

ISSUE 45, AUGUST 2012

# ABOUT THE HOUSE

## OVER EXPOSED

Protecting our  
innocence



**OUT OF THE SHADOWS**  
Health time bomb

**NET BENEFIT**  
Wealth in the water

## MORE DETAIL NEEDED ON WATER PLAN

A parliamentary committee looking into the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Plan wants a better explanation of how the federal government will acquire the water it wants to return to the river system, before parliament considers any legislation on the plan.

At the end of May, the Department of Sustainability told the House of Representatives Regional Australia Committee that of the 2,750 gigitalitres required, 1,480 gigitalitres were already under contract.

The committee believes the public needs much more information on how the proposed plan will acquire the

remaining 1,270 gigitalitres needed to meet the proposed target.

Committee chair Tony Windsor (New England, NSW) told ABC Radio the government and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority should make it very clear how they intend to put together their water recovery plan. "So that not only is it feasible for that water to be delivered to some of the environmental icon sites and some of the productive uses, but the community actually understands how that water would be delivered," Mr Windsor said.

The committee's report is available at [www.aph.gov.au/ra](http://www.aph.gov.au/ra) or for more information email [ra.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:ra.reps@aph.gov.au) or phone (02) 6277 4162.



DATA FLOW: *More information sought on Murray-Darling*

THINKSTOCK



CYBER SAY: *Survey for seniors*

## CYBER SURVEY FOR SENIORS

People aged 55 and over have been invited to take part in the Australian seniors' cyber-safety survey which aims to find out what older Australians think about online services.

The anonymous survey, being conducted by federal parliament's Cyber-Safety Committee, gives senior Australians the chance to share their online experiences and help the government understand how they can make the internet more accessible and safer for seniors.

Committee chair Senator Catryna Bilyk (Tas) said the committee is investigating the best means to reduce the risks, enhance consumer protection and build online confidence for older internet users.

"The internet has opened a whole new way of communicating and removed

barriers of time, distance and physical limitation," Senator Bilyk said.

"It is a matter of equity that older Australians are confident to enjoy the ease of digital communication, and so participate more fully in society."

The survey, which only takes about 10 minutes to complete, has attracted significant interest to date and Senator Bilyk encourages more senior Australians to have their say.

To take the survey visit [www.aph.gov.au/jscc](http://www.aph.gov.au/jscc) or for more information email [jscc@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscc@aph.gov.au) or phone (02) 6277 4202.



JUST A MINUTE: *Taking time out for democracy*

## DEMOCRACY HAS ITS DAY

Nations around the world will celebrate the universal right of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems on International Day of Democracy, September 15.

The United Nations founded the International Day of Democracy in 2007 to promote the values of freedom, respect for human rights and the principle of holding periodic and genuine elections by universal suffrage which are the essential elements of democracy.

Speaking on International Day of Democracy 2011, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reaffirmed that democracy does not belong to any country or region but rather is the right of all people to fully participate in all aspects of their lives.

"On this International Day of Democracy, let us redouble our efforts to support all people, in particular the young – the drivers of this year's momentous events – in making democracy a working reality," Mr Ban said.

"This day belongs to them. Let us honour their commitment to a lifelong journey in democracy."

So this September 15 why not take 60 seconds to think about what democracy means to you.

For more information about International Day of Democracy events visit: [www.un.org/en/events/democracyday/events.html](http://www.un.org/en/events/democracyday/events.html)



# ABOUT THE HOUSE

ISSUE 45, AUGUST 2012

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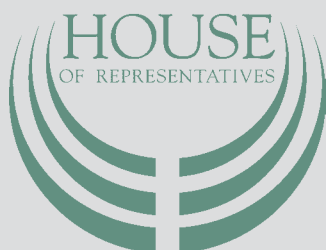
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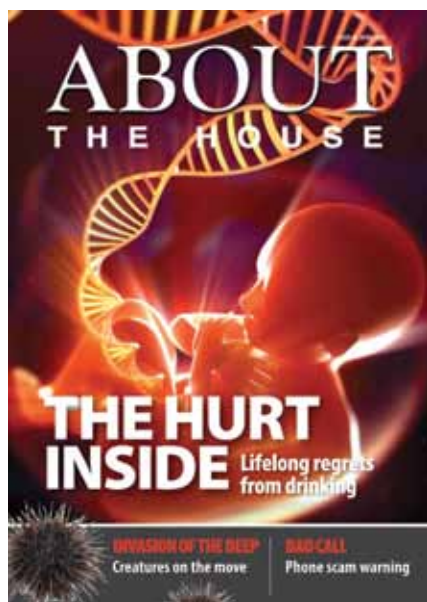
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Please include name, address and daytime contact details. Letters may be edited to fit available space and for clarity.



PACIFIC PARTNERSHIPS: Kiribati Room opening at the ACT Legislative Assembly

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE PACIFIC

Increased vocational education is a key to improving the employment prospects of young people in the Pacific region, according to Kiribati Education Minister Maere Tekanene.

Praising Australia for its commitment to improving education in Pacific island countries, Mrs Tekanene said vocational training is providing more opportunities for self-employment and innovation, giving greater access to job opportunities and stimulating the economy.

"If there is more vocational training, students will be more employable," she said.

Mrs Tekanene was visiting the ACT Legislative Assembly as part of a Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships program.

Under the program, which is coordinated by the Australian federal

parliament, Australian state and territory parliaments are twinned with the parliaments of Pacific island countries. With funding from AusAID, the program supports capacity building of Pacific parliaments. ACT is twinned with Kiribati.

Mrs Tekanene said the parliamentary twinning program provides an avenue for strengthening cooperation between developing and developed nations in the Pacific region.

"There are many things our nation wants to gain from its relationship with Australia," she said.

During the visit by Mrs Tekanene and opposition MP Waysang Kumkee, a committee room in the ACT Legislative Assembly was named the Kiribati Room in honour of the twinning arrangement and the growing ties between the two parliaments.

## PARALYMPIANS READY FOR LONDON

Australia's 2012 Paralympics squad has been honoured at a ceremony at Parliament House in Canberra.

One hundred and sixty-one athletes were selected as part of the Australian team for the 2012 Paralympic Games in London.

The athletes will be joined by 140 officials in the largest Australian team ever selected for the Paralympics.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard, Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, Minister for Sport Kate Lundy and Minister for Disability



PRIDE OF THE NATION: Paralympians with PM Julia Gillard at Parliament House

Reform Jenny Macklin addressed the athletes at the event, wishing them every success.

The Paralympics will begin with the Opening Ceremony on August 29.

AAP

## Hillside

### Diabetes treatment shortfall

MORE funding is needed to help meet demand for a groundbreaking treatment for juvenile diabetes, the Member for Pearce (WA) Judi Moylan has told federal parliament.

The insulin pump, a small computerised device that provides rapid-acting insulin, has been shown to provide positive changes in diabetes management including better quality of life for type 1 diabetes sufferers as well as improved life expectancy.

The pump is being provided to low-income families who do not have private health insurance through a subsidy scheme administered by the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

After an initial slow take-up, recent improvements to the scheme, including a co-payment funding agreement with the manufacturers and improved promotion, has seen a doubling of the take-up rate.

While the federal budget has provided for the continuation of the program, forecasts by the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation indicate that funding for the scheme will meet less than half the projected demand of 556 pumps over the next four years.

“In essence, it means that the funding for this four-year program, on the current take-up rate, will be exhausted within the next four months of the next financial year,” Mrs Moylan said.

“I will be asking the Minister for Health to reassess the program with a view to ensuring that it is adequately funded.” •



**NO SHORE THING:** Coastal communities face an uncertain future

### Coastal confidence eroding

AUSTRALIA'S coastline is in danger of being washed away if more is not done to battle coastal erosion, Rob Oakeshott (Lyne, NSW) has warned.

His call for action came after fierce storms battered his electorate, rendering some beaches unrecognisable and threatening homes and public infrastructure.

“Coastal erosion is much more than an environmental story. It is a human story of homeowners desperate to save their properties from the consequences of climate change,” Mr Oakeshott told the House of Representatives.

An extensive inquiry in 2009 by the House of Representatives Climate Change Committee produced 47 recommendations into the impact of climate change on coastal areas, several directly relating to identifying and protecting areas at risk of erosion.

The inquiry called for more research to identify areas most at risk from wave erosion, the development of an early warning system to alert communities in case of extreme sea level events and confirmation of insurance liabilities in cases of erosion affecting property.

But Mr Oakeshott said the inquiry had failed to generate tangible results for coastal communities.

“I share my community's frustrations that despite the enormous economic, environmental and social costs attached to coastal erosion, we are no closer today to a cooperative strategy involving all three levels of government than we were four years ago,” he said.

He stressed it is now time for all levels of government to work together to protect Australia's iconic coastal areas from this “slow moving natural disaster”.

“We can do some preventative work – some mitigation and adaptation work – and have a coordinated strategy through the three tiers of government now if there is a level of consensus and support in recognising the problem and wanting to resolve it,” he said.

“However, despite the numerous warnings from the science community and despite the thousands of words in reports, studies and planning documents recommending action, my community, and many others, see little to no evidence of a working relationship developing between federal, state and local government on this issue.

“So, words aside, what has happened in the past four years? I am concerned that we have not progressed at all.” •



## Hillside



**PASSION FOR POLITICS:** Youth parliament participants visit the real deal

### Indigenous youth parliament inspires future leaders

THE first National Indigenous Youth Parliament was a success because it encouraged young leaders to seek opportunities and to speak out about issues in their local communities and in Australia more broadly, Member for Canberra (ACT) Gai Brodtmann has told federal parliament.

Ms Brodtmann presided over the event held at Old Parliament House, which was run by YMCA and the Australian Electoral Commission, and coincided with National Sorry Day and the beginning of National Reconciliation Week.

