatment. Many of them are fully embraced by the community and they have become important members of the community. Like many Australian trained doctors in regional and rural areas, they work long hours and go above and beyond to help their patients. They are certainly treasured and we need more of them.

Sadly, however, in some communities in my electorate they cannot even get a doctor. Recently the Aramac community learned the sad news that their hospital would be downgraded to a primary healthcare centre after the community was unable, through Queensland Health, to secure a permanent doctor. When the people of Aramac learned the news, they were getting ready to celebrate the hospital's centenary. The health minister for Queensland expects that the people of Aramac will now travel to Barcaldine, which is some 70 kilometres away, for their health needs. Yet, just three days after the minister announced the downgrading of the hospital to a primary healthcare unit—without consultation with the community, might I add—the road from Aramac to Barcaldine was cut off by flooding, which is the third time it has happened this year.

Unfortunately, issues like this are endemic in rural Australia. We do need more doctors in rural and regional communities. We need more support for our rural and regional hospitals. That is why I am calling for this inquiry. There needs to be a fairer go for doctors trained overseas so that we can get them to come out into rural and regional areas of Australia and practise where we know we have a massive and critical shortage. I know many Australian doctors. I understand why they train at university and obtain their degree. They are not encouraged to go out into rural areas of Australia. I understand that. I do not know why they do not like our rural communities but I understand that for so many reasons it is becoming difficult to attract Australian trained doctors to our rural communities.

I invite the Minister for Health and Ageing to give us the opportunity to conduct a parliamentary inquiry, as this motion calls for. The health needs of our communities right across

Australia are an important issue. I have mentioned the Gold Coast, I have mentioned the Lockyer Valley and I have mentioned Cairns. I have also mentioned the lack of a hospital in the very remote community of Aramac in my electorate. Can I just say to the Prime Minister that if she is really serious about regional issues, as she said she was when she was sworn in and spoke about the need to focus this government on regional issues: here is an issue of regional and rural health. I call on the minister to give us this inquiry. I also say to the health minister that if she came to Aramac she would be made most welcome. I will make sure that I am there to welcome her. I think we can do a lot with this hospital. I think that if we are able to get a multipurpose health service that would fit Aramac it will be a model that we can use in other parts of Australia. Currently the multipurpose health service criteria mean you have to have a full-time doctor. Let us try to find a way to get a model to fit this community, because one size does not fit all.

I look forward to the minister's response and I look forward to other contributions. This is an important issue. It is about the health of rural and regional Australia. It is about overseas trained doctors, who are a vital part of our health needs in Australia. I look forward to the support of this parliament.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (6.40 pm)—Overseas trained doctors are often popular and respected in regional and rural areas, particularly in Queensland. The registration and accreditation of overseas trained doctors is the responsibility of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. This came about following the COAG agreement of 2006. Overseas trained doctors are assessed to demonstrate they have the capacity to practise medicine at a level equivalent to that of Australian graduates. There are a couple of pathways. There is a generic pathway that they can undertake and there is a specialist pathway. Whilst overseas trained doctors are working towards full registration on their pathways they receive conditional registration. They are also required to work in an area of need during this time, and to achieve these positions they must satisfy a pre-employment interview by their employer and an assessment by the relevant specialist college.

Many overseas trained doctors, as I said, work in areas where there is a workforce shortage. In fact, the Gillard government is taking big steps with respect to this. The government has implemented a multipronged approach, providing \$134.4 million in the 2009-10 budget for the Rural Health Workforce Strategy, which targets communities most in need by ensuring greater incentives for doctors to work in those isolated communities. We also announced a \$632 million package in March 2010 to deliver an extra 5,500 new general practitioners, 680 specialist places and 5,400 junior doctor training places in general practice over the next 10 years. Fifty per cent of new GP training places will be in regional and rural areas.

I have been critical of the practice undertaken by the Medical Board with respect to a particular incident in my electorate, which is the Brisbane Valley, not the Lockyer Valley. There is a very popular GP practising in Lowood, Dr Rajendra Moodley. I have met with him on numerous occasions and I have also met with people in the Brisbane Valley, around Lowood and other areas, who support him. He is well respected. He trained in South Africa and worked there for about 12 years before coming to Australia and he has worked in the Lowood area for about six years. The situation in his case is that he is not on a 457 visa; he is on a 442 visa, a temporary residence visa. His moratorium completion date is 9 September 2014. I have been very critical of the way in which the Medical Board undertook the pre-employment

structured clinical interview. I wish Dr Moodley well in his appeal to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal. I think it will go a long way to assuaging people's concern, should he be successful in that appeal.

The pre-employment structured clinical interview, in his case, was undertaken by three GPs from the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine. There is no audio tape, no video tape and no transcript. There are deficiencies in accountability and transparency. He was told that he had failed the interview, but there were no further particulars upon which his lawyers could undertake an appeal. As I understand it, he attacked the decision making during the tribunal proceedings and has had a stay of the decision. He is in a position where he can continue to practise and will not be deported unless, at the conclusion of this process, his registration is cancelled.

I have to say this: on this issue I have to be critical of the LNP, who have politicised this issue in my area. This is a legal process. They undertook a campaign in this regard and politicised this issue to campaign against me and the Labor member for Ipswich West on this issue. They undertook a meeting and they were critical of us. The state shadow health spokesperson, Mark McArdle, came there. More questions were asked of him, and I have to say that the LNP should be ashamed of themselves for the way they have politicised this issue. Dr Moodley should be supported and given affection, love and physical support, and people should stand with him in this regard, but to politicise a legal proceeding is the wrong way to go about it.

We can do better, and I believe the process should be done better and the medical boards should have a look at themselves, but I do not think that inquiry is necessary. I think that what we need to do is have some discussions with the Medical Board of Australia. There are a number of other allied health professional organisations as well. It is not just medicine. There are a number of other allied health professions: physiotherapy and others. The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme is predicated on a profession basis. It is based on the principle of protection of public health and safety. It is not a Commonwealth scheme; it is a national scheme led by the professions, who are responsible for determining the appropriate standard for health practitioners.

I do not want a situation where the federal minister for health or the state minister for health determines whether a physiotherapist or a doctor should remain in a place and have registration and accreditation. We have to have a rigorous peer-driven assessment mechanism. I think it is appropriate to have transparency and accountability, to use the words of the member for Maranoa. I am with him on that. They need to do better in that regard, and Dr Moodley—and anyone else—deserves, frankly, to have those interviews recorded or taped, to have a transcript available and to have detailed reasons for their failure or success provided. It is not happening. That is not good enough. There should be natural justice given. I would have thought it is very difficult in the circumstances for anyone who finds themselves in that position to then successfully appeal. That is where it comes about. There is a perception of a lack of justice in the methodology.

We are not going to change the fact that doctors need to be engaged in that peer-driven assessment. What we need to make sure of is that these bodies do it better. That is what I think we need to put pressure on them to do. I do not want a situation where the medical board is not responsible for determining whether or not an application for registration takes place; I think that is the appropriate place to do it. But the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial

Council consists of the health ministers from all the jurisdictions, including the Commonwealth, and has the capacity under the national law to give directions to the national agency or national board in regard to relevant policies, processes or procedures, and I think that is where a remedy lies. I think we need to have some advice and consultation and speak to these boards about the way they are conducting it. It is now important that we get fairness.

Directions may be provided by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council only if ministers believe that:

... the accreditation standard will have a substantive and negative impact on the recruitment or supply of health practitioners.

It is a bit rich for the LNP, who have failed with respect to regional and rural health, to protest. The coalition are the ones who capped GP training places, and they are not the ones who are providing the incentives. We are the ones who are training more doctors, nurses and other health professionals. We are the ones who have increased it, because the coalition simply failed. They often pose, preen and posture about their support for regional and rural Australia, but the fact is that they do not support it, whether in roads, health, infrastructure or primary health care. We are the ones who are providing the funding for primary health care in those regional and rural areas, and you can see it. I have written heaps of letters of support for doctors who are providing services in the Brisbane Valley and even in the Lockyer Valley, in the seat of Wright, because I think it is important.

Dr Moodley, as I said, is a temporary resident doctor who is subject to section 19AB of the Health Insurance Act. As I said—and I want constituents in my electorate to know this—under section 19AB of the act, overseas trained doctors wanting to access Medicare benefit arrangements are required to work in a district of workforce shortage, and that is where he is working. I thank Dr Paul Crowley of Lowood Medical Centre for his support for Dr Moodley. No-one could have been a better mentor, supporter or friend to Dr Moodley than Dr Crowley. I wish Dr Moodley well. I hope for his sake and for the sake of the Brisbane Valley that we see his registration renewed and that doctors of his calibre and ilk continue to practise in the Somerset region. *(Time expired)*

Mr LYONS (Bass) (6.50 pm)—In response to the motion put forward by the Hon. Bruce Scott, member for Maranoa, I would like to talk about the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme. On 1 July 2010, the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for health professionals was implemented. Ten national boards are now operating with full functions under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009. The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme is a national scheme led by health professionals who are responsible for determining the appropriate standards for health practitioners. We need to support this national scheme, a scheme that provides standard assessment processes across Australia. The important part of this registration scheme is that appropriate standards are determined and assessed by health professionals, who are members of colleges rather than bureaucrats.

The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme is based on the principle of protection of the Australian public. Nobody wants another Patel incident anywhere in Australia. Importantly, the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, with appropriate collegiate and professional assessments, will maintain the standards required not only by the profession but also by the Australian people. It is in the interests of both the health professions and the public that there are appropriate and clearly defined standards in place to govern the registration of

all health professionals. We need to let this scheme bed itself in, in the best interests of all Australians. It is obvious that governments and full-time bureaucrats are not the appropriate people to assess professional standards. A surgeon working in a theatre with an applicant for registration over a period of time is an appropriate person, and this would assist in maintaining the necessary standards. The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme must take evidence from people on the job so that standards are maintained.

Under the scheme, there is one professional national board setting the standards and policies for the regulation of each of the professions covered, including the medical profession. This will allow the movement of appropriately qualified people across state borders, thereby creating opportunities for trained professionals to move to a far better and more desirable lifestyle in Tasmania, particularly in the electorate of Bass, whilst maintaining their registration. The national boards are assisted by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. The Medical Board of Australia is responsible for determining whether or not an application for registration as a medical practitioner in Australia is successful. Where an applicant's registration is rejected, there is a process for appealing the decision.

In the second part of the member for Maranoa's motion, he indicates that there has been a revocation of visas and requests a delay. Provided that the appropriate opportunity for assessment by the Medical Board was available, the question should be: why has the board chosen not to renew the conditional registration? It should not be about delaying visa revocations.

The Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council, which consists of health ministers from all jurisdictions including the Commonwealth, has the capacity under national law to give directions to the national agency or board in regard to relevant policies, processes or procedures. The skills of a surgeon should be assessed by other surgeons, not by bureaucrats. The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency considers every medical registration to ensure that all practitioners granted registration have the qualifications, the skills and the experience to provide safe care to the Australian public, with the application passing through a minimum of four stages before a recommendation is made to the national board. This recommendation may be to register, to register with conditions or to reject the applicant. If rejected, the applicant can make a submission to the national board for reconsideration. If that is unsuccessful, it may then go to a tribunal.

The member for Maranoa would be far better off putting his energies into supporting the National Accreditation and Registration Scheme, which will regulate assessments across the country and provide opportunities for people to move around the country to support the needs of patients without having to go through several state registration processes. In my job at the Launceston General Hospital, I saw doctors who were rejected in Tasmania move to other states and be registered. I think this is not fair and not right for patients.

Mr ENTSCH (Leichhardt) (6.55 pm)—I welcome the opportunity for governance of this area to come under the jurisdiction of the federal parliament as of 1 July, because I think what we need to do here is send a strong message out to the Australian medical colleges that, with the gift of monopoly—which is what they have—come serious obligations in relation to the way in which they treat foreign trained doctors. Regional Australia could not function without the services of these foreign doctors. Let me tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that these colleges are nothing but old boys clubs. They have been established by those who get major benefits from the current situation. They do not like any competition whatsoever. If another

doctor comes in and does not play the game, they will attack them relentlessly and they will remove their opportunity or their licence to practise.

I have such a situation in Cairns. Dr Roger Chattoor was recruited from the United Kingdom. He was recognised as one of the best cardiologists in the United Kingdom. He came over here, recruited to an area where there has never been an intervention cardiologist. He came over with glowing reports from those that recruited him of over 9,000 successful procedures. In Cairns, over a period of 12 months, he did 1,600 procedures. In those 1,600 procedures, he had operated in 500, and of those 500 there were 230 that could not be done in our region before he came. The mistake he made was that he was successful and he was not prepared to play the game.

There are four senior cardiologists in Cairns who have been involved in, first of all, collusion and, secondly, dishonest conduct. They are not interested in the wellbeing of Cairns or the far northern region. They are acting only in their own self-interest in relation to their income. Because Dr Chattoor was not prepared to play the game, they have been ringing around nursing staff and other cohorts in other hospitals. They have been involved in influencing the chair of the assessment committee at the royal college to make sure that this fine cardiologist is kicked out of the country. It is absolutely appalling.

I have over 4½ thousand signatures from people in support of Dr Chattoor. But what has happened now is that, because those cardiologists have influenced this decision, through deception and collusion, Dr Chattoor's 457 visa is now under threat of being rescinded. He is a man of impeccable qualifications. For the last four or five months, he has been fighting this, and the community has been fighting to keep him. What they have argued all the way through is that this is a peer review issue. But understand that his supervisor, who had given him above-average assessments all the way through, subsequently relocated 500 metres down the road and, because Roger did not go with him, he had a whinge and suggested that there was a supervision issue.

For months now, we have been trying to deal with that. They changed the rules that allowed him to practise. They came back and said, 'Well, if you get into the public health system, we'll allow you to stay.' He was happy to do that. Unfortunately, Queensland Health said: 'No, we don't have any space for somebody like Dr Chattoor. We don't need another cardiologist in Far North Queensland.' In the meantime, the hospital cardiologist has been filling in at the private practice where Roger was working—and they are asking him for an opinion.