It attracted six representatives from each state and territory and two from the Torres Strait Islands, who presented and debated bills on issues of importance to

them. They also participated in debates in which they spoke about problems in their communities such as alcohol and drug abuse, mental health and suicide.

“They revealed a real passion about a range of issues, such as leadership and the need for more opportunities in local communities,” Ms Brodtmann said.

The event introduced participants to the legislative process in a rigorous way, providing a fascinating experience and a good learning opportunity, she said.

“I am sure they will take this experience back with them to their local communities, and perhaps even aspire to come back to this place one day and represent their local communities as federal members of parliament.” •

### Graffiti strategy getting results

A VICTORIAN local council’s graffiti strategy that combines graffiti removal with educational programs is paying dividends, Maria Vamvakinou (Calwell, Vic) has told federal parliament.

The Hume City Council’s Write Signal Project, run in partnership with The Salvation Army Crossroads, is intended to help curb visual vandalism while at the same time encouraging graffiti artists to express their creativity in a socially acceptable manner. The project has received \$127,830 in federal government funding.

In one month alone 1,170 square metres of graffiti was removed in two suburbs, with the community responding positively to the council’s 1300 hotline and other anti-graffiti measures.

“Hume council’s education campaign has also created a new generation of ‘Graffiti Warriors’ who are proud of the city they are growing up in and want to keep their communities clean,” Ms Vamvakinou said.

According to crime data cited by Ms Vamvakinou, teenagers in the 15 to 17-year age bracket are the most prolific graffiti offenders, with local police youth liaison officers indicating that many young people are committing graffiti vandalism due to boredom, lack of direction and lack of support structures. •

### Butcher decline bad for consumers

INDEPENDENT local butchers are in need of community support to prevent them from becoming a dying breed, the Member for Hughes (NSW) Craig Kelly has told the House of Representatives.

Mr Kelly is concerned that the increasing dominance of the major supermarkets and resulting distortion of the retail lease market are contributing to the decline in independent operators, with local

butchers having to pay much higher prices per square metre for their rent.

“About 25 years ago, there were over 8,000 independent butchers around our nation. But despite the growth of our population, those numbers today are down to fewer than 3,500,” he said.

Mr Kelly said that as the independent butchers have disappeared from the market, the reduction in competition has resulted in consumers paying

increasingly higher prices for lower quality cuts of meat.

He encouraged members of parliament and the community to try shopping at their local butcher and experience the wide variety of select cuts of premium meats available.

“I strongly recommend that you give them a try. You may just be pleasantly surprised.” •

# Mental health stigma blocks jobs

MPs call for awareness and action.



**STANDING OUT:** Stigma isolating job seekers with mental illness

**A** national education campaign is needed to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and help sufferers into education and employment.

In its latest report, *Work wanted*, the House of Representatives Education and Employment Committee has called for a comprehensive, multifaceted campaign in schools, businesses and communities to raise awareness of mental ill health and break down discrimination.

One in five Australians has experienced a mental illness in the past 12 months and the employment rate for people with such a disability is around half of the general population.

Tabling the report in the House of Representatives, committee chair Amanda Rishworth (Kingston, SA) said such a campaign is needed as stigma is consistently rated as the key barrier to entering the workforce by people with a mental illness.

“This is not the first report to note the entrenched stigma surrounding those with a mental illness,” Ms Rishworth said. “Nonetheless, the committee was struck by how pervasive stigma remains.”

The report found the stigma associated with mental illness is often based on incorrect assumptions that people with mental ill health have limited capacity or will to participate, or that they will be disruptive and dangerous.

Witnesses to the inquiry reported that disclosing mental ill health lowered the likelihood of selection for interview or appointment to a position.

“When you have a mental illness, employers think of you as a liability,” New South Wales Consumer Advisory Group CEO Julie Hourigan-Ruse said. “Some of them think that you’re likely to be an axe-murderer.”

The committee called for government support of social enterprises that assist people with a mental illness into the workforce, the extension of the primary school mental health program KidsMatter into high schools, and better

## LATEST

### NEW CHARITIES COMMISSION

A new national regulator for the charity and not-for-profit sector is set to become fully operational from 1 October 2012, replacing a number of overlapping state, federal and territory oversight bodies.

The Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission (ACNC) will provide a central point for the registration of Australian charities, determine charitable status and public benevolent institution status, and provide a free, searchable charities register to the public.

It will also investigate allegations of misconduct and inappropriate activities by charities.

The ACNC will begin by only overseeing the operations of

Australia’s charities, but is intended to extend across the entire not-for-profit sector from 2014.

However decisions about what tax concessions are available to a charity or not-for-profit organisation and the collection or enforcement of taxes in the sector will remain the responsibility of the Australian Taxation Office.

The House Economics Committee is inquiring into the exposure draft legislation establishing the new regulator and is expected to report back following the parliament’s winter break. •

### LINKS

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## NEWS

training for education providers to assist students with mental health issues.

Deputy chair Rowan Ramsey (Grey, SA) said fostering a supportive educational and work environment through these measures is crucial to help people with a mental illness participate fully in society.

“The loss of employment, or the inability to engage in it in the first place, because of mental illness is a debilitating barrier which can lead to disconnection from society and exacerbate the original condition,” Mr Ramsey said. “The cost to society of this disconnection is far higher than the cost of positive programs to engage these people.”

The committee also called for a communication campaign to clearly lay out the eligibility and workforce participation requirements that apply to the Disability Support Pension for people with a mental illness.

Ms Rishworth said a third of DSP recipients have a mental illness, and fear of losing access to payments is holding many back from the workforce.

“The system must encourage and engage rather than discourage and disengage job seekers,” she said.

“Participation requirements need to be sufficiently flexible for people to venture into employment without the fear of losing their benefit entitlement and in the knowledge that there is a safety net for them should a job not work out.”

Ms Rishworth said given the high prevalence of mental illness in the broader community and current workforce shortages in parts of the country, helping more people with a mental illness into work would have broad economic and social benefits.

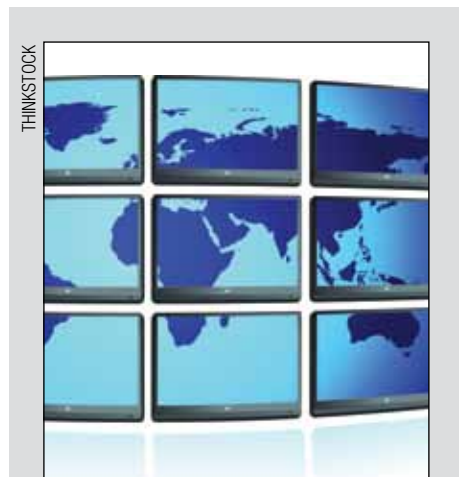
“The statistics are such that, even if we ourselves do not experience a mental illness, we will certainly know someone close to us who does.

“It is in everyone’s interest to help job seekers with a mental illness secure sustainable employment.

“They want to work, and work is part of their recovery – and this report shows that there are ways for them to find work.” •

## LINKS

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**TENDER SUBJECT:** *Australia Network controversy continues*

## PM’S DEPARTMENT DISPUTES TENDER CONFUSION

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has denied there was an “atmosphere of uncertainty” about the role of cabinet during the Australia Network tender process, which was scrapped in November 2011.

Responding to a critical report from the Auditor-General on the tender process, the department’s deputy secretary Renee Leon said the Prime Minister had advised the final decision would come back to cabinet before the tender was released.

“The department’s view is that there was no uncertainty,” Ms Leon said. “The Prime Minister had made clear – and as the report indicates ministers had agreed in October – that it was to come back to cabinet.”

However the Auditor-General Ian McPhee disagreed, telling federal parliament’s Public Accounts and Audit Committee his investigation clearly found confusion about the role of ministers in choosing a preferred tenderer to operate the network.

“I think we have put a fair bit of evidence in there to say there is quite a deal of uncertainty amongst ministers about the processes both before the tender arrangement and subsequently,” Mr McPhee said.



Video news from the House now available at  
[www.aph.gov.au/ath](http://www.aph.gov.au/ath)



The Australia Network is Australia's international television service, which broadcasts local and international news, sport and lifestyle programs in more than 44 countries across Asia, the Pacific and the Indian subcontinent. It has been operated by the international arm of the ABC since 2001, and the operation contract was put out to open tender at the start of 2011.

The tender process was halted by the government in November last year on public interest grounds following repeated leaking of tender information to the media, with the service eventually to be transitioned to the ABC permanently by the government.

While the Auditor-General's report did not make any specific recommendations, it identified several "lessons learned" that could be applied to inform future procurement activities. As well as finding there needed to be more clarity about the role of senior decision makers in the tender, the Auditor-General's report also suggested a greater focus on following information security protocols to reduce the risk of leaking of sensitive and confidential material.

"Briefings prepared for ministers should have had greater regard to the confidentiality and sensitivity of the information being provided for what was still a 'live' tender process," Mr McPhee said.

"Ultimately, information was not as tightly controlled as it should have been."

The report also highlighted the importance of departments adhering to conventional procurement arrangements and effectively managing the range of risks involved, given they can change significantly over time. ●

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**HOMEGROWN HORROR:** *Australians implicated in potential attacks*

## Terrorist attacks foiled but threats remain

More than 150 active investigations pursued.

**F**our potential mass casualty attacks have been disrupted in the past decade by the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO).

In a submission to federal parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee, ASIO said while the threats have been inspired by ideologies imported from overseas, the individuals involved have largely been Australians.

ASIO also told the committee during 2010/11 it pursued more than 150 active counter terrorism investigations.

"The threat of home grown extremism will continue, particularly given the increased technological sophistication of international extremists," ASIO said.

There has been an increasing prevalence of stand-alone or small terrorist cells with little international or group affiliations, making them difficult to detect by security organisations.

ASIO said one important way to limit internal threats is to withhold passports to certain individuals, preventing them from travelling overseas to train, support or participate in terrorism.

## NEWS

The Minister for Foreign Affairs cancelled or denied seven passports in 2010/11 resulting from adverse security assessments, prohibiting the travel of several people for terrorism related activities.

Ties between Australian intelligence agencies and their foreign counterparts are being strengthened to effectively identify people attempting to enter Australia who pose a security threat.

Visa applications requiring ASIO security checks have increased significantly, placing pressure on the agency. In 2010/11, ASIO completed 34,396 visa security assessments, with 45 adverse assessments issued, 40 of which were on terrorism grounds.

For the same period, the number of complaints to the Inspector General of Intelligence and Security by visa applicants increased by nine per cent, attributed to the growing number of security assessments required by ASIO and the subsequent backlogs.

ASIO has received increasing powers and capabilities to neutralise international threats, ensure Australia's territorial and border integrity and combat people smuggling. These legislative changes follow a number of previous amendments that provided ASIO greater and more intrusive investigative powers.

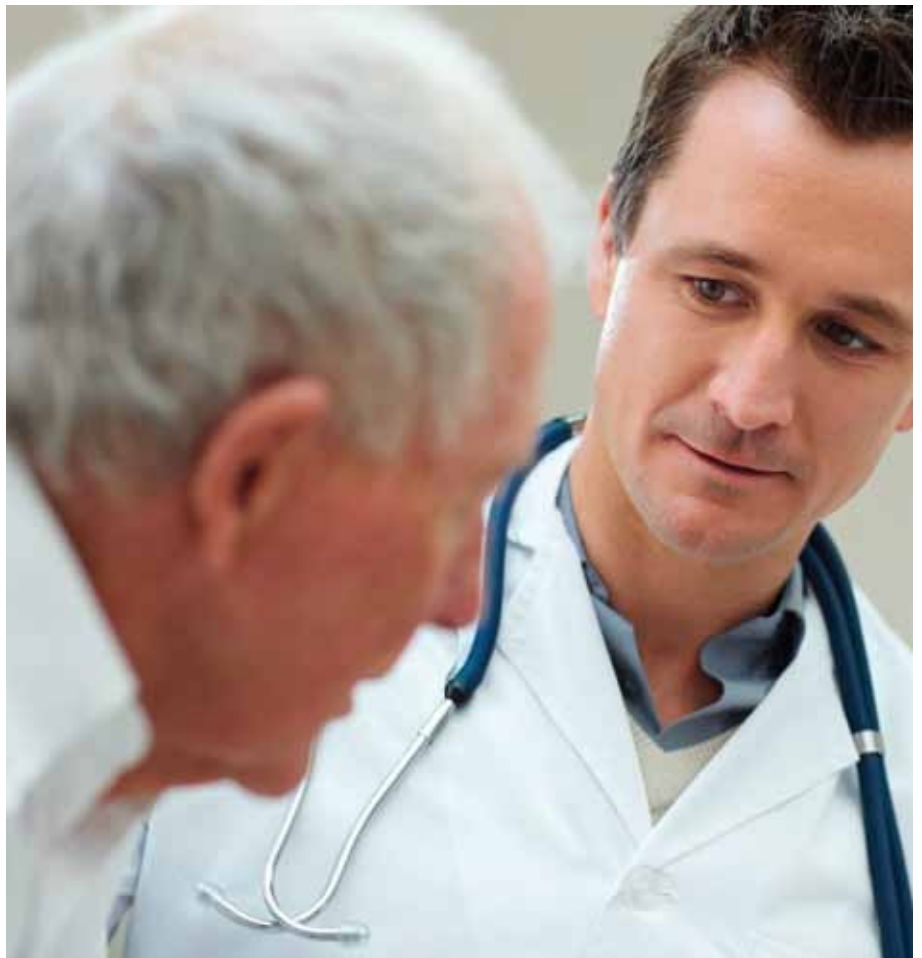
Under warrant, ASIO can enact its powers of intrusive investigation on Australians and within Australia relating to terrorism matters.

ASIO said Australia is experiencing emerging complexities in its security environment and needs to continually review its capabilities to pre-empt the development of increasingly insidious security threats.

"ASIO will need to continue to enhance its capabilities and foster close collaboration with key national and international partners in order to preserve Australia's security," the agency said. •

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THINKSTOCK

**PAINFUL LEGACY:** *Polio eradicated but many still suffering*

## Polio still affecting thousands

**A**ustralia is free of polio but thousands of Australians are still affected by the disease.

Many years after recovering from the initial infection, polio survivors are increasingly experiencing the late effects of polio, characterised by symptoms such as fatigue, weakness and pain.

The House of Representatives Health and Ageing Committee has recommended measures to better estimate the number of people living with the late effects of polio (sometimes known as post polio syndrome) and increasing awareness of the condition among medical practitioners, medical students and the community.

Presenting the committee's report, based on a roundtable that brought together people interested in the treatment and management

of the condition, committee chair Steve Georganas (Hindmarsh, SA) said with the symptoms being largely unrecognised to date, there is a clear need for improved diagnosis of the late effects of polio.

"Improved diagnosis will lead to better estimates of the prevalence of the condition and in turn better management and treatment outcomes for LEOP/PPS sufferers," he said.

The committee said it is important to determine the prevalence of the condition in order to establish a clearer understanding of the potential demand for services and support.

At the committee's roundtable held in Melbourne, national program manager for Polio Australia, Mary-ann Liethof said very little is known about the prevalence of post polio syndrome in Australia.



“All we can indicate at this point is that there may be anything up to hundreds of thousands of polio survivors living with the late effects of polio in Australia today,” Ms Liethof said.

As the Australian Bureau of Statistics already conducts a number of surveys which examine the health of Australians, the committee has recommended the ABS introduce questions to estimate and report on the late effects of polio.

The committee said measures also need to be taken to improve the capacity of clinicians and other health professionals to recognise the condition and confirm clinical diagnosis.

“There is no simple or definitive test for the condition, and it often takes years of persistence and frustration before sufferers receive a diagnosis,” Mr Georganas said.

Some roundtable participants suggested with the eradication of polio in Australia, health professionals are less aware of polio as a problem and medical students were not being taught about it in their undergraduate training. As a result many health professionals may not even consider the late effects of polio as a possible diagnosis.

To help raise awareness of the condition the committee has recommended that the relevant national boards, in consultation with key stakeholders, ensure curricula for medical students includes information on the late effects of polio.

The committee has also called for communication strategies that go beyond just educating health professionals to raise awareness in the wider community as well.

Mr Georganas said increasing community awareness could help to identify polio survivors with late effects of polio symptoms who, being unaware of the condition, may not have mentioned a history of polio to their GPs or other health professionals providing treatment. •

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# Epidemic defence starts overseas

## Cross border collaboration vital for disease control.



THINKSTOCK

**DISEASE CONTROL:** Collaboration needed with regional neighbours

Infectious disease experts have called on the government to further develop international disease control protocols and maintain adequate drug stockpiles to limit the impact of future disease epidemics in Australia.

Adrian Sleight, professor of Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University, told a parliamentary roundtable Australia is confronting new or re-emerging infectious diseases at a rate of 50 to 90 per decade, mainly through cross border transmission.

Professor Sleight presented *Epidemics in a changing world*, a report he co-authored with an expert committee, which recommended Australia maintain

its human capacity to combat epidemics, ensure its capability to collect, analyse and interpret disease information, and maintain vaccine stocks and production, particularly for influenza and niche vaccines.

Australia holds valuable influenza vaccine stockpiles which are effective in patient management and controlling disease outbreaks.

The report says stockpiling of antivirals is vital to ensure their availability during times of manufacturer supply shortage such as during epidemics.

Professor Sleight told the House of Representatives Health Committee Australia needs to collaborate with neighbouring states to contain the

## NEWS

spread of infectious diseases, which become especially dangerous as they cross borders.

“We are dealing with the intersection of the environments and the lifelines of at least two different organisms,” Professor Sleight said. “The situation may be quite unstable and expansive, creating an explosive epidemic such as when we were confronted with SARS and avian influenza.”

The risk of transfer of infectious diseases to Australia is heightened by the lack of biomedical expertise in neighbouring states in the Asian region.

Professor Tania Sorrell of the Emerging Infections and Bio-security Institute said the key to protecting Australia may lie in capacity building beyond our borders.

“When we think about emerging infectious diseases within Australia, we are thinking about what we can do within our own borders – to detect them, to control them,” Professor Sorrell said.

“But we need to recognise that the Asia-Pacific region is quite an important incubator for emerging infectious diseases and for increasing antimicrobial resistance.

“Perhaps we should be looking to develop collaborative interactions with strategic partners in the region so that we can actually anticipate some of these problems and prevent them reaching our borders.”

The infectious diseases roundtable was the first in a series of roundtables looking at policy responses to health issues that cross international borders.

Committee chair Steve Georganas (Hindmarsh, SA) said the roundtables will provide an important insight into protecting national population health in a globalised world.

“Specifically, the committee will investigate how government and non-government agencies protect our country from exposure to imported infectious diseases, and the risk of epidemic and pandemic disease outbreaks,” he said. •

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## Coordination vital on baby alcohol disorders

Complex issue needs whole-of-government approach.



**DAMAGED BY DRINK:** *Unborn at risk from alcohol during pregnancy*

**F**ederal government departments have called for a national strategy to cover the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

In evidence to a parliamentary inquiry, representatives from three federal departments – Health and Ageing (DoHA); Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA); and Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) – said while a number of programs and strategies focus on alcohol harm reduction, there is currently no Commonwealth policy strategy specifically dedicated to FASD prevention.

“Alcohol consumption during pregnancy can cause a range of abnormalities in the unborn child which are included under the umbrella term Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD),” DoHA and FaHCSIA told the committee in a joint submission.

“People affected by FASD experience a range of difficulties including low IQ, learning difficulties, developmental delays and behavioural problems. Secondary outcomes may include: mental health problems; drug and alcohol issues; poor social, educational and employment outcomes; and a high

level of contact with the criminal justice system.”