It is absolutely appalling, and I call on the Australian Medical Council to start setting accreditation standards and to give 12 months for these colleges to start to sort out their nonsense, to sort out this mafia that they are involved in and to improve conditions, transparency and accountability. I also believe it is about time that we had a full Senate inquiry to investigate this. I have absolutely no doubt that we need competent people here, but we have foreign doctors training in this country who have no voice and no opportunity to defend themselves or their reputations. When they are being destroyed by greedy individuals like these four in my region, I think that those four people need to be held accountable. I have all of the evidence showing what these people have been doing and I will certainly be looking to have a full inquiry. We need to have them under oath and they need to be held accountable for what they are doing to this wonderful man and his family.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (7.01 pm)—In strongly endorsing the words of the member for Leichhardt, I note that we had a situation in Townsville where there were only three surgeons who were able to do heart surgery. I can speak from personal experience on this because I have been rushed to Townsville for emergency surgery. The previous member for the electorate of Herbert also had to have emergency surgery in Townsville, and the state minister and Speaker of the Assembly, also from Townsville, had to have emergency surgery there too. So it is very common. Due to exactly the same sorts of things that the member for Leichhardt was referring to—petty, vicious, personal vendettas; that is the only word that I can use to describe them—we were left with one single doctor practising. He happened to be the doctor that operated on me, and we checked him out. I am related to a family with a hundred doctors in it, and we checked this bloke out. His name is Mo Diger, and he is one of the better, arguably one of the best, heart surgeons in the country. His figures in each of the categories are exceptionally high. His survival rates are very, very high indeed, arguably higher than those of anyone except four others in the entire country. But he was under venomous and vicious attack—exactly the same type as Chattoor was under in Cairns—just through the petty prejudices of people who do not have to live there and whose lives are not at risk from us being bereft of specialist care.

The last set of figures I looked at was for the Edmonton area. In the cities of Australia we have one doctor per 300 people. In the country as a whole we have one doctor per 600 people. We have one doctor per 2,000 people in the southern end of Cairns.

Honourable member interjecting—

Mr KATTER—I accept the interjection: I am not Robinson Crusoe. But it is infinitely worse for us in North Queensland. All right, the cavalry is on the way a bit for North Queensland, with the JCU medical school, but we are looking at another 12 years before we have specialists coming out from that school.

I must comment upon the fact that the minister has no representatives here. It is an insult to every single person on both sides of the House.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr KATTER—Do not be holier than thou, you blokes; I am very bipartisan in my comments here. But when there is a matter of such importance, when the member for Leichhardt speaks with such passion—as well he should—and the member for Maranoa and the member for Kennedy are up here and extremely angry, what is the use, when there is not a single representative of the minister here? That is absolutely disgraceful. In the state parliament we always had the head of the department and the minister. If it was a matter that concerned them, the minister had to be there and so did the head of the department. They had to face the music. But they are hiding out in ivory towers and in cowards' castles. They are not game to face the music that is being played down here today. It is our people from North Queensland who are going to be in serious trouble and who are going to die, and for the people from Western Queensland I would assume it will be the same.

Mr Bruce Scott interjecting—

Mr KATTER—I do not have to tell the honourable member for Maranoa these things. There comes a time when we really have to stand these people up, and the time has come for them to be stood up. The minister must take responsibility for what is taking place here. The

Chatoor example is an absolute disgrace and a reflection not only upon the state government but also upon the federal government. It remains a reflection upon them, and if they want people in the streets in anger and with venom and spite then they should just allow the Chatoor thing to continue on—and all of the other issues that we have had over the years. Mr Deputy Speaker, we have put our point to the House, and we would appreciate it if you would put it to the Speaker that ministers should be represented.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (7.06 pm)—I must start my contribution to this debate by saying that I am exceptionally disappointed in the contribution that the member for Kennedy made. He, better than anyone up here, knows that the minister does not come to and cannot participate in private members' business. Whilst he made some very good points, the member for Kennedy knows the rules of debate on private members' business, and outlined in them is something that he and the other Independents all signed up to—that is, ministers cannot participate in private members' business. The member for Kennedy stands condemned for his dishonesty in this debate.

Mr Katter—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Not only have I been misrepresented; I have also been vilified. I would ask the member to withdraw and apologise.

Ms HALL—I will not withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—Order! I did not hear the remarks the honourable member made. I was in conversation with the clerk. If the honourable member feels badly done by I would ask the member for Shortland to withdraw.

Ms HALL—I am very reluctant to withdraw because it was pure debate and the facts were correct.

Mr Katter—You used unparliamentary language.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order!

Ms HALL—I did not use unparliamentary language.

Mr Katter—You certainly did.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! I ask the honourable member to withdraw without qualification.

Ms HALL—I withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The honourable member has withdrawn. She has now has the call.

Mr Katter—Why doesn't she stick to the subject instead of attacking me?

Ms HALL—I listened quietly while the member for Kennedy made his contribution to this debate. If he is honest about the situation in relation to doctors and the doctor shortage he will first get to the reason we have a chronic doctor shortage. That shortage is because the coalition government cut the numbers of doctors and put a cap on the training of doctors. Coming from that a chronic doctor shortage developed.

The member for Kennedy has a doctor shortage in his electorate. I have a very significant shortage of doctors in the Shortland electorate; there is one doctor for 1,600 people. I will say that it is much easier for people living in Shortland to access the services of a specialist than it is for people living in the electorate of Kennedy. I think that the member for Kennedy needs

to acknowledge the contributions that the minister has made in creating more training places for doctors—an enormous number of additional training places for doctors, nurses and allied health professionals. When these training places come on line that will go towards addressing the doctor shortage that exists.

The motion before us talks about the training of specialists and the role that medical and surgical colleges play in the registration process of medical graduates. I agree with comments that have been made about the need for this system to be reviewed. I think that the specialist colleges do have an exceptional amount of power in determining who should train in those specialties. I believe that there is a better and fairer system that could be put in place than the one that exists now. The system that we have come from the UK, as did many of the practices that we undertake, but now I think it is time for us to revisit it. I do not think that an inquiry that is about scapegoating certain people is the way to go; I think we need to approach this matter in a serious, mature way, where we look at the best way to train medical specialists within this country and not look at using a motion like this to attack particular scenarios or cases.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (7.11 pm)—This very important debate, brought to this chamber by the efforts of the members for Maranoa and Leichhardt, is an issue that the government has turned a blind eye to over the last three years. Obviously, we have a maldistribution of doctors and the health workforce in this country, and we need a solution rather than internal bickering on the government benches on whether there should be a point of order or not. Let us focus on the patients and the 1,800 doctors that we need in rural areas who are not there at the moment. I should declare a conflict of interest in that I am a member of one of the aforementioned colleges. But there is no doubt that those colleges have to put their hands up, as has been pointed out, and take responsibility for distribution of the health workforce.

You cannot be the nation's only specialist college and not take an individual, responsible position on equitable provision throughout Australia. Patients with differing clinical severity can walk into a health establishment and be triaged on need and yet when we triage this nation on geographical need there is no-one doing anything more than applying the standard Rudd-Gillard government model of trickle-down economics where we turn the taps on and train a few more GPs then hopefully one day they will find their way out to rural areas.

Ms Hall—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My point of order relates to the relevance of the contribution of the member on the other side. He is not addressing the substance of this motion. As such, I would like to ask you to bring him back to the issue at hand.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—Order! The member will resume her seat. The honourable member will address the motion before the chair.

Mr LAMING—I hope that 20-second interruption was worth the effort because patients in rural Australia will pay the price for that silly stunt. The key issue here is getting a workforce out to central, remote and rural Australia. We need state Labor health bureaucracies to work with the colleges, not against them. That is what we saw in Cairns. I do not want to comment on individual cases when I do not know all of the facts, but I do know one thing: PESCIIs, the pre-employment structured clinical interviews, were not introduced to pass or fail doctors; or to guillotine their health careers in this country after they gave up lives, work and careers overseas to come and serve Australia in some of the toughest and most high need areas. They were introduced to assess whether doctors could move from areas of certain risk to areas of

high risk—from where they might be working in a hospital to where they might be working more independently as a GP. That should be the issue.

I think it is only fair that members on this side of the chamber ask the question about these PESCs: have they been adequately evaluated? Are they targeting the doctors that genuinely are clinical threats to rural and remote Australia or are they being used for some other purpose? What we do not want to see is a situation where state bureaucracies can say, ‘Sorry, no job here,’ and then a clinical college says, ‘Well, if there’s no job we can’t help you, sir.’ We want their heads butted together so they find solutions and are not being antagonistic.

I want to say something quite simple, and that is: ‘If you want to be the only specialist college in the country, you have a service obligation to make sure this nation is adequately provided with those doctor specialists or allied health practitioners.’ That is not a big request. We want to know that if people do come from around the world to serve in Australia that it is done fairly. We do not need a mountain of bureaucracy for the sake of bureaucracy. It is one thing to create a single registration board for the nation but quite another to use PESCs as a way of further interfering with clinical provision. Without saying that in any individual case that is occurring, I would like to know that these PESCs are being fairly and adequately evaluated.

In this great battle of assessing overseas qualifications, we have always found it very difficult to evaluate medical schools according to the level of quality of their graduates. Yet I note Australian universities do that all the time. They will only accept Indian graduates from tier 1 and tier 2 Indian universities to study at selected universities. We do not do the same thing with doctors. We pay an enormous price because we put English trained GPs, from high-quality institutions, through a complete rigmarole that is utterly unnecessary and serves only to damage health provision in remote areas. I believe if graduates are trained in an English-speaking university there is no need to tie up those graduates who arrive here to test them in their levels of English. If we are going to do IELTS tests, put them to clinical supervised work if they have an IELTS of six and let them show that they have adequate English, because they are working with a supervisor. Why not get them to work? Don’t use the PESCI as a way of interfering with that. I would like to see stalemates like we have seen in Cairns resolved rapidly. I would like to see PESCs adequately evaluated. They were never meant to be pass/fail; they were meant to be indicative and be drawing attention to areas where clinical skills were inadequate. That is what we need to move towards—an area where the administration is no longer used as a way of putting brakes on clinicians but it is used as a way of identifying those who can practise safely in the bush.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (7.17 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak, albeit very briefly, on this matter relating to overseas trained doctors. Can I say from the outset I very much understand and accept the very genuine concerns being put to this House by members opposite. There is no question at all that when one needs the service of a doctor or a medical practitioner of some kind it is of the utmost priority. The last thing that any of us would want is for a medical person not to be available when one is needed. But can I say that their concerns are not confined purely and simply to country Australia.

As a member representing metropolitan Adelaide, I can assure members opposite that there are also concerns about the lack of doctors within metropolitan areas. In recent months I have been caught in the midst of a political bunfight as to whether some local doctors should be

allowed to recruit from overseas. I understand that, whether you are in the country or in metropolitan parts of Australia, in urban areas, the need for access to a doctor is of the highest priority. Having said that, I am not going to engage in a vilification exercise of doctors and the system that we currently have in place, albeit that I have my own concerns about it. I do not only have concerns about the registration process for doctors. In fact, on Friday this week I will be going back to my electorate to meet with nurses who are going through similar problems and who would also like to see the process changed. Perhaps that process needs to be changed. In saying that, however, I believe the member for Blair quite properly articulated the process that this government has followed and is following at the moment in order to ensure that ultimately we do have the best processes in place.

I also say to members opposite that the problems that they are referring to did not arise in the last year or two. They have been evident since I was elected to parliament three years ago. I say to them: if these concerns are real—and I accept they are—rather than blaming the current minister and this government, why were steps not put in place to make the necessary changes that they are now calling on this government to do and why did they not, as the member for Shortland quite properly pointed out, allocate and fund more places in our universities to ensure that we would have more graduates from within Australia in the system to fill the shortages that were emerging? One of the genuine concerns I have about recruiting from overseas is that we recruit from countries that have a greater number of patients to the number of doctors than we have in Australia. What we are really doing is taking medical people from countries in much greater need than us. I believe our first priority ought to be to ensure that we provide places within our universities and ensure that we encourage our own students to go through the process of becoming medical professionals.

I refer briefly to the motion. It talks about ‘an inquiry into the role of Australia’s medical and surgical colleges in the registration process’. It does not state who is going to conduct the inquiry, how it is going to be comprised or the particular guidelines or criteria for the inquiry. Whilst it is generally something that this House might have some sympathy for, I would suggest to the member for Maranoa that he needs to be a little bit more specific if he wants this House to support his motion in respect of establishing an inquiry. An inquiry is something that I would take very seriously because the inquiry would result in recommendations and there would be nothing short of criticism by the community if those recommendations were not implemented. I also refer to part (2) of the motion which talks about the 457 visa. I reiterate something that the member for Blair said earlier: a working visa is only granted after registration is given to a doctor. It is not the case that a 457 visa will be revoked if a doctor fails his or her pre-employment interview. Again, the motion is not correct in terms of what it is asking this House to do. I suggest to the member for Maranoa that he ought to rethink the way he wants this House to deal with the motion and resubmit it if he wants us to take it seriously.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (7.22 pm)—In supporting this motion today I would like speak about matters to do with doctors in Australia. We all know that health is one of the two big default issues in this country. If you ask people what their issues are, if they cannot think of anything else they will mention health and education. We can be sure of that. But specifically what they mean when they mention health is where the difference lies.

For some Australians it might mean elective surgery waiting lists; for others it might mean getting to see their GP when they want to or need to. It could be that they mention health be-

cause of a personal perspective or because they saw a media report suggesting a problem exists and they are concerned in a detached way. In any case, health remains one of those issues that is never far from the minds of Australians. It is also in the nature of Australians that we are critical and that we see fault within our health system. I believe that in overall terms it is better than any other nation's health system; however, despite that, it is right that we always seek to make it better.

In the last two weeks I accepted the invitation of one of my local GPs, Dr Wood, to visit her surgery and speak with her and her staff—including her registrar and two student doctors. Dr Wood and her team are adding great value in the Alexander Heights community. I want to take this opportunity to thank her for the opportunity she gave me. I have become more aware of the situation for general practices, and matters relevant to this motion came up during our discussion. The positive impact of overseas trained doctors was one point of discussion. The ability to assess these doctors is critical, and many of our suburban practices would not be able to serve their communities without these doctors coming in under 457 visas. Dr Wood will soon have a new doctor, who is moving from Northern Ireland to Perth with her husband and, I believe, four children. This is very good news for the patients of Dr Wood's practice. I hope that it all works out well and that this doctor and her family make Australia their home permanently.

As I have alluded to already, Dr Wood is not the sort of person who just recruits overseas; she also helps in the training of student doctors and newer doctors. One of the issues I want to raise today is directly relevant to this motion. It relates to how doctors are trained and how they move through our system. Many members would be aware that upon graduation medical students must take up an internship for a year in order to finally qualify as medical practitioners before taking a registrar position. But in 2012 there will be a problem with the number of intern positions available due to the increasing number of graduates. I have been told that there will not be a guaranteed intern position for graduates of Australian universities who are overseas students. Surely this problem can be addressed; the last thing we want is for graduates of our medical schools to go back overseas immediately. These are the sorts of people who we definitely want to stay here—we want to make sure our health system is the beneficiary.