The departments told the House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee the primary and secondary impact of FASD on individuals, their families and the community is wide-ranging and crosses many portfolio areas such as physical and mental health, early childhood, education, disability, family and community services (including child protection), employment, housing and the criminal justice sector.

“Clearly, given the association with the potential harms of alcohol consumption for the developing foetus during pregnancy, prevention of FASD is a significant priority,” the departments said.

In planning for future activity, the departments consider FASD should be managed as a whole of population issue, with targeted approaches for at risk populations, and coordinated whole-of-government responses.

The departments said the prevalence of FASD often is concentrated in families and communities that have myriad risks and social challenges, all of which need to be accommodated in approaches to FASD prevention.

DEEWR branch manager Russell Ayers told the committee education is



an important factor in addressing the intergenerational prevalence of FASD.

“It is important to emphasise the role of education to break intergenerational trends and a whole range of negative social behaviours and outcomes, including alcohol and its impact,” Dr Ayers said.

While there is a range of programs and support for parents, children and students in various circumstances, DEEWR does not have a specific targeted set of programs around FASD.

Dr Ayers said with the major work around developing a national curriculum, DEEWR hopes to provide a national approach to the responsible consumption of alcohol during pregnancy.

But without national data that can reliably indicate the number of people with FASD, it is difficult to identify groups at risk.

Health department principal medical advisor Bernie Tower said the department is developing a diagnostic tool that will outline an agreed multidisciplinary approach to both the diagnosis and ongoing management of the condition.

Colleen Krestensen, health department assistant secretary, said the whole intent of getting better at diagnosis is to link the assessment to appropriate early intervention, to address the early trajectory of the condition, to minimise the secondary impact and also to link parents to the best services to support them.

“That is why we are trying to advance our knowledge collectively across government about the best form of intervention – both early and later – and how to link services to best meet the needs of these kids,” Ms Krestensen said.

While acknowledging there is a growing awareness about FASD in the community, the federal departments said it remains a complex issue which needs a concerted and coordinated effort with respect to research, prevention and services. •

#### LINKS

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DEFENCE DIGITAL MEDIA

**BRINGING THEM BACK:** *Injured soldiers need support in the field and at home*

## Review of care for wounded Defence personnel

**W**ith 227 Australian Defence Force personnel wounded or injured in Afghanistan since 2002, a parliamentary inquiry will investigate how the ADF manages and supports these soldiers, sailors and air crew.

Personnel who are wounded on operations and suffer relatively minor injuries are treated and, once fit, return to service.

ADF personnel who are seriously wounded are transferred to the nearest military hospital and may be sent to a specialist facility for additional treatment. They may also be returned to Australia for additional treatment and rehabilitation.

ADF rehabilitation programs aim to reduce the impact of injury or illness through early clinical intervention and lessen any psychological effects of the injury.

Chair of federal parliament's Defence Sub-Committee Senator Mark Furner (Qld) said it was of paramount importance that the systems and processes to care for, repatriate, and

rehabilitate or transition ADF personnel wounded and injured on operations are efficient and effective.

“The inquiry will enable the committee to review current arrangements to ensure they are appropriate to support ADF personnel who have been wounded and injured while serving their country,” he said.

As well as examining care arrangements in operational areas, the inquiry will also look at repatriation arrangements to Australia and the care provided on return to Australia, including ongoing health, welfare and rehabilitation support arrangements.

Return to work arrangements and management of personnel who cannot return to ADF service will also be reviewed, along with the transition from ADF support to managed health care and support by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. •

#### LINKS

[www.aph.gov.au/jfadt](http://www.aph.gov.au/jfadt)  
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## NEWS

THINKSTOCK



**STAYING AWAY:** Students are choosing other countries for study

## Reform fatigue affects student numbers

### Thirty per cent decline puts industry at risk.

International education providers claim constant reform in the sector is contributing to a severe decline in student numbers, threatening Australia's second largest service export industry.

Student numbers have fallen sharply in recent years, especially from key markets such as India and China.

Concerns about security have previously been highlighted as a major factor in the downturn, following a string of high profile attacks on Indian students in Melbourne in 2009 and 2010.

However Sue Blundell, director of English language learning school English Australia, said recent reforms to requirements for education providers and students are also having a major impact on student numbers.

While the reforms to the Education Services for Overseas Students Act were designed to protect international students, Ms Blundell told a parliamentary roundtable on international education they have actually acted as a disincentive.

"Have the reforms had an impact on addressing our competitiveness? They are making us less competitive," Ms Blundell said. "Our zeal for regulatory reform is putting up compliance costs for our providers, so they see revenue going down and costs going up."

She said the main issue is not the content of the reforms, but the fact that a number of changes to both provider and student requirements have happened close together, confusing prospective students and international education sales agents.

"Whereas Australia is becoming more and more complicated and difficult to understand – with change every six months sometimes – other countries are becoming simpler to understand and are opening up their borders," she said. "Agents and students are losing interest because it is just too hard."

Other experts agreed that many prospective students are deciding against studying in Australia due to a perception that it is too difficult to obtain an appropriate visa.

Dr Helen Forbes-Mewett from Monash University told the roundtable concerns about visa requirements and the ability to work in Australia are often the underlying factor which prevents parents from sending their children to study in Australia.

"About three years ago I was interviewing parents of Chinese students in Beijing, and the parents indicated that safety was very important – because I think they knew that was the focus of my study – but, when questioned, actually it turned out that visa access and the status of education were incredibly important," Dr Forbes-Mewett said.

"The UK and the US were seen as being above Australia, but students came to Australia because they could get easier visa access, and they were prepared to give away some of that perceived status, in their view. That has changed now, because Australia does not hold quite that status that it had before in providing an education.

"That is something that really needs to be regained."

The federal government announced changes to international student visa requirements earlier this year, opening up assessment standards in a bid to attract more applicants.

A new class of student visa is also being introduced, which will give more international students the ability to work in Australia after they have completed their studies.

While Ms Blundell said the changes were appropriate, she indicated better communication of requirements to key stakeholders and a period of stability are needed to help the industry get back on track.

"We have now been in decline for two and a half years, and in fact our student numbers over that two and a half year period have declined by 30 per cent," Ms Blundell said.

"Our industry is in danger of disappearing. We are in danger, I believe, of having the best consumer protection system in the world but no consumers to enjoy that protection." •

#### LINKS

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# Libraries face growing cyber demand

Seniors seek help to log on safely.

THINKSTOCK



**HELP DESK:** Libraries can provide cyber training for seniors

**L**ibraries are in a prime position to help seniors have a safe online experience, but the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) has told federal parliament's Cyber-Safety Committee they are constrained by the limited resources currently available to them.

With the number of Australians aged over 65 growing rapidly, ALIA said libraries are reporting a growth in membership and demand with many seniors seeking assistance and training to help them take advantage of the benefits the internet brings.

"This ever-increasing demand includes help with everyday needs such as setting up email accounts, online

banking, setting up mobile phones, completing government forms, accessing e-government information, applying for Centrelink benefits, etc," ALIA said in its submission to the committee's inquiry into cybersafety for seniors.

ALIA said with more funding libraries could reach a wider group within the community and could provide services such as internet training for those who are housebound.

It has called for a comprehensive cybersafety plan for seniors similar to one the federal government launched in 2008 to educate young people about cybersafety.

"The same level of resources and support should also be available to senior Australians in order to prevent

their exploitation, increase their quality of life, and provide them with equal opportunity and access to online resources," ALIA said.

While seniors comprise the fastest growing demographic of online users, the committee has heard a large number of older Australians are still hesitant to go online.

Committee chair Senator Catryna Bilyk (Tas) said the committee was looking to find the best ways to get reluctant seniors online safely and upskill competent users without overemphasising the risks.

"Older people who have never worked with computers or who have been retired for a long time can be very intimidated by the internet, or not see its utility," Senator Bilyk said.

ALIA said with a strong presence in most communities, libraries are in a unique position to provide a platform and resources to assist seniors with internet and cybersafety training.

"Public libraries and their partner state libraries offer an existing infrastructure, staff that are connected into their communities, existing local partnerships with seniors groups, and access to those who are socially isolated.

"Libraries are perceived as neutral spaces where people can go and get information and support without judgement. Libraries are trusted places, seen as civic and community spaces where you go to find out something you need to know.

"Communities respond well to initiatives conducted in their local area. Local initiatives are easily accessible, trusted and comfortable." •

## LINKS

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To find out about the Australian parliament's international program  
 visit: [www.aph.gov.au/international](http://www.aph.gov.au/international)

## NEWS

# Delay urged for anti-piracy treaty

Independent economic analysis needed.

Federal parliament's Treaties Committee has recommended the controversial Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) not be ratified until certain conditions are met.

ACTA focuses on strengthening intellectual property standards through trademark and copyright enforcement.

It is heavily backed by much of the global entertainment industry, which is losing billions of dollars each year through the illegal downloading and piracy of films and television shows.

However the treaty has been met with international protests from groups concerned about its impact on privacy and freedom of expression.

Committee chair Kelvin Thomson (Wills, Vic) said the treaty has a number of flaws and the committee is not yet convinced it is in Australia's interests.

Mr Thomson said he is particularly concerned about the use of the term 'intellectual property' throughout the text, which may take it beyond the area of simple copyright enforcement.

"If that then becomes a matter of patents being able to be challenged through this process then there is the potential for downside impacts on consumers," Mr Thomson said.

The committee report calls for an independent and transparent economic analysis of the treaty's costs and benefits to be done before Australia considers ratifying the treaty.

The committee was also wary of pre-empting an ongoing Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into copyright in the digital era.

"We want to allow that law reform commission report to proceed and we think that there is a risk if we ratify ACTA now that we will effectively lock



**FLAWED:** Treaty may impact consumers

out the potential changes that the law reform commission might recommend."