Residents in our local communities deserve the right to access doctors and medical treatment reasonably close to where they live. In the rapidly growing northern suburbs of Perth—including in my electorate of Cowan—it is a challenge to keep pace with the heavy demand for services. As I have already mentioned, without the services offered by doctors coming into Australia on 457 visas many GPs and specialists in many parts of Australia would not be able to keep up with the demands of local communities. I particularly endorse the views expressed tonight regarding specialists. Whilst we do not have a significant specialist population within Cowan—we are just across the road from the Joondalup Health Campus, and that is where a lot of the northern suburbs specialists are—these matters are extremely relevant. I certainly think the government should think through the ramifications of any revocation of 457 visas for doctors who have been deregistered because of problems, particularly the question of all problems with the pre-employment structured clinical interview.

Government should allow sufficient time for a proper thorough review of these cases and ensure there is a clear process in place that affords the opportunity for a reassessment. In

overall terms, what is needed to meet the needs of primary health care in the outer metropolitan suburbs, as in my case, is to examine what can be done to remove the hurdles for existing practices to attract doctors. Neighbourhood general practice surgeries like Dr Woods' are at the heart of successful primary health care. We should be very careful in being too hasty and we certainly should make sure that all potential doctors are given the opportunity to provide services within our suburbs.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (7.27 pm)—I would like to commend the member for Maranoa for his interest in and promotion of good health care and a sound health workforce throughout Australia, particularly in regional and rural Australia. Parts of Australia continue to cry out for additional professionals. Doctors and other health professionals are one such group. This group is naturally central to the ongoing health and function of every community. It is well and good that this Labor government has moved to integrate state based labour markets, each with its own registration processes and lists of professionals eligible to practice, into a seamless national labour market.

Instead of a health professional working in Perth, for instance, being able to freely move interstate and take up a position in regional New South Wales, rural Queensland or rural South Australia, medical professionals have long suffered the inconvenience of having to register in each and every state in which they want to practice their profession. It would be ridiculous in this day and age to continue down that track. When people reminisce about the great economic structural and social reforms of the past—for example, the floating of the dollar in the eighties, enterprise bargaining and productivity increases of the early nineties—it is really quite odd to think that until only a couple of years ago we had seven quite distinct economies and workforces. They were partitioned by state regulation, constitutional limitation and, at least to a certain extent, by professional confinement or restriction.

It is only in the last couple of years that the obvious has been undertaken—that is, to make Australia one country, one seamless national economy. Nothing could be more obvious than the removal of marginally significant parochial borders to facilitate smooth economic activity. A mobile workforce is essential to the smooth allocation of resources to where they are most in demand, where they are most needed. Before I finish on a seamless national economy, I would like to congratulate Dr Craig Emerson and the Hon. Chris Bowen for their work in this area in the last parliament. It might not be a sexy area of public policy for most people but I rank it up there with the best. They are the most sound and most obvious examples of national leadership that we may have seen in this place for many a year.

Going back to the motion before us, let me say that it was a Labor government that brought the nation together, developed and nurtured the requisite goodwill amongst interested parties and forged the agreement to nationalise the professional accreditation boards of the various health professions. The responsible minister, Nicola Roxon, should also be congratulated for this milestone in Australia's economic and social development.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 7.31 pm to 7.47 pm

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**Forestry**

Debate resumed, on motion by **Mr Adams**:

That this House:

- (1) recognises that the forestry industry is an important part of the Australian economy but is currently in crisis;
- (2) understands that it is necessary to secure the viability of forestry dependent communities and to create well paid, high skilled jobs by value adding to our natural resource;
- (3) supports the process whereby the forestry unions, government, industry, environment and community groups working together will allow a complete restructure of the industry that will determine that any transition is fair and just for workers, their families and communities; and
- (4) calls on the House to ensure that interim payments to those facing hardships because of the transition, and those exiting the industry, can be assisted in a timely manner.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (7.47 pm)—I have raised this motion to express my support for the ongoing deliberations of all the interested parties working to develop solutions to ensure the viability of the forest industry over future years while also dealing with such issues as climate change, biodiversity and economic change. I have been encouraged by the work of many of the interested parties to look at their operations, study how the industry works, and to consider current and future markets and how they can productively but sustainably use our beautiful timbers in Tasmania. Tasmania leads the way, but the process is just as important for the rest of Australia.

Our forest industry is something to be proud of. There is still great demand for timber and timber products. We only have to look at our own homes to see how timber is used and, further, how it is developing in new and varied ways. Yet we understand that change is inevitable, as with all things. As a product becomes scarcer it grows in value, and it is up to us to make sure that we do not sell our industry short and to make sure we get a good price for all our timber and wood products. It is better that we try to manage change so that the people who work in the industry, the people who make or use the products and the people who use the proceeds of the industry to undertake other work can grow with change. If we do not manage change and use the processes positively, many people will get hurt or be left behind and their businesses could fail.

We must ensure that change does not disadvantage whole sections of the community or economy. To ensure that the communities that have been part of the industry for centuries do not lose out, it is important to ensure that any process of restructuring includes a rethink of how things are done and who does them, and that criticism of the industry is constructive rather than destructive. I believe that this is what is happening at the moment, although I am not party to any of the discussions and nor, as far as I know, are any of my colleagues, state or federal. I believe that is as it should be, as we are the representatives of the people in this instance.

It was my good fortune to attend a small part of the Timber Communities Australia state conference in Launceston a couple of weeks ago, and it gave me heart to hear what the timber communities are doing and talking about. I was particularly interested in the work of one of the TCA members, Rodney Stagg, who comes from the Meander Valley—a long-term timber

community. Rodney was curious to find out how much local timber was being used, where it came from and where it went, and how many people were employed. He undertook a survey of 10 businesses from the *Yellow Pages* in Launceston which receive timber from all over the state to make various sorts of furniture; internal and external doors; fittings for households such as vanity and kitchen units, built-in robes et cetera—lots of different fittings and household goods.

He then sought to find out where their products went—whether very local, to markets on the east coast of Australia, or overseas—and how many employees these businesses had. The minimum number of people employed in these 10 Launceston businesses was 84, and that did not include the auxiliary people who help to supply and transport goods, the sawmillers or all the other people who are employed because these businesses are there. Once you start adding the other involvement, including all the building and other businesses that use timber, you start running into hundreds of jobs just out of Launceston—around 800. If the process of sawmilling timbers is removed from this community, suddenly jobs will disappear.

Another story involves a small country sawmiller in southern Tasmania who was looking to find a sale for shorter lengths of sawn timber. He had been puzzling over this for some time and he came up with the solution of joining the short lengths together into longer, more usable timber lengths, using a sawtooth timber jointing machine. But this was big money for a small sawmiller. Fortunately, the Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement was providing assistance for value-adding projects in 2005. This sawmiller looked at that option with his family and realised that, with that assistance, they could do even more value-adding than was first thought. By adding a glue press laminator, they could produce beams up to 12 metres in length that were even stronger than the single piece that they had contemplated. Add to this a finishing planer that removes any surface glue marks resulting from the gluing process. This family is now producing highly sought-after beams of Tassie oak, often used as feature timber in buildings. So Ike Kelly and his family, down in Dunalley, can take a bow. They are leading the way for small sawmillers, taking up the challenge to develop businesses in new and exciting ways while employing local people and keeping their community viable.

I also attended two community festivals at the weekend, one in my hometown of Longford, the Longford Show—a very old show of 150 years plus—and another in Oatlands, another wonderful town right in the middle of Tasmania. I found that people were making practical goods for sale from all sorts of timber, including old pallets. The sorts of things being made were boxes, jewellery cases and picture frames. It was very saleable stuff and they were doing extremely well.

Change to the industry will have to be very carefully managed. Restructuring also includes re-evaluating markets, changing the harvesting and transport methods and reviewing the players in the industry—but in all this ensuring that there is a resource that will allow both traditional and new skills to be used in dealing with Tasmania's timber. Some timber usage just does not work with young plantation wood, but the regrowth sector can still use the older and mature wood and it can be used without harming the overall resource or its biodiversity. By the same token, we need to be able to use all the wood that we harvest. That means that a pulp mill is not only an important downstream process but is vital to ensuring that our industry is properly sustainable and economically viable.

Transitions can be painful or they can be managed. I would like to see this approached with the agreement of all parties, both in the community and the industry, and with the involvement of everyone else who has concerns. It is necessary to secure the viability of forestry-dependent communities and to create well-paid, highly skilled jobs by value-adding to our natural resource. It can be done if everyone works together and we have sensible access to our resource. The resource has to be able to be used in a whole variety of ways. The young resource from plantation timber just does not cut it in the old sawmill industry. We have to make sure that there is a resource for the sawmilling industry of the future. I certainly wish the industry all the best. I wish all the best to all the people who have been meeting to discuss this issue over some months now. I hope that they can bring something together very soon for us all to give consideration to. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (7.57 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak tonight on the motion moved by the member for Lyons. I recognise his passion for the future of the sustainable forestry industry. In his address he referred to the impact of the timber industry on small regional communities and the importance of the timber sector right throughout regional Australia. I fear, however, that it is not a passion that is shared by many of his colleagues who have sat back at both the state and federal levels and allowed the death of a thousand cuts to be applied to the timber industry in regional Australia.

As we approach a state election in Victoria I have grave fears for the future of the timber industry in Gippsland if the Labor Party is returned in some type of coalition with the Greens. Labor and the Greens have talked a lot in the past and made a lot of promises about jobs we might have in the future in Gippsland, but I am fighting for the jobs we already have today, and that includes fighting for the future of the native hardwood timber industry in my community. I am talking about towns like Heyfield, Orbost, Bairnsdale, Swifts Creek, Nowa Nowa and Cann River, which have a strong dependence on the timber industry, from the people who work directly in the harvest and haulage section to those in the mills and those who service the industry. Every time the Labor Party and the Greens lock up another section of forest in Gippsland more jobs are lost and more families are forced to seek alternative employment in the region, or they simply move away and small country towns suffer the consequences.

The Greens in particular like to claim that the jobs will be replaced by jobs in areas like ecotourism, but in my experience the Greens have never created a job in regional Victoria and their policies are a direct threat to the livelihoods of the families that work in a range of traditional industries, from timber harvesting to commercial fishing and the Latrobe Valley power industry. As one of the leading players in the timber industry in East Gippsland, Bob Humphries from Cann River has told me in the past that he cannot see many of his timber workers serving up Devonshire teas in the future. This is a real issue for us. I am a very passionate supporter of our tourism industry, but at the same time the timber industry provides sustainable jobs in the long term for our community and there are people with the skills and experience who deserve to be able to continue to earn their living in a sustainable manner in the East Gippsland forests. These are hardworking men and women. They have skills in that industry. They provide a product that is in great demand. But their livelihoods are constantly at risk from the Labor Party and the Greens when they do those deals to win preferences in city seats. It is to the eternal shame of Labor members of parliament that they refuse to stand

up and be counted when the workers in the timber industry are having their jobs taken away from them at the expense of Green preferences.

Just on the point of skills that the timber industry workers have I will briefly mention the important role that the timber industry has played in the past and must continue to play in the future in fire suppression and prevention activities in Gippsland. The skilled heavy machinery operators in the timber industry have been critically important in severe fire events over the past decade and before that. I have no doubt that the presence of machines and the men with the skill and courage to use them in difficult circumstances has helped to protect life and property. Every time another area of land is shut away from the timber industry, more workers are lost from those communities and more opportunities to help defend life and property in those extreme fire events are lost from areas like Gippsland. I have not seen any members of the extreme environmental groups jumping on bulldozers to put in firebreaks when fire has threatened our towns in the past. I hope the timber industry workers are around to provide that service for us in the future.

As the recent federal election result in Gippsland indicated, my community has had enough of the city based politicians, and in this case the city based Greens candidate, telling us how to live our lives, what jobs we can have and what jobs we cannot have. I sincerely welcome this motion by the member for Lyons because, like the member for Lyons, I recognise that the forestry industry is an important part of the Australian economy.

In my contribution to this debate I want to focus more on the native hardwood timber industry in Victoria. I do support the sustainable harvesting of native timber in Victoria because I recognise the important role that the industry plays in regional communities. I also recognise the complete impracticality of the alternatives which are often shouted by the Greens and whispered by Labor MPs. They call for an end to logging of native timber but remain strangely silent on the importation of timber products from poor nations with a poor track record of illegal harvesting and unsustainable forest management practices.

The Victorian Association of Forest Industries reports that the value of national imports and exports of forest products in 2008-09 show a \$2.1 billion trade deficit in forest products here in Australia. I would much rather see Australians support an Australian native timber industry that is strictly supervised and managed in a sustainable manner to achieve maximum value for each tree that is harvested than support the pillaging of the forests of poorer developing countries where there are not the protocols, they are nowhere near as well managed and they are unsustainably harvested.

I could take all night to dispel more of the myths and the factual inconsistencies of the Greens in their anti-logging tirades but in the time I have available I want to focus on the importance of the timber industry to Gippsland and the positive policy direction that has been adopted by the coalition at both the state and federal levels. Timber production, as a matter of interest—and this is completely contrary to the information that is often promulgated by the Greens—is excluded from vast areas of Victorian forests. It is excluded from all national parks and conservation areas—and that is over three million hectares of native forest. The area of Victorian public native forest actually harvested and regenerated equates to approximately 0.12 per cent of the total forest area in Victoria. If you listen to the Greens you would believe we were about to cut down our last tree in Victoria. It is a ridiculous proposition and it really causes great offence to the people who live and work in the bush and sustainably man-

age their forestry resource and seek to add value to the product at every opportunity. The industry itself is worth about \$6.5 billion to the Victorian economy and directly employs in the order of 20,000 people.

I recently visited the Heyfield mill of the Gunns company and had the opportunity to witness firsthand the new technology and the investment in some of the equipment that the member for Lyons referred to. Finger joining is being done on small offcuts of timber that would have previously ended up in the chipper. They are now being joined in a high-tech process and maximum value is gained from every stick of wood that comes out of the bush. It is a fantastic commitment that the company has shown to the timber product we have in Victoria. It is a product that is in demand right around the world.

The Victorian Liberals and Nationals in coalition have recognised that there is a threat to the industry at the moment that is posed by Labor and the Greens in the state election and have given their policy commitments that they will not support any further reductions in access to native timber. There was a great announcement made on the weekend. The Victorian Leader of the Nationals, Peter Ryan, and the shadow minister for agriculture, Peter Walsh, gave more undertakings to the Victorian timber industry. They said they will guarantee long-term access to the current supplies of native timber, they will review the regional forest agreements every five years to provide 20-year resource security, they will place VicForests under the sole direction of the Minister for Agriculture, they will restructure the board of VicForests to include industry stakeholders and they will review harvesting rotations for faster-growing native species such as mountain ash.

These are all important initiatives that will help to provide security for the timber industry. The industry needs that security to be able to invest in new technology with any confidence whatsoever. Anyone who has not been to a timber mill in the last 20 years should visit a mill today. They will see it is completely different from the old saw bench they might have seen in the past. There is maximum effort to get the highest yield possible out of each log. The only way the industry is going to invest with confidence is if it has a policy direction set by state and federal governments that recognises that we do have a sustainable hardwood industry here in Australia—and we certainly have one in Victoria that needs the support of both state and federal governments.

The only way I believe that will happen in Victoria is if the coalition wins the state election. The future of towns like Bairnsdale, Swifts Creek, Orbost, Cann River, Heyfield and Nowa Nowa, which I mentioned before, will only be secured and the jobs of those working families in those communities will only be secured if we can get rid of the Brumby government in Victoria.

At a federal level the coalition has also got a strong history of supporting the forestry sector. We took a very detailed policy to the recent election. It was disappointing that the Labor Party—the party that claims to stand up for the working class, the party that claims to stand up for blue-collar workers—did not even release a full policy to cover the timber industry. It is an appalling situation when we have that neglect of such a valuable industry here in Australia. So at the federal election the Liberals and Nationals in coalition at the federal level committed to maintaining our support for the long-term regional forest agreements and not supporting any further lock-ups unless they are proposed by the industry itself, which is a completely different approach to that adopted by the Labor Party, who have the Greens constantly

tugging at their coattails to make sure they get their attention. The moment the Labor Party lock up one more section the Greens will say, 'That's a good start, but now we want something else.' They will never be satisfied. When it comes to the timber industry the Greens will never be satisfied.

Mr Katter—Hear, hear!

Mr CHESTER—The member for Kennedy supports me in that. When it comes to the timber industry the Greens will never be satisfied and the Labor Party are getting themselves into a position of great folly. If they believe they can ever satisfy the demands and the wants of the Greens when it comes to the timber industry, they are deluding themselves. Unfortunately, I fear for the future of the timber industry under a Labor Party which is in debt to the Greens for their preferences in the city seats and I fear what will happen in the Victorian state election if Labor and the Greens form another rainbow coalition like they have here in the federal parliament.

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (8.07 pm)—I thank the honourable member for Lyons for putting his private member's motion forward, because it gives me an opportunity to speak about the importance of the timber industry and forestry to my seat of Page and to the whole north-east. There are a couple of things in particular I want to talk about. I know that the motivation was to give protection to the industry. In Page, the whole north-east and the North Coast there is a strong environmental movement that is decades-old, but the timber industry is a lot older. I have lived through the regional forest agreements, the RFAs, and I have lived through a whole range of conflict. We are at a stage now where we have the RFAs and we have some certainty, but there are still real problems in the industry.

I want to thank Southern Cross University, particularly Professor Jerry Vanclay, who hosts our Forest and Timber Industry Forum. That Forest and Timber Industry Forum has a range of people involved in it, from Planted Forest Operations, Forests NSW; Koppers Wood Products, the Hurfords Group, 4STree Pty Ltd and Timber Communities of Australia. I thank Tony Wade from Timber Communities of Australia for providing me with some information tonight on the industry.

It is hard to break down the figures specifically for Page, but for the upper north-east of New South Wales from Coffs Harbour north a lot of timber comes from private native forest. This equates to about \$84 million of manufactured output, \$26 million per annum in wages to about 650 employees in harvesting and processing. There is also \$15 million to landholders for their trees. It is estimated that an additional five people are employed for a certain area of timber harvested, which in this instance would equate to about 1,300 additional jobs.

I also want to talk about the managed investment schemes. I have a briefing paper here called *A framework for a sustainable forest and timber industry* from the Southern Cross University Forest and Timber Industry Forum. I met with them recently. They asked me if they could have a meeting with the minister. I have put that request in and I am sure that that will be able to happen. I am hoping it can, because there are some good things they have to say and some specific things they want to ask. Some of those are about a sustainable industry. It is about creating jobs and income opportunities, delivering high-value renewable green products to current and future generations. It sustains biodiversity and clean water, captures carbon and provides renewable energy options. These are the words from the forum themselves. There is a proposed action plan which covers a legislative and policy review and renewal. It has im-

mediate measures in there about the disposal of small wood and mill wood waste. There are short-term, stopgap measures to assist forest plantation owners. That includes provisions in the MIS about tax concessions.

I have already spoken in this place about the review and a report on MIS. I said that that was a good start but that it did not go far enough. While managed investment schemes might be applicable to what they were designed for—which was international equity trusts and a whole range of other financial products—when we are looking at forestry and agriculture different provisions within the MIS are needed. It needs to be quite specific and there needs to be a whole lot of people involved in it—particularly more involvement with local government. Forest research is another area within the plan. Key considerations are forest plantations as long-term infrastructure investments. We know forests take a long time to reach maturity—up to 40 years. Thus, long-term, patient capital is required. Patience is not always operative when we have managed investment schemes, because MIS promote short-term rotations and low-value product. There are also forest plantations supporting environmental services. (*Time expired*)

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (8.12 pm)—In rising to speak to the motion before the House, I pay tribute to the honourable member from Tasmania who moved this resolution. I think he embodies all of the laudable characteristics which hallmark the Labor Party from its inception. I hope to have my history book published early in the New Year. It will delineate those great character traits that created this great movement that was so germane to the formation of modern Australia as we know it. Those values are still very much alive in the person of Mr Adams, the member for Lyons, representing Tasmania.

Having said that, I have always been one that has been associated with proactive government—governments that get in and do things and get things done, things that have been good for Australia. I was very, very young. I was really only tagging behind the great men that built the coal industry of Australia, the aluminium industry of Australia and the tourism industry of Queensland. They did it by proactive government. We have seen that in successive governments, starting with the Keating-Hawke government and going on with the Liberal-National Party government. It has been a little less true of the Rudd government and it is a bit hard yet to make judgment upon the current government. These people did not sit idly by and watch things happen, so I have always thought that if we wanted timber we should go out and plant trees.

The honourable member for Page, who spoke previously, is a very excellent member for her area, and so was her predecessor, Ian Causley. He took me to task on the idea of plantations. I said: ‘We’re the mob that go out and get things done. We don’t talk about it; we do it.’ He said, ‘Have you ever driven north of Brisbane?’ I said: ‘Yeah. Righto!’ I strongly urge those who genuinely care about the Australian environment to take a drive north of Brisbane. They refer to it as the ‘pine desert’. There are no insects. There are no animals. There are no birds. There is just a thundering silence. They tell me that, when they take the trees away, nothing will grow because of what the trees have dropped in those areas. But even a monoculture of gum trees can create problems for us, so sustainable logging is definitely where we should be at. I am not saying it cannot be enhanced by some pods of plantation timber. I would not go that far. But putting trees back seems to me to be a good thing to do as well.

Sustainable logging is definitely a million miles ahead of plantation monoculture when it comes to the environment.

I come from North Queensland. There is a tiny coastal belt—about 60 kilometres wide, I suppose—where some of the trees have been taken. Not very many have been taken because it is a highly mountainous region. Outside of the Snowy Mountains, it is the highest mountain range in Australia, so obviously you cannot take too many trees from there or farm there—and we have not. Only about a third, or maybe a quarter, of that coastal belt has been logged. West of the Dividing Range—the vast bulk of the northern half of Queensland—only an imbecile would do major clearing work, because it costs \$300, or maybe \$500, an acre and the land is worth maybe \$70 an acre if you are lucky. So it has not happened and it is not going to happen.

Let me turn to the timber industry. It has been taken away from us. Some 28 mills were closed in North Queensland. You can see 11 giant mills when you drive on the highway. You can actually see them from the highway. The one in Ingham is three-quarters of a kilometre long. It is just a big empty shed. Three days ago I showed a visiting journalist the town of Mareeba. The main street of Mareeba is a kilometre-long manufacturing area and there is nothing there now. *(Time expired)*

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (8.18 pm)—I stand today to speak in support of the motion of my good friend, colleague and cousin, the member for Lyons, at a time when the forestry industry in our home state is at a real crossroads. For many years forestry has been a battle-ground and political football in my state, particularly around election time—something I know only too well by bitter experience. But finally, hopefully, we are seeing both sides of the argument working towards a lasting agreement. That may not be soon enough for some in the industry, unfortunately.

During the election, I was pleased that we as the Labor Party promised to provide \$20 million to help forest contractors and their employees, a sector suffering severely during the downturn of the forest industry. I know that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator Ludwig, is working through the details of the type of assistance the government will provide, who will be eligible for assistance and when assistance will be provided. On a number of occasions, I have sat with people from the industry—decent, hardworking people—who are being pushed to the edge by the financial pressures they are under. I have visited them out in the bush and in their workshops and seen them at work. They are good people who do valuable work. These people have built what they thought would be a business which contributed to the many communities which depend on forestry. They employ many people; some of them are family and many of them are just like family, such is the nature of these small businesses in close-knit communities. Now, because of a whole variety of factors, many well beyond their own control, they are facing financial ruin. I truly do not know how some of these people are able to sleep at night with the burden of their financial troubles.

The challenge for us now as legislators, state and federal, is to find the middle ground and provide a lasting framework to secure the future for those who remain in the industry. This should set a course where we can have a valuable forest industry which sustains strong regional communities and where conflict is just part of history. I want to be able to see these people be proud of their part in an industry which is creating a stable environment for people to work in, an industry that is renewable, sustainable and significant—the forestry industry.

We must create an industry that can invest and plan for the future without—as my colleagues have mentioned—fear that it could be derailed with the stroke of a pen at some political whim or by a poorly chosen set of words. We do not want an industry that has to invest more in security than it does in the safety of its workers just so those workers can go about their daily duties. We want an industry where forest workers can be proud to stand up and say that they are so, wherever and with whoever they may be.

This can be done without jeopardising the future of our great native forests and the environment which we all treasure. Nobody wants to see this great forest resource wasted or sold for a pittance. We want an industry where they can invest in the best of downstream processing so that they can be competitive worldwide and not have to do so with the fear that it could all be taken away. This is an industry that is no small contributor to the Tasmanian economy and employment, particularly in regional areas. In 2006 a report into the industry by Dr Jacki Schirmer put the annual spend by forestry industries in Tasmania at about \$1.6 billion, employing 6,300 people. Tasmanian forestry exports were estimated to be worth \$443 million, or 13 per cent of exports, in the 2008-09 year, according to ABARE statistics. Importantly, a majority of these people and companies work in native forests. If we are to see a shift away from native forest logging then it will mean a massive change in the industry. Given that we are talking about something which could impact on three per cent of the Tasmanian workforce directly, and many more indirectly, then we must do everything we can to get it right and to cushion the blow.

The forest industries are an important, significant part of my region and of Tasmania as a whole and we must do everything we can to ensure their future is a positive one. The best thing to do to achieve this is to provide formally agreed certitude beyond the whim of political parties and with the agreement of the Tasmanian community. On a final note, it is crucial that the agreement, as it reaches its final stages, must support value adding, and in my region this means guaranteeing resource security for Britton Timbers and Ta Ann, both users of native hardwoods.

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (8.23 pm)—I rise to speak on the private member’s forestry motion put forward by the member for Lyons. We the coalition welcome a motion on the important forestry industry as we have long supported it and recognised its large contribution to the economy nationally, especially in regional Australia. The coalition has always recognised a balance between the environmental and socioeconomic needs of native forest management through the regional forest agreements and the landmark Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement. Australia’s forestry industry is able to deliver significant economic and environmental returns to the nation.

With regard to this bill, the member for Lyons has the right intent; however, the Tasmanian situation does not extend to the rest of Australia. We recognise that the forestry industry is an important part of the Australian economy, but in Tasmania we also, as the member for Lyons said, recognise the current crisis in the industry in that state. Unfortunately for the member for Lyons, his support of the industry does not extend to his government. Labor has failed to support the forestry industry as a key contributor to the nation’s economy and a major employer in regional Australia. Labor scrapped the position of dedicated forestry minister upon coming to government in 2007. Labor’s new alliance with the Greens means the forestry industry faces an uncertain future.

The coalition went to the recent federal election with a strong forestry policy while Labor did not even release a full policy. We committed to maintaining support for long-term regional forestry agreements, not supporting any further forest lock-ups unless proposed by industry, ongoing development of quality forest certification processes, providing funding to assist small sawmillers to obtain international forestry certification, \$3.7 million over five years to develop a centre of excellence for timber engineering and design, increasing research and development for the forestry industry, funding of \$1½ million over three years for forest works and the reintroduction of amendments to the renewable energy legislation to allow for wood biomass to benefit from the energy incentives available to other renewable energy sources. As far as Tasmanian forestry negotiations go, we recognised the efforts of the forestry industry, unions, timber communities and environmental NGOs in negotiating a way forward for the industry in Tasmania. It will be up to these organisations to work together and negotiate with both the Tasmanian government and the Federal government. The coalition has worked and will continue to work constructively with these groups through this process.

The Tasmanian crisis, however, does not reflect the timber industry throughout Australia and there are no calls for complete restructure as is suggested in the motion before the chamber. What the industry needs is not a complete restructure but certainty of access to resource and this can be achieved in a number of ways: stopping unnecessary lock-ups of forest, ensuring incentives are available for ongoing investment in the sector and increasing research and development. The coalition supports all of these measures and this was reflected in our election policy. We ask that the government do the same and ensure the industry, its businesses and workers have a positive future.

I do not just speak on this issue as the shadow minister for agriculture. The electorate of Calare is a very serious area of forestry, mostly plantation forestry. The forestry industry has, always has had and always will have the support of the coalition. It will have the support of the unions. The industry will have support because it does not just provide jobs; it provides an incredibly valuable resource that all of Australia needs.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! The time allocated for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

National Stroke Awareness Week

Debate resumed, on motion by **Ms Hall**:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) National Stroke Awareness Week was 13 to 19 September;
 - (b) sixty thousand people will suffer a stroke this year, that is, one stroke every 10 minutes;
 - (c) stroke is the second single greatest killer after coronary and a leading cause of disability in Australia;
 - (d) one in five people having a first stroke die within one month, and one in three die within one year;
 - (e) twenty per cent of all strokes occur in people under fifty five years of age;
 - (f) eighty eight per cent of stroke survivors live at home, and most have a disability;
 - (g) stroke kills more women than breast cancer;

- (h) stroke costs Australia \$2.14 billion a year, yet is preventable; and
- (i) education plays an important role in reducing the occurrence of stroke; and

(2) acknowledges:

- (a) the role played by the families and carers of stroke victims;
- (b) the work of the National Stroke Foundation;
- (c) the effectiveness of the FAST campaign; and
- (d) that prevention is the best cure.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (8.29 pm)—In speaking to my motion, I would like to acknowledge the fine work done by a number of health professionals and organisations that provide support to those people that suffer from stroke. National Stroke Awareness Week was held between 13 and 19 September. Due to the election, parliament was not sitting during that period, which was unfortunate since I had a number of constituents approach me and ask me if I could raise this issue in the House. In June last year I also raised the issue of stroke and the fine work that is being done by a number of organisations, particularly Stroke and Disability Information (Hunter) Inc. I will talk a little bit about them as I progress with my contribution.