Mr Thomson said the international environment has also played a role in the committee's recommendation to delay ratification. ACTA has been rejected or deferred in a number of similar jurisdictions, including the United States and various European nations.

Mr Thomson said the fate of the treaty internationally should be clearer by the time the recommended analysis of the treaty is complete.

"The law reform commission is not scheduled to bring down its report until late next year so if we are waiting for that report we have time," he said.

"We have time to do the cost benefit analysis properly, and we have time to see what is going on in Europe – whether this treaty has legs and is going to get international support and is going to get off the ground, or whether the revolt we are seeing against it will prevent it from moving forward." •

## LINKS

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**PRICE WATCH:** IT costs under scrutiny

## CUTTING THROUGH IT PRICING

Are Australians paying more for IT software and hardware than consumers in overseas markets and, if so, why?

These are key questions for the House of Representatives Infrastructure and Communications Committee as it undertakes a review of IT pricing in Australia and its impact on consumers, businesses and governments.

"The committee will look into the costs of computer hardware, software, downloads and e-books to name a few," said committee chair Nick Champion (Wakefield, SA). "We look forward to hearing from the companies who set these prices and the consumers and businesses that purchase their products."

Committee member Ed Husic (Chifley, NSW) stressed the economic importance of the issue. From the evidence received by the inquiry, he expects the committee will be able to make recommendations for the market to operate in a way that is fair to businesses and to consumers.

"The internet itself has been estimated to add between \$50 billion and potentially up to \$70 billion to our economic growth," Mr Husic said. "As many jobs are created as a result of the internet in Australia as they are by mining. Within business these days IT is a major capital and operating expense."

Another committee member, Jane Prentice (Ryan, Qld), expressed concern about price disparities faced by consumers.

"Why in this day and age does it cost us more to download an Australian artist on iTunes than it does in the US? That's the sort of thing we need to get to the bottom of," she said.

Deputy chair Paul Neville (Hinkler, Qld) said the inquiry will help to "flush all the issues into the open" and make the market more transparent.

"We've become an easy mark in Australia," he said. "I hope we can drill down to the wholesale levels to find out what the real costs are and come out with a report that hopefully will be a benchmark around which the parliament can base their future work." •

## LINKS

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GETTY



**HARASSED:** Millions of workers face bullying during their careers

## Rising costs of bullying prompt review

**W**orkplace bullying is costing Australia between \$6 billion and \$36 billion annually, according to estimates from the Productivity Commission. It contributes to decreased productivity, increased staff absenteeism and poor morale.

Research cited by the Australian Human Rights Commission estimates that between 400,000 and 2 million Australians will be harassed at work and 2.5 to 5 million will experience workplace harassment at some time during their careers.

To help tackle the problem, the House of Representatives Education and Employment Committee is examining the nature, causes and extent of bullying in the workplace, and will look at ways to combat the workplace cultures that allow bullying to thrive.

Committee chair Amanda Rishworth (Kingston, SA) said workplace bullying can have a profound effect on all aspects of a person's health as well as their work and family life.

"Bullying has serious consequences for individuals and the wider community," Ms Rishworth said.

"Every Australian has a right to feel safe and respected at work."

The experiences of workplace bullying victims will be considered during the inquiry and the committee will also examine the adequacy of existing education and support services.

"While it is not the role of the committee to intervene in or consider individual cases, we welcome submissions from employers, employees and their representative organisations regarding proposals and suggestions for securing workplaces against bullying at a national level," Ms Rishworth said.

The inquiry will also review the effectiveness of existing anti-bullying regulatory frameworks, and investigate how coordination between agencies and research on workplace bullying can be improved.

Public hearings for the inquiry have begun and will continue throughout August in Adelaide, Perth and Canberra. •

## LINKS

[www.aph.gov.au/ee](http://www.aph.gov.au/ee)  
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# Overexposed

Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum say more must be done to protect the innocence of our children.

**STORY:** JEREMY KENNETT  
AND ANNELISE YOUNG

**F**or a nation already battling an obesity bulge among our young, a recent statistic has set another alarm bell ringing. The children's hospital in the Sydney suburb of Westmead has reported a 270 per cent increase in the number of children being admitted for eating disorders over the past decade.

While the causes may be many and varied, there is a common and underlying theme to this paediatric dilemma: children and young people in Australia are feeling increasing pressure when it comes to their body image, and many are not coping with the strain.

Australian Medical Association president Dr Steve Hambleton says having a good body image is a crucial building block for kids to be healthy and happy.

But he says children's ability to feel good about themselves is being undermined by the increasing sexualisation of our society, where a person's value is becoming more and more reliant on their physical attractiveness and sexual appeal.



ISTOCK

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*“The media practice of presenting unrealistic images encourages our vulnerable young to strive for what is not natural.”*

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Dr Hambleton's concerns are being echoed in parliaments across Australia, as MPs of all political persuasions speak out about the damage being done to children and young people as a result of exposure to overtly sexual products and images.

Leading a debate on this issue in the House of Representatives, federal MP Amanda Rishworth (Kingston, SA) said it is high time the community started to address the increasing commercialisation and sexualisation of children, and to work together to ensure children can grow and develop in a positive and healthy way.

“I often feel bad when I open up a magazine and see unrealistic images of women,” Ms Rishworth said. “However, the important point is this: unlike adults, children have not yet developed the cognitive ability to objectively analyse these kinds of images, and so they are particularly vulnerable to this kind of content.”

“While adults are able to determine whether something has been airbrushed or is unrealistic or a person has had their body altered, children are unable to do this.”

IMAGE PROBLEM:  
*Sexualised products being  
aimed at children*





Ms Rishworth called on parliament and the community to take note of a British report into sexualisation called *Letting children be children*, which found that children are not only growing up amongst a backdrop of increasingly sexualised advertising, but are also exposed to clothing, services and products which prematurely sexualise behaviour.

Based on in-depth surveys, interviews and focus groups with over 1,000 parents, the report found many believe their children are almost constantly exposed to sexualised imagery through all forms of media – referred to in the report as “the wallpaper of children’s lives”.

The report also found the pressure on children to grow up too quickly takes two different but related forms: the pressure to take part in a sexualised life before they are ready to do so; and the commercial pressure to consume the vast range of goods and services that are available to children and young people of all ages.

While the UK report indicated this pressure falls on all children, a number of parliamentarians in Australia are concerned the burden is especially heavy for young girls.

Deborah O’Neill (Robertson, NSW) said the contrasting ways young girls and young boys are presented in advertising is reinforcing negative perceptions.

“I was caught behind a bus and on the back of the bus was an image of a four-year-old girl in a very short dress, knee-high stockings and extreme amounts of make-up,” Ms O’Neill told parliament.

“This was something that really alarmed me. It was even more alarming when I contrasted the image of this young girl with the young boy who was her play partner in the picture. He looked very free, very comfortable, hardly made-up at all, in a regular pair of play shorts.”

According to Jane Prentice (Ryan, Qld), this focus on appearance and sexuality is pervasive in the marketing of products targeted at young girls, especially clothing and media.

“Sadly, the increasing prevalence of sexualised images and products can be noticed every day when simply walking around clothes shops, with sexualised underwear and swimwear aimed at young girls,” Mrs Prentice said.

“One need only open a girls’ magazine to see ‘keep slim’ tips and dating advice for 10-year-old girls. We know that the risks of this increasing commercialisation include but are not limited to mental health effects, body image issues, eating disorders and low self-esteem, as this motion suggests.”

The *Letting children be children* report made a number of recommendations to help relieve this pressure in the UK, including restricting outdoor advertising, especially around schools, limiting children’s access to certain forms of media, and enforcing guidelines on age appropriate clothing for retailers.

Industry and government have been quick to respond to many of the recommendations. The UK government has created a centralised point for complaints about sexualisation, advertising authorities have issued tighter guidelines on outdoor advertising and new customers of internet service providers are now required to actively choose whether or not to install parental controls on their devices.

However in Australia movement on the issue has been slower. A 2008 Senate inquiry into sexualisation and a 2011 House of Representatives inquiry into outdoor advertising



“We seem to be moving as a society towards anything goes, anything is acceptable”

both made recommendations for tighter controls and further review, mainly related to the advertising industry.

While some changes have been implemented, such as allowing independent reviews of advertising complaints and a revised advertising code specifically prohibiting the use of sexual imagery of children, critics from both inside and outside of federal parliament claim very little has actually changed.

“The [sexualisation] report was published in June 2008,” Mrs Prentice said. “The government did not bother to respond until more than a year later, in July 2009.”





“When they finally decided to read this report on an issue that is very important to the future of Australian families, what action did they take? Essentially, they did nothing. They admitted that there is a problem. They noted the recommendations.”

Sophie Mirabella (Indi, Vic) said the more recent *Reclaiming public space* report on outdoor advertising has also failed to spark substantial action to protect children and young people.

“It is time we did something real,” Mrs Mirabella said. “It is time we said to the Advertising Standards Board, ‘Don’t mock us.’”

“Self-regulation does not work; we know that. If you have ignored the welfare of children just to make a quick, easy buck through advertising, perhaps it is time to tighten regulation on advertising.

“Perhaps it is time to discuss a statutory body with real powers, including issuing serious fines to offenders, because if all you get is a slap with a wet lettuce then you are going to continue taking the easy way out.”

Dr Hambleton agrees, saying the failure of self-regulation to protect children from sexualised advertising means other measures must be looked at. He has called for a fresh inquiry into the sexualisation of children, backed by a firm regulatory response to rein in the excesses of the industry and let children have a childhood.

“There is strong evidence that premature sexualisation is likely to be detrimental to child health and development, particularly in the areas of body image and sexual health,” Dr Hambleton said.

“We urge the government to start a new inquiry with the view to introducing tougher measures, including legislation, to protect the health and development of our children by shielding them from sexualised and other inappropriate advertising.”