The National Stroke Foundation is obviously the umbrella organisation for all stroke support and information groups throughout the country, and it has used the opportunity of Stroke Awareness Week to launch its new and interactive website. This website has been designed to assist Australians to identify and understand the warning signs and the causes of stroke. Central to the 2010 campaign was the ongoing promotion of the FAST test, which stands for face, arms, speech and time—a way of quickly and easily remembering the signs. People are advised to check the victim's face—has their mouth or one side of their face drooped. Then, can they lift both of their arms? Is their speech at all slurred; can people understand them? And time is critical—time is of the essence. Dialling 000, getting assistance immediately, is of the utmost importance. Quick, effective treatment will mean that the level of disability that a person has following a stroke is minimised.

A lot of people are mistaken about what a stroke is. It is not a heart attack. A lot of people think that a stroke is a heart attack, and that is an issue addressed by the education that has been done through National Stroke Awareness week and also by the foundation. Rather, a stroke is when the supply of blood to the brain is suddenly interrupted. That could be caused through a blockage in the artery to the brain, or it could be caused by a haemorrhage in the brain. The simple message is that those blood vessels to the brain are not working effectively, the blood supply is denied, and when that happens damage occurs to the brain. It can be a clot or plaque, or it can be an artery bursting.

The first part of understanding stroke is knowing what it is. The next important thing is for all Australians to understand how frequent an occurrence this is. On average in Australia there is a stroke every 10 minutes—every 10 minutes somebody suffers from a stroke. One in three people die within a year of having a stroke. Stroke kills more women than breast cancer. This is something that, once again, is not publicised enough. Almost one in five people who experience a stroke are under the age of 55, and more men are likely to suffer a stroke at a younger age.

In the motion I have put before the parliament I have listed some of the contributors to stroke—things such as obesity, smoking, alcohol consumption and other risky behaviours.

Those with diabetes also face an increased risk. If a person has more than one of these factors their likelihood of suffering a stroke is even greater. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of lifestyle, the importance of recognition, the importance of knowing what a stroke is and the importance of adhering to the FAST test advocated by the National Stroke Foundation.

In the time remaining I would like to talk a little about the Stroke and Disability Information service that operates in the Shortland electorate. It provides a service to people throughout the Hunter. I acknowledge the fine work of Dr Chris Levi, who came down and visited Parliament House I think earlier this year with a number of other doctors and professors who work in neurology. The work he has done and the work that continues to be done through the Hunter Medical Research Institute has been groundbreaking and has led to a minimising of the effects of stroke. That work is raising awareness of the science of stroke and of the development of the FAST test. They are also working with clinicians to ensure that they are very aware of the implications of stroke, the benefits of acting quickly and the recognition of stroke.

SADI provides a direct service to people in Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and the coalfields. It is a service provided by mail, email or telephone. They hold free seminars and workshops on stroke disability and health related issues. They have a lot of knowledge—they know about the health system; they know how people can access that system. If somebody has suffered a stroke or has a disability, they work with them to ensure that they can access all the resources that are available. They hold an annual Disability and Seniors Forum, they link people to community support, they support stroke recovery groups and they advocate on behalf of people who have suffered a stroke and been left with some disability. I would like particularly to acknowledge the work of the coordinator, Juliet Roosendaal, and the special projects officer, Judy Webb-Ryall. They have done fantastic work. They work very well with the community and they are totally dedicated to ensuring that the people of the Hunter are well taken care of and well informed about stroke.

A member of the board, Stuart Chalmers, suffered a stroke in his early forties and has a residual disability. But he has not let that stop him. He has been involved with Caves Beach surf club, he has supervised offenders on weekend detention and he constantly contributes to the community. He continues to contribute to the community through SADI. Stuart was awarded an OAM earlier this year for the work he has done in supporting people who have suffered a stroke and for working with those people in the community. I would also like to acknowledge the work of his very good friend Jim Folwell, who accompanies him on many of his visits to work with people in the community who have had strokes and to raise awareness of strokes. I commend this important motion to the House. *(Time expired)*

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (8.38 pm)—I thank the member for Shortland for moving this motion and bringing this important issue before the House. I remember that last year during National Stroke Awareness Week blood pressure checks were offered. I was just saying to my colleague the member for Forrest that I remember having one here. I thought at the time that I was doing alright but when I now look at my blood pressure it is apparently in the range of normal to high, so I think I have a bit of a vested interest in this subject.

Although my father passed away some years ago, back in the 1970s he had several minor strokes. You do not have to go very far before you realise that this is an insidious condition

that impacts many people. We realise that strokes, whether it is through killing or permanently disabling people, are a very serious issue. I suspect that a lot of people do not realise how serious the risk is.

When you look at the lifestyle factors involved, high blood pressure is right up there, along with smoking, diabetes, high cholesterol levels, drinking heavily, a high-fat, low-fibre diet and a lack of exercise. I think that for many of us here, and for many people in the community, these are things that we should certainly be aware of. The National Stroke Foundation has been doing a very good job in highlighting what the risks are but it is beholden on all of us to have a close look at ourselves, particularly once we get to mid-life—certainly beyond the 40s. I am sure I am the only one here in that category, since everyone else is much younger than me. I think you have to look in the mirror and do a bit of self-assessment because some of these are real issues. I will not go into my personal issues here, but I think there are a couple of issues that I should be aware of—diet and high blood pressure might be two of those but luckily none of the others.

We know that diabetes is a major issue in this country. This is particularly true for type 2 diabetes, which is more associated with lifestyle and affects a lot of people. When we wander around our electorates—or even look in the mirror—we might see people in this country who are particularly at risk. It comes back to education and taking a bit of personal responsibility. Looking at my own diet, I have decided in the last few days—not as a result of this motion—to take white bread and butter out of my diet. Unfortunately, there are a not too many vices left, but I am looking out for those sorts of risks. Now that we are back in parliament a lot more physical activity is required.

When you look at the symptoms, this is exactly where education needs to be focused, and a lot of Australians need to look closely at what is happening to them. The member for Shortland mentioned the FAST test. I will briefly run through that. These are the symptoms of a pending stroke: a numb or weak feeling in the face, arm or leg; trouble speaking or understanding; unexplained dizziness; blurred or poor vision in one or both eyes; loss of balance or an unexplained fall; difficulty swallowing; headaches or an unexplained change in the pattern of headaches; and confusion and unconsciousness. If a person has any of those problems it is right to call 000 immediately and get an ambulance for a trip to the hospital.

If Australians better understood that these symptoms are not to be ignored we would end up with a lot fewer people dying or being disabled as a result of strokes. When you look at the lifestyle factors that I mentioned before, you also look for the ages—certainly beyond the age of 40—and the family history of individuals. These are all risk factors that we need to be particularly aware of. Hopefully, education will mean that people do not need to learn too many lessons about this, but it does require people with these sorts of risk factors to be very self-critical. It is time to make some moves. It is time to ask: 'Do I exercise enough? What do I eat?' Other things to consider include making sure that you have a healthy weight for your height, get regular blood pressure testing by a doctor, choose a low-fat, high-fibre diet, and reduce or eliminate salt from your diet—that is a big ask, particularly in my case. These are all things that people need to examine.

If you are carrying a bit of weight, if you are not exercising, if you are drinking and smoking or if you have diabetes, you are really up there in the high-risk category. If you are aware of these things then it is beholden on you to take personal responsibility and start looking at

how you can change your life. A determined effort to stop smoking, as well as exercising regularly and watching your diet and, if it comes down to it, taking the medication necessary, under medical advice, to help control high blood pressure will reduce the risk of stroke.

This is most certainly a serious matter in this country. Despite the work of the National Stroke Foundation there are still too many Australians who accept the risks or do not know what the risks are and therefore they will face problems. Through government support for research and education and through the good work of the National Stroke Foundation and other support groups within the community, this is a way that more people can become aware of the problems they face. As we know, there is now a very high percentage of people in this country who are above optimum weight. I am not saying they are obese or morbidly obese but they certainly could do something to reduce their weight and thereby reduce their risks.

Fortunately most people in this place have turned away from smoking, though there are still some who smoke. Perhaps there are more who have turned away from heavy drinking. This is a very healthy place, of course. You are paragons of virtue, one and all, in this place. It is important that everyone understands what the risks are and understands that it is a matter of confronting one's own problems, of not waiting for the need to call 000 but deciding, 'I'm not living as good and healthy a life as I could. It's time for me to recognise that I am no longer the spring chicken I once was.' In my case, I adjusted my lifestyle to make sure that those risks were eliminated. We must all give ourselves the best chance of living a healthy lifestyle to keep ourselves alive for the sake of our families and to reduce the strain on the health system, which is always an important responsibility.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (8.48 pm)—About 60,000 Australians will suffer new or recurrent strokes this year. It is a tragedy. I commend the member for Shortland for bringing this motion before the House. One stroke is suffered every 10 minutes in Australia. It is a very serious problem for us. National Stroke Week ran from 13 September to 19 September. It was designed to raise awareness across communities throughout Australia about the challenges of fitness, health and vitality. I saw the FAST T-shirts being worn around my electorate. I was pleased to be present at the local Ipswich Stroke Support Group at their stall in Brassall shopping centre on 14 September. I am a very good friend of Peggy Frankish, who joined the Ipswich Stroke Support Group in 1997. She became the coordinator of the group in 1999 and has remained in that role in Ipswich ever since. Why did she do it? She did this because Peter, her husband of many, many years—a very fit and strong man; a strong Labor man; a unionist—had a stroke on 5 April 1996. This changed their lives forever. They have lived in their house on Whitehill Road in Eastern Heights in Ipswich for a long time. They have both been actively involved in the community for many years, but their lives changed forever after Peter's stroke. They had to change their house, their community involvement, their family life and their recreational pursuits as a result of the debilitating aspects and the after-effects of Peter's stroke.

Peggy is currently in the process of organising the Ipswich Stroke Support Group's annual Christmas lunch and she expects dozens and dozens of people to be there. I commend her work in Ipswich. I have a lot of affection and love for Peggy. She is the sort of person that every community needs—the fact that she happens to be a member of my branch of the ALP in Ipswich is a good indication. I am the president of the Raceview Flinders branch of the ALP and have been for a long time. Peggy's work has been recognised in Ipswich and she is

an ambassador for Ipswich. Each year the stroke group have an outing at Christmas to celebrate. They have Christmas in July and they attend seniors' outings throughout the year. They have a great rapport with the National Stroke Foundation. I commend the foundation for the wonderful work it does in raising awareness of this illness and injury and after-effects that people suffer from.

There is a common misconception that only older people are affected by stroke. However, about 20 per cent of stroke occurs in people under the age of 55 years. According to the figures, in the next 10 years more than 500,000 people will suffer a stroke. As Australia's population changes and as we get older, we can expect an increase in the statistics. I have urged all residents locally, on radio, in the media and in print, to understand the FAST test. It is easy to remember. Face: check their face. Has their mouth dropped? Arms: can they lift both arms? Speech: is their speech slurred? Do they understand you when you talk to them? Time: time is critical; remember to call 000. I urge everyone in my community: if you are recovering from stroke, call Peggy. Her phone number is well known in the community. It is (07)32815423. She is well known and she is there for you. Her group does great work in our community and I thank her for her many years of service to the Ipswich community and family.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (8.53 pm)—I am very pleased to speak on the motion by the member for Shortland. I understand the importance of raising awareness of stroke in Australia, as it is Australia's second-biggest killer and a leading cause of disability, costing the health system approximately \$2.14 billion each year. According to *The Western Australian Chief Health Officer's report 2010*, the second most common cardiovascular disease condition reported in Western Australia is stroke, and the consequences of stroke tend to be more severe in regional areas. For the period 1997 to 2006, in my electorate of Forrest in the south-west health region the mortality rates for stroke were significantly higher than the WA state rate. Given this, I take a very personal interest in spreading information and raising awareness of stroke.

On a personal note, I would like to tell the story of a close friend and mentor, one of my constituents, Mrs Jenny Fry, who suffered a stroke in 2009. Jenny was one of the lucky ones, if you can call it that. She is lucky that, firstly, she survived her stroke and, secondly, that she can still walk and, albeit with some difficulty and frustration, talk. On the day of her stroke, Jenny had spent time at numerous meetings, which is normal. When she arrived home she picked up her cat and tried to unlock the door to let herself in. For some reason she found it difficult to open the door, so she put the cat down to try to concentrate on opening the door. Once she had done this she realised she really did not feel well, so she walked through the house and lay on her bed. Jenny's husband, Peter, followed her into the bedroom and saw that she was not her normal self. He phoned 000 and an ambulance was sent immediately. This, though, was the last thing that Jenny remembered for two full days. Two whole days have been lost from her memory. She has no recollection of them and was not able to speak at all during that time. I know when I went to see her how frustrated she was.

After spending a fortnight in hospital, Jenny was allowed to return home, but to this day she endures the ongoing effects of her stroke. She finds it very difficult to communicate and is often unable to speak in the manner that she wants to or is used to. She was very articulate, very strong in her views and very good at letting everybody know what she thought. She now also suffers from TIAs, or mini strokes, where she has complete blackouts for a period of

time. Because of this, Jenny has voluntarily given up her drivers licence. Often she cannot remember the names of long-term friends and sadly she has lost her motivation for carrying out stitch work, a previous passion of hers. Despite these effects, Jenny has no problem doing her and her husband's banking and she is still a great card player. The one thing that I am truly grateful for is that she has not lost her sense of humour. On days when it is all a bit too much or when Jenny is having trouble with her speech, you can still always count on her having a smile and a laugh. This just shows her determination and positive attitude.