#### LITTLE WOMEN:

*More pressure on children to grow up too quickly*



However the Advertising Standards Bureau, which manages the regulation of advertising and the Advertising Standards Board, said there is no need for another inquiry into advertising regulation. ASB chief executive Fiona Jolly said self-regulation has been a success since its inception in 1998, and has been strongly supported by findings of previous inquiries into the issue.

“Two parliamentary inquiries have now recommended that advertising self-regulation remain,” Ms Jolly said.

“Since its inception, the Advertising Standards Bureau has made many changes to systems and processes of our own initiative and in response to community concerns. Our solutions for making the system more transparent and accountable have been carefully implemented to ensure any changes will be of benefit.”

The use of explicit imagery in advertising is not the only source of concern when it comes to the sexualisation of young people. The widespread practice of digitally altering photographs of models and celebrities has also been condemned for leading young people to develop impossible ideals of how they should look.

WATCHING OVER THEM:  
*More legislation may be  
 needed to protect children*

American Medical Association board member Dr Barbara McAneny, cited in a speech to the Senate by Senator Helen Polley (Tas), said advertisers commonly alter photographs to enhance the appearance of models' bodies, and such alterations can contribute to unrealistic expectations of appropriate body image – especially among impressionable children and adolescents.

“A large body of literature links exposure to media-propagated images of unrealistic body image to eating disorders and other child and adolescent health problems,” Dr McAneny said.

Concerned about this issue, a national committee of women parliamentarians has decided to campaign for measures to address the harm caused by the digital enhancement of images. Chaired by Western Australian MP Lisa Baker and including women parliamentarians from across Australia, the committee is pushing to ensure their concerns get national attention.

Speaking in the Victorian parliament, deputy chair of the committee Christine Fyffe urged lawmakers to introduce requirements for digitally enhanced images to be marked as such.

“The media practice of presenting unrealistic images encourages our vulnerable young to strive for what is not natural,” Ms Fyffe said.

“Israel has recently introduced legislation requiring that any digitally altered image of the human body produced in Israel that is published in print or electronically will now have to carry a statement that the image has been altered. Australia must follow Israel's lead.”

This call for a direct legislative response to the causes of sexualisation is gaining support across Australia's parliaments.

In the House of Representatives, Jane Prentice said she would welcome ongoing monitoring of regulation and if necessary further legislation to protect children.

Senator Helen Polley said the most important thing is to increase community awareness of the issue, but agrees

## WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS SPEAK OUT

Issues such as the sexualisation of young people and the digital enhancement of images are of concern to a national committee of women parliamentarians, chaired by Western Australian MP Lisa Baker and involving representatives from all of Australia's parliaments (federal, state and territory). The national committee has developed an action agenda called w.comm which provides a platform for communication and engagement, and advocates on a range of issues in parliaments across Australia. You can connect with these issues at [www.wcomm.org](http://www.wcomm.org) or join the conversation on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/w.commAus](https://www.facebook.com/w.commAus) or follow the Twitter feed: @w.commAus

governments have to play a role in ensuring advertisers and the media live up to community expectations.

“I think we have got to have this real earnest discussion within the community and we need to have that dialogue to say what is acceptable,” Senator Polley said. “We seem to be moving as a society towards anything goes, anything is acceptable, that we don't want to impose rules and regulations on people.

“But I think we have to have some regulation there to protect the young. And if it's not being done by self-regulation then I think it's time for governments to step in.”

According to Amanda Rishworth, we all need to play a role or the problems of sexualisation will only get worse.

“I do not think that it is any one group's responsibility, and that has been the trouble – one group of people has not been responsible, because it is a complex issue,” Ms Rishworth said.

“Industry, government, parents and the community need to work together to ensure that as a society we deal effectively with this important issue so that future generations of Australian boys and girls can grow and develop in an environment that promotes positive and healthy messages.

“Unfortunately, I feel that we are going the other way.” •



## POINT OF VIEW

Two participants in a young women's forum at Parliament House in Canberra (the w.comm forum) give their perspectives on sexualisation of children and young people.

## The issue runs deeper

BY ALEXIA FULLER

If you are under 25, I am fairly certain you will have seen the television show *Toddlers and tiaras* or the YouTube clip with five-year-old child beauty queen Alana Thompson strutting around in next to nothing. This program is regularly watched by many of my friends.



This says a lot about where society has reached, that a program about tiny children acting four or five times their age can be so popular. The idea that sexualised images of young children are seemingly acceptable to our community is a worrying thought.

I write as a young person who has witnessed some of my peers give into the pressure to conform to an idealised body image reinforced by our mainstream media.

I feel the all-pervasive sexual images in the media affect every individual to varying degrees. Many of us are now so used to the overt sexual references that it almost goes over our heads without any consideration. For others, elements of the media, such as digitally enhanced images, can cause serious body image problems.

We all have days when we don't look our best. However, for some young people the issue runs deeper. Serious issues arise when young people avoid doing things, such as eating or exercise, because they are worried what people will think of how they look.

I am not saying overtly sexual images in the media are the sole demon causing hurt and pain to all. Nevertheless, it can't do you any favours when what is constantly publicised in the media are images of girls with pristine skin and svelte body shapes.

For me though the most serious thing is when children younger than 10 start to worry about the way they look.

I have a friend who watches a six-year-old girl until her parents come home. Recently the little girl stopped eating the peanut butter sandwiches my friend gives her because there were too many carbs in bread. Where does a six-year-old get that kind of information?

We have a responsibility to put pressure on governments to regulate the industry so as to prevent the publicising of overly sexual images to children. We need young people to feel safe and happy in their own skin.

## Put down the airbrush

BY ASH QAMA

When I was younger I used to love reading magazines. Every month I used to buy *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* and gawk at the colourful pages with my friends. I would like to think that I didn't pay any attention to the ads, but given the sheer number of them within these magazines, I know I did. There always seemed to be beautiful thin models parading in their bikinis or magnificent dresses having more fun than me with whatever product they were promoting, looking happy and sure of themselves, seemingly all the things I was not.



Of course, the models in these ads were not the cause of my insecurity. I don't want to vilify beautiful women or men for their looks. My insecurity was amplified however by these kind of advertisements targeted at a youth demographic by marketers. Being a young person can be difficult enough trying to figure out your own identity without being bombarded with targeted ads in a variety of mediums telling you that if you buy a product, your life or appearance can be better.

Looking back, I feel a bit silly being so impressionable. Until I stumbled onto Photoshop Disasters, a blog which ridicules badly photoshopped images, I didn't realise that so many photo shoots were airbrushed, not to mention manipulated badly – sometimes past the point of recognisable human anatomy.

France debated the idea of a law some time ago that would require digitally altered photos to be labelled with a warning. Would this help prevent young people from aspiring to achieve unrealistic beauty ideals? It might. It would be impossible to ban altering images altogether, so perhaps this is the closest we can get.

Some magazines such as *Seventeen* in the US have caved to pressure to publish photos of ethnically and physically diverse models with minimal airbrushing. I think this may be a better solution, though convincing the fashion and marketing industries to follow suit would be quite difficult.

However, if *Seventeen* receives positive support for this move and increases its profit in the process, it could become a viable option that would hopefully prevent many young people from feeling more insecure than they may already.



# Waiting for the wins

Australians spend nearly \$20 billion each year on gambling and most is poured into the country's 200,000 poker machines.

With growing concerns about the damage done to individuals and families, a parliamentary committee is looking for remedies to problem gambling.

STORY: GEOFFREY MASLEN





**For each addicted gambler  
up to 10 more people are  
seriously affected**



**T**he first time Tom Cummings played the pokies he won. It turned out to be the worst luck he could have had.

“I started playing poker machines socially but I very quickly developed a problem which I concealed for several years. I played and lost in the vicinity of \$100,000 in three years, all the while concealing that from the people around me,” Mr Cummings says.

“The biggest problem was that the first time I played I won a \$100 jackpot. That was huge; that was brilliant. But it set me up to think the next time I played this was going to be easy. And I was nowhere close...”

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## Problem gambling is not confined to poker machines

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A self-confessed former pokies addict, Mr Cummings gave an insight into his former life at a public hearing by the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform. The committee is inquiring into the prevention and treatment of problem gambling, mainly focused on prevention strategies, intervention and treatment programs, as well as marketing strategies and inducements that might result in more problem gambling.

The inquiry builds on earlier reviews of proposed mandatory pre-commitment schemes and gambling advertising. As well as holding a number of public hearings, the committee has received 55 submissions from individuals and expert groups, most of whom are working to tackle the impact gambling is having on Australians and their families.

That impact is huge: the Productivity Commission estimates that 600,000 Australians play the pokies at least weekly and up to 170,000 adults face significant problems due to their gambling, with as many as 350,000 gamblers vulnerable. The commission says for each addicted gambler up to 10 more people are seriously affected, including families, friends and employers.

If that isn't enough of a concern, the commission warns 60 per cent of problem gamblers who have sought counselling spoke of killing themselves. And 400 suicides each year could be attributed to addictive gambling.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists tells the committee in its submission that problem gambling often coexists with psychological problems of anxiety and depression. Gambling could be a way of dealing with pre-existing anxiety or depression and both conditions require appropriate treatment.

Discussing his addiction to poker machines, Mr Cummings gives an insider's view on the feelings of problem gamblers.

“Once I started playing, everything else would go away. I could stop worrying about the money I owed, the hours I was losing from work or the fights that I was having with my partner,” he says.

“When I was playing, that was all there was: it was just the screen, the reels and waiting for the wins. If the win came up, it was great. I would take that and just keep playing. If I lost, I would just hit it again. It becomes your world when you are playing a poker machine because it is so constant, so quick and so repetitive.”



Although he no longer plays the pokies, Mr Cummings says he regularly dropped into gaming venues to “take a look around”, to study the machines, watch the patrons and the staff, and check the signs on the walls and attached to the machines. He soon realised nothing had changed in the decade since he had started playing and thought it was time he did something about it. So he began researching gambling, especially the problems caused by addiction to poker machines, and writing about his findings, including setting up his own blog.

Among the dozens of recommendations made to the committee by psychiatrists, psychologists, gambling counsellors and others who study problem gambling, several call for staff in gaming venues to be trained to recognise potential problem gamblers and take action. But Mr Cummings says he has never seen a staff member in any of the venues he has visited approach a gambler about their playing behaviour.

“It never happened to me. And I know from speaking to staff after hours that their training is regarded as a necessary evil, something they have to do to keep their jobs. Given that many staff are casual employees, often university students, it is a bit much to expect they would have the inclination or the presence of mind to approach and speak to someone suspected of having a gambling problem.”

In June the clubs industry mailed a policy paper to all federal politicians saying staff in poker machine venues would be required to approach problem gamblers and discuss with them how to overcome addiction, including self-exclusion. The paper was prepared by Clubs Australia which represents more than 600 non-profit clubs and was the organisation that headed the nation-wide campaign last year against the Gillard government's planned mandatory pre-commitment scheme to limit gamblers' losses.





THINKSTOCK

**FINANCIAL HEADACHE:**  
Some gamblers are struggling  
to make ends meet

“It becomes your world when you are playing a poker machine because it is so constant, so quick and so repetitive.”

## OUR NATIONAL HABIT

- Nearly two in every three adult Australians, about 11 million people, participated in some form of gambling last year among whom 1.1 million gambled 10 per cent or more of their annual income.
- The proportion of Australians who gamble has fallen from 76 per cent 10 years ago, a significant decline that has occurred in almost every state and territory.
- Australians spent \$18.1 billion on gambling in 2011 with \$10.9 billion or 60 per cent going into poker machines (down from \$14 billion 10 years ago).
- The average Australian spends \$1,641 a year on gambling while the average poker machine player spends \$2,407 a year.
- At risk or problem gamblers spend an average of \$11,500 each a year and several hours a day on poker machines; they tend to be older, living alone and retired, to be in the lower socio-economic group and with poorer education.
- More than one in four adult Australians played poker machines in 2011 and more than half bought lottery tickets or ‘scratchies’.
- All forms of gambling are trending down except for racing and sports betting where spending increased to \$3.6 billion in 2011: \$2.6 billion on racing and \$1 billion on sports betting.
- Gambling rates vary considerably from state to state: Western Australia has the highest gambling rate despite a ban on poker machines but lotteries there are highly popular. Queensland has the next highest participation rate – particularly in rural areas that have many league clubs while Victoria has the lowest.
- Older Australians gamble more than younger: while 63 per cent of the adult population gamble, only 44 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds do.

*Source: Members of Roy Morgan Research presented these findings, based on interviews with a randomly-selected 21,000 Australians, to the Gambling Reform Committee at a hearing in Canberra.*

The paper says prevalence rates and estimated social costs related to problem gambling are much lower than other public health issues such as problem drinking, illegal drug use, mental illness, obesity and smoking. Therefore, “a more measured [government] policy is required”.

Similar arguments are set out in submissions to the committee from the Australian Hotels Association and the Australasian Gaming Council, the members of which include hotels and casinos, licensed gambling operators and gaming machine manufacturers. The submissions indicate that the billions spent on gambling contribute 10 per cent of all state and territory taxation revenues, that the gambling industries are significant employers and that they are also major contributors to tourism, hospitality and funding for local communities.

The lobby groups argue that the majority of Australians gamble responsibly and within their means, and that only a relatively small proportion of the population “experience



## The use of self-exclusion from gaming venues is futile

problems associated with gambling”. They also point out that problem gambling is not confined to poker machines and preventative measures should not be restricted to them alone.

This was a topic raised with the committee by Christopher Hunt, a psychologist who heads a gambling treatment clinic at the University of Sydney. His main concerns include live announcing of available odds during sporting broadcasts, the practice of using inducements in marketing such gambling, the use of language to create or strengthen the link between gambling and winning, and the failure of marketing strategies to properly explain why gamblers should expect to lose in the long run.

“We note with concern the practice of inducements involving free bets or bonus credits that are routinely offered to [gamblers attracted to] sports betting websites,” Mr Hunt’s submission states “Clients of the treatment centre report that such inducements encourage them to think they have nothing to lose by betting, or that betting offers them easy money or free money. Such offers are highly appealing, and make it difficult for them to ignore, cut back or stop gambling.

“Clients at the clinic report considerably more gambling arising from this style of free bet inducements than those offered at land-based gambling operators such as reward points or cheap meals. It is likely the gambling industry sees it as an essential marketing strategy to promote gambling by associating it with knowledge, skills, success, winning and long-term wealth. This is because such associations are explicitly encouraged in most if not all forms of gambling advertising.”

Chair of the Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce, Reverend Tim Costello, says sports betting and betting online, which were not covered by the Interactive Gaming Act, have “exploded” and need regulation.

“The public has been quite shocked by the wave of sports betting. They were not asked for their views on allowing it

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[and] it has saturated sporting events,” Mr Costello says. “It has started to shape the culture, with children often now thinking of sport in terms of the odds – even under-10 cricket and football games with odds on who is 11th man or who is on the bench.”

The Northern Territory-based online betting company, Sportsbet, added to the growing concern among politicians and experts in June when it offered bets on whether Melbourne’s trains would meet Metro’s service targets by running on time that month. But a public outcry followed and the company was forced to withdraw its offer, although not its other so-called novelty bets including odds on which party will win the next election, who will lead Labor, and which country will be the first to leave the Eurozone market.

When the head of the school of psychology at the University of Sydney, Professor Alex Blaszczynski, appeared before the committee, he predicted that within 20 years there would be an increase in social media gambling based on iPads and smart phones.

“I think the cohort coming through will certainly bring in an entirely new technology based form of gambling,”



BAGGING A FORTUNE:  
*Australians gambled nearly  
 \$20 billion in 2010/11*

## DEALING WITH PROBLEM GAMBLING

- Problem gambling messages and campaigns should be promoted in gambling venues and via a variety of social media platforms.
- Increased funding be given for more effective advertising and information campaigns to highlight problem gambling and assistance to problem gamblers.
- Advertisements for betting and gambling companies during commercial breaks be restricted to a set number of times per hour and twice should be the maximum.
- All jurisdictions should work together to develop guidelines and legislation that address the challenges of the growing online betting market.
- Invest in the training of gambling venue staff to recognise problem gamblers and give them appropriate advice.
- Better awareness of problem gambling as a medical disorder by health funders.
- Money raised from gambling should be distributed among disadvantaged communities where gambling venues are preferentially located and hence are significantly more affected by problems associated with gambling.
- Stricter regulations on the issuing of gambling licences.

*Source: The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists*

Professor Blaszczynski says. “I think the electronic gaming machines will tend to remain but not be as popular as they are currently.”

In their submission, the psychologists at Sydney’s Gambling Treatment Clinic say they have researched different forms of treating problem gamblers, including cognitive

therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, multimodal therapy and supportive counselling. They believe “pure cognitive therapy” represents the best treatment because it is based on the idea that persistence at gambling was motivated by the gambler’s misguided understanding of the probabilities of winning.

“In other words, it assumes that problem gamblers make poorly informed decisions about gambling and are unaware of their own erroneous thinking,” their submission states. “Data collected at the clinic clearly indicated that changes in an individual’s beliefs and knowledge about gambling are one of the key predictors of reduced gambling behaviour... with minimal rates of relapse over the longer term.”

In reviewing other options, the psychologists note research which shows that Gamblers Anonymous – widely cited as a ‘help-seeking option’ for problem gamblers – has much poorer results compared with professional treatment. Likewise, they say the use of self-exclusion from gaming venues is futile because of the sheer number of gaming venues that allowed gamblers easy access to alternative venues.

Submissions from other groups echo the psychologists’ call for more research into problem gambling and treatment methods, as well as into early intervention, developmental pathways of problem gambling, the effects of self-exclusion in areas of high, medium and low density gambling, and public education and awareness campaigns.

But Mr Cummings criticises the emphasis on treating problem gambling rather than on prevention.

“Treatment is something we have been focusing on for decades while we have ignored prevention for far too long,” he says. “The truth is that regarding poker machines none of the [treatment] initiatives has had any impact on the experience of actually playing a poker machine. That has remained essentially unchanged for over 20 years, save for changes implemented by the industry that are designed to increase revenue, not reduce problem gambling.”

The one single measure that has had a significant impact on poker machine revenue was the introduction of smoking bans. Except, that is, in New South Wales, which allows ‘al fresco’ gaming where patrons are able to smoke at their poker machines in gaming areas technically classified as outdoor areas.

“What this highlights is a refusal on the part of state governments and the industry to act on the gambling product itself, and instead focus on the trappings,” Mr Cummings says.

“The two preventative measures that have attracted the most discussion in recent times, being mandatory pre-commitment and maximum \$1 bets for poker machines, both had the potential to change the actual playing experience for gamblers.

“And this was among the reasons why the measures were so strongly opposed by the gambling industry while others had been strongly supported.” •

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** on the inquiry into the prevention and treatment of problem gambling, visit [www.aph.gov.au/gamblingreform](http://www.aph.gov.au/gamblingreform) or email [gamblingreform@aph.gov.au](mailto:gamblingreform@aph.gov.au) or phone (02) 6277 3433.



## THE LAW

# Illegal timber faces the axe

Legislation targets imports and domestic harvesting.

**T**he importation and sale of illegally harvested timber, or products containing illegal timber, will be banned under legislation currently being considered by federal parliament.

Illegal timber harvesting costs the global economy US\$60 billion annually, impacting environmental sustainability and undercutting legal and regulated timber industries.