I am aware that there are insufficient services in the south-west of WA for those who have suffered a stroke. After her stroke, Jenny underwent speech therapy. There were no appropriate speech therapists available in the Bunbury region, so someone was sent from Perth. This leads me to the efforts of a local woman, Anne Jackson, who worked tirelessly for 12 months to establish the Bunbury and District Stroke Support Group. Unfortunately, Anne has since passed away, but the group continues to provide much appreciated support to stroke survivors, especially in regaining their self-confidence. The group also assists carers, family and friends to learn about adapting to the new situation that arises after strokes.

What worries me, and I am very pleased with this motion by the member for Shortland, is that Jenny Fry, a stroke sufferer herself, did not know how she could have prevented her stroke. Nor was she aware, until we notified her, of National Stroke Awareness Week 2010. If a former stroke sufferer is not aware of the work of the National Stroke Foundation, the effectiveness of the FAST campaign or the prevention of stroke then how can the average Australian be expected to know this information? That is why I, like the member for Shortland, will continue to raise the profile of National Stroke Awareness Week.

Stroke plays a major role in our society, and we have heard tonight how that will increase, whether we like it or not. I strongly support this motion by the member for Shortland in its aim to increase stroke awareness in Australia.

Ms O'NEILL (Robertson) (8.58 pm)—I thank the member for Shortland for raising this issue tonight in the Main Committee. As has already been discussed, it is a great national sadness that 60,000 people will suffer a stroke this year, which works out to one stroke every 10 minutes. It is of even greater sadness to know that this tragedy could be greatly diminished with increased education and more assistance to primary healthcare providers.

I join the member for Shortland in her praise of the National Stroke Foundation and their promotion of the FAST campaign to educate not just those most at risk but also families, friends and colleagues about warning signs and the quick reaction that can guarantee the best outcome. Ensuring that both young and old know to watch for the key signs of stroke will mean a quicker response time and less chance of sustained disability. Knowing the symptoms and noticing changes to the face, an inability of the sufferer to lift their arms, slurred speech or a lack of understanding of other speech will mean that grandchildren will recognise these signs if they are alone with grandparents, a wife will notice these changes in her husband and ensure they seek assistance as soon as possible, or perhaps a workmate or even a fellow shopper may be able to act FAST to actively enhance the health outcomes of people who are experiencing a stroke. I became aware of this program on the television only just last week. I was walking, I had my headphones on and I found it a very easy slogan to respond to and to recall: Face, Arms, Speech and a Timely response.

But early prevention initiatives are also really important. We do know that strokes can be prevented or at least the risk of them can be reduced. Contributing factors such as age or family history cannot be helped, but individuals can seek further assistance from their primary healthcare provider about lowering their cholesterol or blood pressure, which are both high-risk factors for strokes. Similarly, quitting smoking, while not always easy, is certainly a step towards reducing the risk of a stroke.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! It being 9 pm, the debate is interrupted. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Question proposed.

That grievances be noted.

Multiculturalism

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (9.00 pm)—My grievance tonight is about an issue that was once central to government policy and widely accepted across mainstream politics but has now been relegated to a marginal and contentious place in the political agenda. I speak, of course, about multiculturalism. It is with much regret that I note the growing reluctance of politicians and opinion leaders to embrace or to even discuss multiculturalism. It appears that this reluctance stems from perceived public hostility as gleaned from focus groups, internal polling, talkback radio and letters to newspaper editors. So-called opinion leaders are fast becoming opinion followers on this issue, with the result being a fast-diminishing circle of fear, distrust, diminished horizons and social exclusion. Now we are left to wonder how it is that an issue with strong bipartisan support for more than two decades suddenly becomes seen as contentious, divisive and relegated to the policy margins. How can a guiding principle that helped Australia embrace its diversity, build upon the strengths of its social capital and stand out as a positive model for the rest of the world suddenly be in the retracting state that we find it in today?

The end of a bipartisanship approach to multiculturalism can be traced to the days of the Howard government. Former Prime Minister John Howard never really supported the policy and, once elected to the leadership of this nation, ensured that his narrow-minded approach to many issues, including this one, prevailed. This is from a former Prime Minister who did not support reconciliation and who did not support the apology to the Stolen Generation, a former Prime Minister who used the excuse of avoiding a so-called ‘black armband’ view of history to justify his own white-washing of history. After 9/11, John Howard and his fellow travellers had a golden opportunity to feed on public fears and legitimise their rejection of multiculturalism in both the public discourse and the basis of government policy and programs. Unfortunately, after years of this conservative and narrow agenda, many politicians across the spectrum are nervous about reaffirming the once popular multicultural approach to public policy. This has led us to a situation where, in the 43rd Parliament, there is no clear specific place for multiculturalism amongst the executive portfolio responsibilities.

As Australians we should be proud of our multicultural society. We should be proud of the achievements of our multicultural policy and the way it has underpinned our cultural, social and administrative development. Embracing diversity, harmony, equity and access has been

central to the essence of the Australian identity. It is important that we recap some of the milestones which have marked the development of our multiculturalism policy. Successive governments, of both political persuasions, have promoted this policy, which has helped contribute immensely to our progress. In fact, it was the Whitlam government that in 1973 announced the universal admissions policy and an end to the White Australia policy. The then Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby, presented multiculturalism as the basis for migrant settlement, welfare and social cultural policy in a 1973 speech entitled 'A Multicultural Society for the Future.' This was the first time the term 'multicultural society' was used in an official Australian government policy statement. In 1974, the opposition spokesperson for labour and immigration, Malcolm Fraser, became the first person to invoke the term 'multiculturalism' in parliament and commenced the long tradition of bipartisan support for the concept. He said:

... the Liberal and Country Parties recognise that there is a need to overcome the complex problems confronting migrants, especially non-English speaking migrants, who already live in the multi-cultural society of today's Australia.

1975 also saw the Racial Discrimination Act passed, which aimed to implement Australia's international obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. As the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council, appointed by the Fraser government in 1977, concluded:

An acceptance of the multicultural nature of Australian society implies that government and established institutions acknowledge the validity of ethnic cultures and respond in terms of ethnic beliefs, values and customs ... [What] Australia should be working towards is not a oneness, but a unity, not a similarity, but a composite ...

Subsequent to that we saw the Galbally report, which identified multiculturalism as a key concept for the future development of government immigration policy. We also saw the provision of special services and programs—to ensure equality of access, such as the establishment of SBS, radio and translation services—that, and I quote:

... was much more than the provision of special services to minority ethnic groups ... [but rather a] way of looking at Australian society [that] involves living together with an awareness of cultural diversity.

Significant too was the Hawke government's introduction of an access and equity strategy, as well as the establishment of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

The initiatives and programs that were part and parcel of successive government policies reflect the fact that, since the introduction of a multicultural policy at the federal level, at every stage, with every parliamentary term, through every government, a lot of thought and commitment went into multiculturalism. Unfortunately, however, the bipartisanship that had long defined the framework of multiculturalism was effectively broken when the then opposition leader, John Howard, called for the abandonment of the term and a new focus on what he described as 'One Australia'. With the election of the Howard government in 1996 and the election of Pauline Hanson to the House of Representatives, the combination of the 'One Australia' catchcry and the 'One Nation' political party served as a dangerous and destructive catalyst to a shift in the public discourse. A national consensus that had long embraced and nurtured Australia's diverse culture, identity and democratic tradition was severely shaken. Lost was the openness and embracing nature of multiculturalism. Lost was the uniquely Australian narrative that had made this society the envy and role model of progressive societies around the globe. The language of multiculturalism was replaced by the language of assimila-

tion, and linked to the rhetoric of ‘national security’, as John Howard tried to reassert what he recently described, in a speech to the ultraconservative Heritage Foundation, as ‘the Anglophere’.

Three years ago this nation said it had had enough of Howard’s narrow and hostile view of the world. It is now time to also declare an end to the hostility to multiculturalism which has been allowed to drift into the public discourse without challenge for far too long. It is also time to again celebrate the wide-reaching contributions to Australian life that multicultural policy has achieved and reinvigorate its power to enhance the fabric of Australian society. Multiculturalism has served Australia well. Through various acts of parliament, programs and services, multiculturalism has ensured an active commitment to human rights, and access and equity, as well as helped to shape a positive contemporary Australian identity.

I am a child of post-Second World War immigration and an example and beneficiary of multiculturalism and its success, as are millions of other Australians. We have achieved what we have as a direct result of the policies and initiatives of successive Australian governments which were committed to multiculturalism. Our parents integrated and made a contribution while proudly maintaining their original languages, cultures and family ties. We maintained an active cultural inheritance. We are bilingual, even multilingual, and have used our abilities and experiences to enrich our Australian society. We reflect respect and pride in both ourselves and Australia.

I hope that at a federal government level we can look to the very positive example of my home state of Victoria. There has been strong and continuous bipartisan support for multiculturalism in Victoria. Successive premiers from Jeff Kennett to Steve Bracks and John Brumby have all been strong and proud advocates of multiculturalism. Both Victoria and New South Wales have enshrined the principles of multiculturalism in legislation. I believe the time has come for the federal parliament to follow suit.

Finally, I acknowledge and commend the excellent record of my colleague Laurie Ferguson, the member for Werriwa, who in his role in the previous parliament as Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services demonstrated a thorough understanding of contemporary multiculturalism and oversaw the excellent diversity and social cohesion program. I also look forward to the Gillard Labor government’s reaffirming and returning multiculturalism as a specific portfolio responsibility in the very near future. I look forward to working with the Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Kate Lundy, on this very important issue. This will reflect the reality of multiculturalism as a positive policy to offer social cohesion in Australia. This will help restore a program of positive action for integration, for diversity and for building social capital that in years past has been second to none.

We should not frame our policy towards multiculturalism with reference to national security as the basis on which our social policy is developed. Multiculturalism is not a policy debate in response to issues of national security. In fact, we must demonstrate our commitment to multiculturalism with pride, not rejection, and with action, not disregard, and we must not shy away from our responsibilities to continue to build a dynamic and inclusive society and once again be the best in the world. We must not turn our back on a policy that has been proved to work, a policy that ensures our commitment to embracing our diversity and, as such, promotes respect and equality among fellow Australians. *(Time expired)*

Multiculturalism
St Mary of the Cross
Hospitals

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (9.10 pm)—The speech of the member for Calwell on multiculturalism would be very well received by thousands of people across Victoria. I represent part of the Latrobe Valley and grew up in Koo Wee Rup with a diversity in ethnic groups in my schooling and with an appreciation of the importance of Greek associations, and I cannot help but think that the father of multiculturalism was Petro Georgiou, who was such a leader in the Fraser years for multiculturalism and SBS television—I could go on for ages. I am going to talk about him tomorrow. We do have a proud legacy, as the speech of the member for Calwell points out. I do not think your own people will return to you what you are expecting of them. I do not think they have the intestinal fortitude to do that in the current circumstances, and that should be a disappointment to the whole of the nation. I will not talk about my own side. I like to be in the moment, and that is why I wanted to respond to the address.

Today, Mary MacKillop, if you are Catholic, is also in the moment. The great legacy of Mary MacKillop is an intrinsically Australian one. It is a tapestry of inspiration sewn together with the steel needle of resilience and the binding thread of compassion. Mary's life story lights a spiritual beacon of hope for so many Australians, especially to many in my electorate of McMillan. I am not Catholic myself, but the Carmody family are a Catholic family and they are from Leongatha and have Mary's legacy threaded deep in the fabric of each of their lives. Australia's first saint is the reason Ed Carmody moved his family to Leongatha to establish Mary MacKillop College in 1986. In developing the school, Ed Carmody learned much about the life of Mary MacKillop and has followed her beatification and the process towards canonisation ever since. His wife, Jill, was educated by the Sisters of St Josephine in South Australia. Now running a successful travel business in Leongatha, Jill is leading a 15-day pilgrimage of Gippslanders to Rome and is also joined by their daughters Renae Littlejohn and Jacinta Johnston. I saw a photo of these two girls standing in front of Kevin Rudd in Rome. That will be in the Leongatha paper next week. I am sure Mr Rudd is looking forward to being on the front page of the Leongatha paper.

Renae is a talented artist, businesswoman and community leader in South Gippsland. In a text message to a friend at home, Renae wanted me to say that this is the experience of a lifetime for the Carmody family. Renae wrote that for her and her sister Jacinta:

Mary's words that 'we are all but travellers here' encourages us to take opportunities everyday of our lives.

Renae and Jacinta's text message read on:

Mary MacKillop's resilience to hardship and change help us to focus on accepting life's challenges, as Australian women, through the power of prayer and meditation.

These two talented Gippsland women add:

... we can focus on creating a better life for ourselves and those around us.

To Renae Littlejohn and her family, this is the true meaning of Mary MacKillop's legacy. I wish the Carmody family all the best for their trip. They have obviously been deeply inspired

by their journey already, as they lead a pilgrimage of Gippslanders on behalf of all Australians. Here's to the Carmody family.

In our nation we had our government stand up and say to our state governments, 'If you don't fix your hospitals, we are going to come in and ruthlessly rip the management of them off you, pay for 60 per cent of them and fix every hospital problem in Australia.' Mr Deputy Speaker, you are in an area that is growing like wildfire and so am I in the outer reaches of Melbourne. The growth is explosive and it is driving itself out past Pakenham all the way out to Moe and Newborough, right along a corridor. In the old days we had bush nursing hospitals at Bunyip, Koo Wee Rup, Pakenham and Berwick. They all had a hospital, as did Neerim South and Korumburra. Now they have closed all of them down; we do not have those hospitals anymore. We have Casey Hospital, but they will only take certain patients, because they are a bit busy now. We have a hospital out at Warragul that has 87,000 visits a year. They come from Moe in the east towards Warragul. They come from the south towards Warragul for the specialists. They come from Pakenham towards Warragul for clinical care and to have their babies. And they come a short way from the north on this side of the hills.

I need to mount an argument. I am not a person who abandons states rights. The Western Australian sitting beside me knows all about states rights, because you have wanted to secede a couple of times, haven't you? It would not surprise me if you tried again. Importantly, I do not like to cross what a state government has done or what they have planned to do or how they run their operations. I think it is wrong. I think we should invest in the states and have them make the decisions at the lower levels. You do not want a politician like Russell Broadbent coming along and saying: 'Because I have hospitals in Warragul, Leongatha, Wonthaggi and Latrobe, which is just out of my electorate, I need all the money for hospitals and health care for the whole of Victoria to come to my area. I am in a marginal seat and I have decided that is what I want.' I think that is totally inappropriate.

I think the bureaucrats working in the Victorian state government over the years have worked out a plan for the region of Gippsland and I think their plan is probably slightly contrary to what the locals believe they should have in their local area. Koo Wee Rup would love their hospital back. Bunyip would like their hospital back. Pakenham would like their hospital back. Neerim South would like their old hospital back. It is not going to happen unless in years to come they form part of the great metropolis of Melbourne and the area is more like the seat of Calwell than the seat of McMillan. There may be hospitals that close if that happens, but right now I have to mount an argument that I can put to the bureaucrats and to the state government that says: because of the explosive growth in this region, Warragul is the natural home to rebuild that hospital.

I am not sure that I have got these figures right, because I have not read the speech that was prepared for me, but it will give you the message. To rebuild the old hospital piece by piece over the next 20 years is going to cost \$297 million. To finish with it and move to a new site is going to cost \$243 million. The Independent from Tasmania stood up and said, 'I'll have a billion dollars for my hospital thank you very much, nation,' but when he was offered it he said, 'I don't really want that; I only want \$300 or \$400 or \$500 million.' Well there is a hospital in Gippsland that needs to be completely rebuilt to service that region appropriately for the demands that are going to be put upon that hospital in the next 10 years.

There is only one way to go here in my opinion. The state government can give it \$5 million a year and \$2 million at the moment to put in some more beds in the emergency wards, and then another \$3 million when they are under pressure to put in another 20 beds in the emergency wards. In 20 years time I will not be here but there will be a member for McMillan who will stand up and say: 'You know what we really need? We need a new hospital at Warragul.' I am old enough now to have been there and I have actually seen that happen, seen the wheel turn right around. It is going to take some brave person to say so. I encourage all of the players that are involved in planning for health care across this nation, from the Gold Coast to Pakenham and from Western Australia to the seat of Calwell, to ensure that this money is allocated appropriately for the benefit of the nation, the state and the community. I would argue in that process that Warragul regional health care and the Warragul Hospital should be a priority for the Victorian state government regardless of marginal seats. It is an 8-year plan costing \$243 million and 60 per cent of that should come from the federal government.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I thank the honourable member for McMillan. Before calling the member for Hindmarsh, I would refer the member for McMillan to the fact that I represent the Sunshine Coast and not the Gold Coast, where he holidays so often.

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (9.21 pm)—I rise to speak on the subject of the Murray-Darling Basin and the changes that have been evident for some years now, are evident today and will inevitably continue in one form or another into the future. We have all heard the sounds of concern emanating from certain communities over the past week, and naturally such sounds are distressing to all who hear them, even to those of us in the coastal cities outside the basin. Some of the statements I have heard have been thoughtful and based on consideration of the guide to the draft Murray-Darling Basin plan released a little over a week ago. Other statements have been expressions of concern or fear about the worst possible scenarios, outcomes which in numerous cases nobody wants or even proposes. It is clear that some concern and fear is based on misunderstandings as to what is happening and what the government has already made very clear.

I rise this evening to take the opportunity to say one thing above all others, which is to urge calm and the suspension of one's conclusions as to what is eventually going to be in a parliament-approved plan some two years down the track. I would urge all interested parties and individuals to take time to let the information that is being put together and spread throughout our communities become clear, for its meaning to be elaborated on and for the implications in real terms to sink in.

I think it is great that people throughout the basin have started and will continue to put forward their views. And it is great that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority is out there in public—we saw that this week on news reports—speaking with people and listening to what people in the communities are saying. Before any of us firms our beliefs of what will happen across the basin through the decade ahead and before any of us firms our views on what positions we must take against anything the authority might put in one of its guides or draft plans, let us share our understanding and our views without malice or aggression or fear of predetermined visions of apocalyptic scenarios.

The basin and its communities have suffered a lot over the last decade—for more than a decade in fact. Changes felt in the last 10 years had their genesis in the 1970s. That was when much change was put in motion through the increase in diversions for irrigation purposes springing from fewer than 8,000 gigalitres per year to 11,000 or more in the late 1990s, which was a 40-odd per cent increase in the draw-down from the rivers. This increase in the volume of water extracted from the river system combined with climatic variability, which is such a feature of Australia, resulted in the decade of pain and distress for all concerned. There was distress and death of the native vegetation that relied on the river system, distress and death for the wildlife that also lived in and around the basin and distress caused by the reduction in the quality of water that was available to people and, of course, in the total volume of water that was available.

Even the very soil in some of our billabongs and which underlays our Lower Lakes underwent change, turning bright yellow with the activation of its lethal acidic properties. The river system was becoming a toxic wasteland degree by degree, month after month and year after year. It was not just the drought of the last decade that caused the macabre deterioration. In 2001, before the drought had really taken hold, we saw a toxic blue-green algae outbreak in the Darling River that extended for more than a thousand kilometres. A thousand kilometres is like a river running all the way between Melbourne and Adelaide full from beginning to end with a toxic green sludge. The outbreak was largely caused by river regulation.

As the drought took hold we had similar shocking evidence of imbalance and distress. Everyone in this nation and everyone across the states and across the political divide recognised that change was required to restore balance in our river system. It was not simply a matter of waiting for rain—even though the rain did come—as if the breaking of the drought would make everything as it should be. It was clearly recognised that remedial action was absolutely necessary.

In 2004 we had the Living Murray initiative and in 2007 we had the proposal for increasing environmental water through both the buyback of licences and efficiency improvements. This is the package of reforms which the Commonwealth has continued with from Liberal to Labor governments. This is the package of reforms that has been supported by the public, who have wanted everyone concerned to do more with the water and who have wanted more and better outcomes with the water that has been available.

Basin communities are reliant on a healthy river system, and the key word is ‘healthy’. If the river system decays, the communities that rely on those rivers will also decay, whether it be in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, the Riverland in South Australia or around the Lower Lakes. Such communities, who screamed out for remedial action and were desperate for vastly more environmental water than was available, know and must surely realise the desperate need we have for large-scale reallocation of water resources.

Just as the communities around the Lower Lakes foresaw their own demise due to over-extraction, some communities now fear for their future as a result of insufficient extraction. Nobody wants any regional communities to suffer a decline as a result of over- or under-extraction. This is the balance the government is committed to re-establishing. This is the balance that all of us in this place want to ensure that we are committed to re-establishing. We all want healthy, vibrant and economically sound and sustainable basin communities to continue

to thrive. For this to occur into the future, available water must be shared more equitably and the balance must be restored.

Over the past week people have expressed concerns that they are going to lose what water entitlements they have. It is a genuine concern. This, however, is not proposed. There will be no compulsory acquisitions. What is proposed is for the government to continue to buy licences from the willing sellers, just as it has been doing over the past three years. Nobody—and I repeat nobody—will be forced to relinquish their water rights. Nobody from government has even suggested that they might.

People have expressed concern that the future plan will decrease their community's water by up to 45 per cent. The reduction applies to the volume of water extracted, not to the total water supply. In some cases this is highly significant. Where a community only extracts 20 per cent of its total irrigation water a 45 per cent reduction through voluntary sales of licences will reduce the community's total water supply by a much more modest nine per cent. Importantly, it has been clarified that the licence buybacks that have already happened will be included in the proposed reductions, as they may eventually end up in the plan.

We have already had around 1,000 gigalitres of licences purchased by the government, licences held by the environmental water holder, to give back the balance for the health of the river system. This is a highly substantial proportion of the total volume of reduced irrigation licences. Of course, we all look to further efficiency gains on farm and off farm, which will make a significant contribution towards the total volume of water required.

Each of these points and more, each of the fears welling up in us from time to time, each of the questions raised and the variables which underpin them, will continue to receive attention and be advanced towards a resolution over the next 12 months or more in the development of the plan as it will be put to the parliament. We have time before us to speak of our thoughts, of our fears and of our concerns. We also have plenty of time to listen and to question, and to listen some more. Each of us, irrespective of which community we are a member of, has enough time to pursue a good, fair and sustainable solution to the imbalance in the basin, a balanced solution that will preserve the most of what we have and cherish. Again, I say that over the next few months there will be plenty of opportunity for all of us to discuss the plan, to have a level head and to ensure that we get the best solution and the best outcome for our communities. *(Time expired)*

Swan Electorate: Canning Bridge Precinct Development

Mr IRONS (Swan) (9.31 pm)—I note the member for Hindmarsh was speaking about taking the time to listen, making sure that everyone has a chance to put something forward, and that is what I rise to speak about. I rise to express disappointment on behalf of my constituents and ratepayers of Swan who reside in South Perth. I also note that many residents from Tangney are unhappy with the direction the City of Melville has taken on the issue I am going to talk about and they have formed a Melville action group.

The decision being taken is to approve the draft for a high-density, high-rise planning regime in the Canning Bridge precinct of Perth. There has been widespread and almost unanimous opposition from local residents in both council areas and I must admit I have not had one resident approach me and say, 'This is a fantastic idea.' The draft Canning Bridge Precinct Vision document, which outlines this plan, defines a Canning Bridge precinct as an 800-

metre radius centred on the Canning Bridge train station. On the Swan electorate side of the bridge an arbitrary circle has been drawn demarking the area to which this regime will apply. Information my office has received from the Western Australian Planning Commission suggests that this will lead to 1,600 more dwellings on the South Perth side of the precinct by 2031. It has been met with a resounding opposition from local residents. Worryingly, it has now been endorsed by the City of South Perth in the face of this opposition. The other council involved, the City of Melville, is set to vote on this issue tomorrow night.

I want to run through how this process has developed into such a contentious issue in my community. When this issue first surfaced earlier in the year, people were concerned about the lack of consultation and the lack of information available. The residents are not antidevelopment but have felt that, through the whole consultation process, they have not been listened to. I have been to a few of the meetings and I must admit I also felt they were not being listened to.

The WAPC issued the draft for comment and subsequently extended the consultation period timeframe, which gave some time for the local residents to raise their objections and for a full public reaction to emerge. Public meetings were held, including one down by the Canning Bridge, which I attended with the local state member, John McGrath, MLA for South Perth—a hard-working local member—and Janet Woollard, an Independent MLA who listens to her constituents and understands their needs. It was clear at this meeting that there was an overwhelming opposition to this proposal in the community. Many of the main concerns from local residents centred on the proposed tower block developments. The draft plan foreshadows buildings potentially 20 storeys high which would undoubtedly come to dominate the skyline and the surrounding areas. In a submission one local resident said:

It's ironic that one of the very things (the leafy quiet feeling of community) that draws people to live in Applecross will be eroded by it and eventually disappear altogether under inexorable encroachments of successive high-rise developments. Witness what happened to South Perth.

The same sentiment has been echoed by many residents of Como. There is a palpable fear in the community that these tower blocks will change the nature of what are quiet and indeed leafy suburbs, which is what attracted people to these areas in the first place. There has also been anger over the inevitable destruction of green space. The Como Beach action group raised concerns about the Olives Reserve, the only park on the river side of the Canning Highway for nearby residents. The group also raised concerns about the potential use of green land at the end of Melville Parade.

Other concerns included the possibility of compulsory acquisition of properties, impact of noise pollution and devaluation of properties. One resident summed up his views about the plan as more traffic, more congestion, parking issues, reduced street parking, overshadowing, less trees, more noise, more pollution, extensive zone of high rise buildings, existing views impacted, reduced privacy and overlooking issues, lack of public open space at ground level and security concerns.

After making detailed submissions and attending public meetings and lengthy consultation sessions, local residents would have hoped to have been heard. However, it is the inability of the council or the Planning Commission to take any of these points on board that has angered the local residents. This has led some local residents to declare it is a sham consultation process. A submission from one local resident declares:

This section states that the visions have been identified through 'extensive community and stakeholder consultation'. Many of these dot points however were not discussed within nor arrived at through the conducted community forums and it is not clear from where many of the points have eventuated. A number of points were put forward by the consultant running the workshop sessions as his own personal thoughts and were not put forward from the community nor supported by those in attendance.

Another submission states:

... we do not recognise the community forums held or sponsored by the South Perth City Council and other governments to date as legitimate community consultations for the following reasons:

1. Material information that would significantly affect residents and owners—including but not limited to the bus ramp at Cassey Street, the rezoning of heights to 10 storeys, and the rezoning plan leading to the elimination of many existing river views—was known and foreseen as a possibility by the governments before and during the community forums.
2. That this material information was either vaguely presented, downplayed or not presented at all by the governments in their published documents or in the community forums.
3. That this material information was then used by the governments and government contractors as the basis for the first published vision in a forum(s) that deliberately excluded community participants.

One of the local councillors has responded to concerns about consultation by publishing a diary of consultation events on his Green for Tangney blog. Yes, that councillor stood for the Greens in the federal electorate of Tangney at the August election. I feel this process and the council have been politicised by his lack of independence. Anyway, his blog goes like this:

My diary of consultation around Canning Bridge transport and other issues includes the following events:

21 July 2008: initial presentation by GHD, joint events for the city of South Perth and Melville citizens and the south of Perth yacht club two sessions—midday and evening;

29 July 2008: council briefing, city of Perth with GHD councillors and staff;

11 August 2008: community engagement sessions—one at South Perth senior citizens for South Perth residents within the 800 metre zone.

These are just samples of what is on his blog.

In the end this councillor concludes that there have been almost 40 consultation events. However, one of the residents has said that you can hold 400 public consultation events and it would be pointless unless you listen to what the people are actually saying to you. Another area in the fanciful concept of this draft is about TODs. A TOD is a transit oriented development, but a submission by a resident about the draft on TODs notes:

Section 1.3 of the draft is titled 'Principles' yet the section sets out 'key elements of TOD' The concluding paragraph states, "This study will consider ways in which the above principles of TOD can be delivered effectively and in a timely manner to the Canning Bridge precinct". Transit oriented development planning is a theoretical exercise which cannot simply draw out the main elements of the approach and apply them on the ground in a one-size-fits-all scenario guaranteed to arrive at success, particularly from one country and one culture to another. The section of the element principles is only a vague outline of the details of design within a TOD and is far too broad and non-specific to be applied literally. The component that is most likely to result in a successful TOD is the connectivity in the area, particularly between the identified elements. This aspect has not even been identified. In addition, the principles of TOD have not been applied in any way that is cognizant of what is actually occurring on the ground and in the existing areas".

I would like again to point out that the residents opposing this plan are not antiprogress. Stakeholders commended the recommendation for a southbound Manning Road on-ramp. This is an issue I have spoken about many times in this parliament and during the campaign I was pleased to be able to launch a Liberal election commitment of \$10 million towards the construction of this long overdue piece of infrastructure. It was interesting to note that the Labor candidate also called for this infrastructure to be implemented as well but got no commitment for it. However, we were not given the opportunity to form a government and sadly will not have the opportunity to help build the Manning Road on-ramp for the people in that area.

In conclusion, concerned residents have founded two pressure groups: the Como Action Group and a Melville action group. I applaud them for this. As with other action groups, sometimes councils need to understand the passion of these people for their suburbs. The consultation process should actually achieve some results and not just 'I hear and I feel what you are saying' and then totally ignore the input of the people who voted for them in the first place. These groups are talking about running candidates against the sitting councillors at the next election in 12 months. I would encourage them to do that as part of the Australian democratic process and would warn those particular councillors who are not listening to their local residents that they do so at their own peril. The fact that they can do it is what is great about our country.

In this spirit I call upon the planning commission and the local councillors to listen to the people, shelve this plan, conduct a real process in consultation with the community and embrace the notions for how they want to live. I would like to thank those residents who have contributed and helped me put this speech together with their submissions.

Asylum Seekers

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (9.41 pm)—My grievance is with the way in which the immigration debate in this country has been boiled down to a simple tally of boat arrivals. I live in one of the most diverse parts of Sydney. I live in Parramatta, right in the geographic centre of Sydney, in a community which has come from the world and settled where I live. Quite a significant number of refugees, over many decades, have settled there as well. I know them well. I know them to be great contributors. I know more recent arrivals and I know their stories. So when I talk about boat arrivals today—even though I am not going to refer so much to the personal stories, I am going to talk about the numbers and the problems around the world—I do want to remind the House that we are talking about people who have travelled terrible paths of fear, loss of family, violence and sometimes torture before finding themselves on a leaky boat seeking a safe place to live.

I am concerned in particular at the growing level of fear of what is a relatively small number of arrivals on Australian soil. I would like, in the time I have here, to inject some facts, some evidence and some relevance into this debate. Australia in 2009 had a net migration of around 160,000 people; the humanitarian stream was about 12,000 and of those about 2,000 arrived by boat. So the number of people arriving by boat was under one per cent of total migration. Yet these people had about 100 per cent of the public's and media's attention. Sections of our community respond with such fear at a relatively small number of boats, but I just want to point out that many other places in the world find themselves in considerably different circumstances. I wonder how we would respond in Australia if, like Pakistan, we were hosting

1.8 million refugees, mostly from Afghanistan. We had 2,000 arrivals in 2009 by boat. Pakistan had 1.8 million people flocking across its border. Now that is a refugee problem. Again, in saying that, I am well aware that it is the refugees themselves who face the greatest problem.

In 2009 Syria was host to 1.1 million Iraqi refugees, making it the second-largest refugee host country in the world. Iran hosted 980,000 refugees—large by our scale but small for Iran which earlier, with an open border policy, hosted close to five million Afghans. Jordan hosted 500,000 refugees; Chad, 330,000; Tanzania, 321,000; and 320,000 refugees flocked across Kenya's border. In that year 2,000 people arrived by boat on Australian shores.

The economic and social load from hosting refugees is overwhelmingly carried by developing countries, who hosted nearly 80 per cent of the global refugee population. In the Asia-Pacific region, our neighbours host around one-third of all the refugees in the world. In 2009 just 1.6 per cent of the asylum applications received across the 44 industrialised nations came to Australia. We ranked 16th overall and 21st on a per capita basis. Overwhelmingly, the burden of the world refugee problem is hosted by developing and Third World countries. A relatively small percentage of refugees go to industrialised nations, and Australia is well down the list in terms of how many we receive.

If you have listened to some of the debate recently, you might believe that somehow the number of boats that arrive in Australia is simply a matter of what happens within Australia. I would like to point out that the number of refugees in the world rises and falls with conflict. At the moment, there are around 45 million displaced people around the world, and some think that is a profoundly understated number. About 15 million of those people are recognised as refugees, and just one per cent of those refugees will be resettled in a third country. In about mid-2005, there was a relative outbreak of peace and the number of refugees in the world reduced from about 15 million to eight million. Eight and a half million Afghans went home in that year. The boats stopped arriving in Australia, but they also stopped arriving in Canada, Europe and the US. To suggest that boats stopped arriving in the US because of changes in Australia's immigration law is clearly nonsense. Boats stopped arriving in countries such as the US, Canada and Australia because they stopped leaving places of conflict.

When we talk about people smugglers, we are of course talking about criminals. They are people who break laws; they do not necessarily sit down every day and study them. They do not care that the boat floats, so I am sure they do not have a particular care about the quality of life of their customer—or victim, depending on how you see it—when they arrive in their country of destination. Again, Australia and the other countries around the world receive more refugees, we receive more boats, when war breaks out, and those numbers decline as peace breaks out. Asylum seeker numbers go up and down for all sorts of reasons to do with world circumstances.

Asylum seeker numbers have gone up and down during the terms of individual governments. After the introduction of temporary protection visas, for example—which are hailed as a great reducer of arrivals—arrivals did not decrease. In 1998 there were 200 arrivals on 17 boats. Following the introduction of TPVs, by late 2001 the number of maritime arrivals had increased to 5,516. So the number went up from 200 to 5,516 in the first three years after the introduction of the temporary protection visas. I am not suggesting that the numbers went up because of the temporary protection visas; it is simply that you do not stop a war in a foreign

country, and you do not stop people fleeing persecution, fear and violence, with an immigration regulation in Australia. You stop it with peace, not with immigration regulation.

In the two years after the introduction of TPVs, there were 8,455 irregular arrivals on 94 boats. Between 1999 and 2007, over 10,000 of those people were granted TPVs and 90 per cent of them were eventually granted permanent visas. Only three per cent of those people granted temporary protection visas departed Australia. But TPVs also did not allow for family reunions or enable refugees to travel freely, and there is anecdotal evidence that women and children who had not seen their partners and fathers made the dangerous journey to Australia by boat because it was the only way they could actually see their family members.

The other myth is that offshore processing works, where Australia intercepts a boat and transfers it to an Australian-run processing centre elsewhere, most recently in Nauru. Again, the boats declined between 2001 and 2006 right across the world. Again, it is nonsense to assume that the number of boats travelling to the US and Canada declined because Australia processed its asylum seekers in Nauru. The boats stopped coming because 8½ million Afghans went home and there was a decrease in the number of refugees around the world from around 15 million to eight million in those years.

By the way, in those years when the Pacific solution was seen as the answer, Denmark experienced its lowest level of asylum seeker applications since 1983, New Zealand recorded its lowest level since 1998, the United Kingdom recorded its lowest level since 1989, Norway recorded its lowest level since 1997, France recorded its lowest level since 1998 and the UNHCR suggested that the big fall in asylum seekers was due to improved conditions in some source countries, such as the easing of conflicts in Afghanistan and the Balkans. In those years, Canada and the United States experienced a 47 per cent decrease in asylum seekers and Europe experienced a 54 per cent decrease. In other words, many countries all around the world who did not have a Pacific solution experienced the same kind of a reduction in numbers that Australia experienced.

There is considerable fear in my community and in communities across the country of people arriving by boat. I hope that today, in the short period of time I have had, I have helped explain a little bit about what drives people to flee their own communities and seek safe haven here. Only one per cent of refugees around the world will be resettled in third countries. The queue is very, very long for people to find a way into a safe country. I wish all those who arrive here well. I wish them happy and safe futures. (*Time expired*)

Newcastle City Centre Renewal

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (9.51 pm)—I rise tonight to raise a grievance about the development of the Hunter region. The Hunter region is home to nearly 600,000 people. We are a region of opportunity, a region of growth and a region of great quality of life. While Newcastle is home to the largest coal-exporting harbour in the world, the knowledge based sector is the largest employer in the Hunter region, employing almost twice as many locals as the goods-producing sector. We are a strongly diversified economy and we are building competitive advantages in tourism, defence, health and professional services.

If we want to advance the Hunter, then we need to advance Newcastle. The centrepiece of the Hunter region is the Newcastle central business district. I have got to say it is a pretty unimposing centrepiece. The derelict buildings, empty shopfronts and graffiti vandalism send

the wrong message about Newcastle to locals and tourists alike, casting a gloom on our identity as Novocastrians. Vandalism, graffiti and crime are in part a result of a lack of people presence in that part of town. The offenders get away with it because no-one sees them committing the crime.

In 2008 the New South Wales government commissioned the Hunter Development Corporation, or HDC, to investigate ways to rejuvenate Newcastle over the next 20 years. I commend the New South Wales government for commissioning this report, but commissioning a report is only the first step. There is no point in commissioning a report if you are not prepared to act on it. In May 2009 the HDC report, *Newcastle City Centre Renewal*, was released; but, unfortunately, since then the report has become caught in the cogs of a dysfunctional Labor government. The HDC report outlines a clear strategy for renewing the Newcastle city centre, including the relocation of 60,000 square metres of University of Newcastle facilities to the city, the relocation of state and federal justice facilities to the city's civic precinct and an improved public transport system that involves a new station at Wickham and investment in the city's public domain. For more than 18 months, HDC's researched report has been bogged down in bureaucracy. I acknowledge that the report is not without controversy. There are some who would like the Newcastle CBD to stay as it is. Perhaps the federal member for Newcastle is one of those people. I think the people of her electorate deserve to know where she stands on this issue, and I also think the people of her electorate deserve a member who will stand up and fight for a better Newcastle. But, unfortunately, the federal member for Newcastle is about as interested in the revitalisation of the Newcastle CBD as the Knights are in playing in the AFL. Strong leadership is about making tough decisions.

On any weekend or summer night the foreshore is packed with people. It is positively vibrant, yet Hunter Street and the mall resemble a ghost town. If you fired the cannon at Fort Scratchley down Hunter Street you would be lucky to hit anyone. If 20 years ago, despite a strong party opposition, Mikhail Gorbachev could tear down the Berlin Wall between east and west, what excuse do our governments have for failing to lift the rail line 'iron curtain' that keeps Newcastle from showing its full potential? The experts commissioned by the government 'strongly recommended a transport solution based on withdrawing the rail line to Wickham, developing a new terminus, preferably west of Stewart Avenue, and better serving the CBD by a flexible bus system'. If the government was not going to listen then, why waste taxpayers' money commissioning their advice? The government report states:

The future of Newcastle CBD will not be determined by any one issue, trend or project.

For many years, however, the future of the CBD has for many groups been strongly tied to the future of the heavy rail line. I agree that the future of the Newcastle CBD will not be determined by any one issue, trend or project; however, the rejuvenation of Newcastle's transport infrastructure will undoubtedly be a catalyst project for the development of our region. Let me be clear, my preferred option is for a light rail transport system, which could extend all the way to Maitland. But the advisers commissioned by the New South Wales government say that this is not yet feasible and that a flexible bus system is the best current option. While I am sensitive to the needs of regular rail users, I believe this is a logical compromise.

Research by the Hunter Valley Research Foundation found that the trend in our region over the last 20 years has been for a steady decline in public transport usage, with the number of people travelling to work by public transport falling from seven per cent in 1981 to two per

cent in 2001. We can reverse this trend, of course, but let us be clear about which is the chicken and which is the egg. When it was first built over 150 years ago, the Newcastle rail line served a great purpose as a freight line from the harbour. Indeed, the Newcastle rail line has been an important part of the history of our city. But just as its presence was a catalyst for the growth and development of our region in the past, its absence will be a greater catalyst for growth and development in our region in the future. It is time to lift the iron curtain that has been keeping Newcastle from showing its full potential.

Newcastle is a harbour-front city, with a CBD which may as well be landlocked 200 kilometres from the coast. We must take better advantage of our spectacular harbour. We need to open up from the foreshore to the CBD, removing the physical barriers and providing opportunity. This is why I support the Newcastle heavy rail line terminating west of Stewart Avenue. I support the HDC proposal for the former rail corridor to take on a park-like character, integrating with the foreshore park and reconnecting the city with 15 new links to the harbour. This is not about redeveloping the land or the airspace above the rail line. If executed correctly, this proposal is the ultimate way to kick-start the revitalisation of our languishing CBD. Action is needed to arrest the vacant sites appearing around Newcastle. Action is needed to stop the exodus of businesses like David Jones. We need to attract a critical mass back to the Newcastle CBD; it is only with a critical mass that we can stop the exodus of businesses.

The cost of indecision is already too great. We have already seen the New South Wales government purchase the old post office site. Yes, in this particular transaction there were other factors at play such as vandalism, graffiti and deterioration—all due in part to a lack of people in the area. But a Newcastle CBD bustling with energy would have provided more options to investors to make something of what is one of the most stunning buildings in our region. When the GPT Group announced in August that it was abandoning its proposed \$600 million redevelopment in the CBD, CEO Michael Cameron said:

... a lack of commitment from the Government to fully endorse the Hunter Development Corporation Report and ensure the renewal of the Newcastle city centre has led to GPT'S decision to exit its Newcastle land holdings.

That lack of commitment by the New South Wales government has cost our region thousands of jobs. It has started an avalanche. We cannot afford to keep shooing away investment like it is a misbehaving dog. Last week, I wrote in the *Newcastle Herald* that there has been too much fence-sitting on this debate already. After becoming the shadow minister for regional development, I looked in my backyard and saw an issue critical to the development of the region in which I live. What did I see? I saw too many cautious comments and closed consultations by political leaders. It is political cowardice, and it must end. We cannot wait endlessly for more reports. All three levels of government of all political persuasions must commit to the Newcastle City Centre renewal. Last Thursday, on 14 October, the Minister for the Hunter, Jodie McKay said:

I have indicated my strong preference for the removal of the heavy rail line into Newcastle to drive forward urban renewal.

Well, then, why isn't the minister acting on her 'strong preference'? After all, she is the Minister for the Hunter and the Minister for Tourism. It is a remarkable insight into the workings of the New South Wales Labor government when we see a minister sitting on her own agenda

for more than 18 months. According to analysis by the Hunter Business Chamber, the Hunter region is getting less than its fair share from the New South Wales state Labor government. With nine per cent of the state's population in the Hunter region, it receives less than five per cent of the allocations for major works. The Hunter region produces 33 per cent of New South Wales exports and 20 per cent of the \$400 billion New South Wales economy. Yet, since 2000, the Hunter has received less than five per cent of annual New South Wales government infrastructure expenditure, and the region continues to figure poorly in New South Wales government infrastructure plans.

Last Friday, the Leader of the Opposition in the New South Wales parliament, Barry O'Farrell, committed to a new Hunter infrastructure board that will be empowered to make local decisions. A local infrastructure board is a great proposal as long as it is properly funded and properly allocated. I want to see a fair share of funding come back to the Hunter region. I think it is time that state and federal governments were committed to the same.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I congratulate the honourable member for Paterson. I was going to give him indulgence to finish his 10 minutes, but his speediness made that indulgence unnecessary.

Main Committee adjourned at 10.00 pm