The Illegal Logging Prohibition Bill 2011 restricts the importation of illegal timber products through customs controls, and institutes monitoring at timber processing plants to ensure domestically sourced raw logs are legally harvested.

Individuals found guilty of importing or processing illegal timber will face up to five years in jail, while corporations would be liable for fines of up to \$275,000 per offence.

While the bill establishes the regulatory and enforcement framework for monitoring illegal timber, the regulations that define what constitutes illegally harvested timber will be contained in subordinate legislation still being developed.

Then Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Mike Kelly said it is important to get the framework in place so the

new rules are ready to be enforced once the regulations are finalised.

“The government recognises these are essential first steps towards a longer-term goal of Australia sourcing timber products from sustainably managed forests, wherever in the world they are,” Dr Kelly said.

The bill assists in bringing Australia in line with its international partners, with similar legislation enacted in the United States and Europe to combat illegal logging and reduce its impact in the Southeast Asia region.

A report from the Joint Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee supported the passage of the bill as a key tool in the ongoing fight against illegal logging.

“Illegal logging imposes an enormous financial, environmental and social cost worldwide,” Trade Sub-Committee chair Janelle Saffin (Page, NSW) said. “The World Bank estimates that illegal logging as a criminal activity generates approximately US\$10 to 15 billion annually worldwide.”

However opposition members of the committee produced a minority report calling for the bill to be delayed until subordinate legislation is finalised and further community consultation is undertaken on the bill’s impact.

“It is indisputable that as soon as it enters into law, the Illegal Logging Prohibition Bill will cause uncertainty in Australia’s timber trade because importers will not know what the precise impact of the legislation will be until the regulations are enacted,” the minority report states.

The Coalition members also said there is “considerable unease” among Australia’s key regional trading partners about a lack of consultation on the bill’s impact.

“The evidence presented to the Trade Sub-Committee also clearly shows that important regional trading partners believe this bill will harm their trading relationship with Australia and that there is legal uncertainty as to whether the bill is World Trade Organisation (WTO) compliant.”

Greens members of the committee also raised concerns about the consultation process, saying a more considered approach with more input from importer countries needs to be developed to ensure the regulations are effective and supported by all parties.

**“Importers will not know what the precise impact of the legislation will be until the regulations are enacted”**

“One of the persistent complaints from a variety of submitters to this and previous inquiries has been the lack of clarity and certainty in the current bill,” the Greens’ statement said. “In particular, the lack of clarity regarding the definition of illegal timber and the lack of clarity regarding due diligence requirements remains unresolved.”

But Dr Kelly told the House extensive consultation with the timber industry has already been done, and will continue to be done through an illegal logging working group made up of government and industry representatives.

“The government will continue to work closely with its illegal logging working group and state and

**“These are essential first steps towards a longer-term goal of Australia sourcing timber products from sustainably managed forests”**

## THE LAW

**CRIMECHOPPERS:** *Illegal logging hits the economy and the environment*

THINKSTOCK



territory governments to develop the subordinate legislative instruments required," Dr Kelly said.

### **Illegal timber harvesting costs the global economy US \$60 billion annually**

"The Illegal Logging Prohibition Bill 2011 delivers on the government's policy to restrict

the importation and sale of illegally logged timber in Australia.

"It will remove unfair competition posed by illegally logged timber for Australia's domestic timber producers and suppliers and establish an even economic playing field for the purchase and sale of legally logged timber products and provide assurance to consumers that products they purchase have been sourced in compliance with government legislation." •

## AGRICULTURE

## Wheat exports open up

### **Accreditation scheme to be abolished.**

**T**he Australian wheat export market will take the final steps to deregulation under legislative changes contained in the Wheat Export Marketing Amendment Bill 2012.

Wheat exporters are currently required to be accredited under a scheme overseen by Wheat Exports Australia, which replaced the old 'single desk' export model administered by the Australian Wheat Board prior to July 2008.

The amendment will phase out the requirements for accreditation, and the associated Wheat Export Charge that is applied to all wheat exports to fund the accreditation scheme.

Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Sid Sidebottom said the accreditation scheme has served its purpose in supporting the transition from a single exporter model to a deregulated market.

"Abolishing the scheme will ensure that the benefits to industry provided by accreditation during the transition to deregulation are not undermined in the longer term by the direct and indirect costs of continuing with a scheme that has served its purpose," Mr Sidebottom said.

"These costs include the WEC and the administrative and regulatory burden of accreditation, as well as the negative impact of unnecessary regulation on efficiency and competition in the wheat industry over time."

However the Victorian Farmers Federation has voiced opposition to the bill, saying the WEC and Wheat Exports Australia should be maintained and used to fund and direct improvements to the industry.

"We believe that there is an opportunity with the WEA to control the WEC," VFF Grains Group president Andrew Weidemann said. •

## THE LAW

ISTOCK



**MARRIAGE SPLIT:** Differences of view over same-sex marriage bills

## SOCIAL POLICY

## Divisions remain over marriage bills

### MPs urged to consider committee's report.

Parliament still stands divided on two controversial bills which seek to legalise same-sex marriage in Australia. A report by the House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee has prompted another round of passionate debate.

The Marriage Equality Amendment Bill and the Marriage Amendment Bill seek to legalise same-sex marriage in Australia and recognise same-sex marriages performed in foreign countries. Both bills uphold existing protections that ensure no obligation is placed on ministers of religion to perform any marriage, which would include same-sex marriages.

Tabling the report in parliament, committee chair Graham Perrett (Moreton, Qld), urged all MPs to read the committee's report before voting on the two marriage equality bills before the House.

"I appreciate that there are many differences of opinion among us, as there is across the country. However, we have the weighty responsibility of upholding the views of the constituents who elected us to this position," Mr Perrett said.

"We have a duty to lead, as well as to represent our constituents and to vote accordingly."

To assist parliament with the debate, the report outlined some amendments which emerged from the evidence

received by the inquiry. This includes rewording of the bills to define marriage as simply 'between two people' in order to achieve the intent of removing discrimination in the Marriage Act.

The inquiry also found that, for practical purposes, it may be desirable for the proponents of the two bills to discuss agreeing on the text of a single bill for the parliament to consider.

The committee chose not to recommend how MPs should vote on the bills, but committee members submitted additional remarks which reflect the diversity of views in the parliament and the community.

Some members of the committee argued that the overwhelming response to its public inquiry showed that the community is ready for change, stating that it is indefensible and unjust that two people who love each other are unable to marry each other because of their sexual orientation.

But other committee members disputed that Australian attitudes to marriage have changed, saying the limitation of marriage to people of the opposite sex was not to discriminate against people who wish to belong to same-sex relationships, but rather acknowledges the unique institution of marriage.

More debate on the bills is expected during parliament's Spring sittings. •

## EMPLOYMENT

## Wanted: life beyond work

### Proposals aim for better balance.

The right to request flexible working arrangements would be extended to all long-term casual employees and those employed for over 12 months under proposed amendments to workplace legislation.

The Fair Work Amendment (Better Work/Life Balance) Bill 2012 seeks to expand the National Employment Standards to allow staff to request the number of hours they work, the scheduling of those hours and the location of the workplace.

Current legislation only allows similar requests to be made by people with caring responsibilities for children under school age, or dependants under 18 with disabilities.

However a review by the House Education and Employment Committee has cast doubt over whether the amendments will be adopted.

The majority report of the committee recommended that consideration of the amendments be delayed until after a current review of the Fair Work Act 2009 is completed.

Introducing the private member's bill into the House, Adam Bandt (Melbourne, Vic) said it will provide a better work/life balance for Australian families.

"Sixty per cent of women say that they feel consistently time pressured and nearly half of men also feel this way," Mr Bandt told the House.

"Almost half of all fathers in couple households work more than they would prefer, and one-third of women working full time would also prefer to work less, even taking into account the impact that this might have on their income."

Mr Bandt said the bill would help families to better spread working responsibilities.

Professor Anna Charlesworth of the Centre for Work + Life welcomed



the bill, saying the amendments will provide people greater control over their time and the right to adjust their work schedule to fit changes in personal circumstances, lifestyles and family arrangements.

However the Australian Industry Group said the amendments will put undue pressure on employers that are already trying to do the right thing by their staff.

“Business conditions are very tough under the two speed economy and the high dollar is impacting substantially on many of our members,” Australian Industry Group CEO John O’Callaghan told a committee inquiry into the bill.

“Most employers try hard to accommodate reasonable requests for flexible working arrangements as it currently exists under the Fair Work Act.” •

THINKSTOCK



**HOMEWORK:** Many workers want to spend less time in the office

## LEGAL AFFAIRS

## Judging the judges

### Support for judicial complaints mechanism.

**A** new framework for dealing with complaints against federal court justices is a step closer after a report by the House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee recommended the proposed legislation be passed by the House.

The Judicial Complaints Bill sets up an internal mechanism for lower level complaints about judicial conduct to be handled by the Chief Justices of the Federal and Family Courts and the Chief Federal Magistrate.

The Parliamentary Commissions Bill is focused on serious complaints against sitting Commonwealth judicial officers, including a Justice of the High Court of Australia. The bill enables the establishment of parliamentary commissions, following a resolution by each house of the parliament, to investigate specified allegations of misbehaviour or incapacity, which in rare circumstances could lead to the dismissal of a federal court justice.

First assistant secretary at the Attorney-General’s Department Louise Glanville said together the bills will provide parliament and the judiciary with standard mechanisms for investigating complaints and allegations of misconduct or incapacity.

“The bills will give the public increased confidence that complaints about judicial officers will be handled appropriately and in this way the bills will promote an independent, robust and accountable judiciary,” Ms Glanville said.

But opposition members of the committee have raised concerns the bills could lead to a flood of complaints and impact on the independence of the judiciary.

Committee deputy chair Judi Moylan (Pearce, WA) questioned whether the Parliamentary Commissions Bill could undermine the independence of the judiciary by formalising a system allowing

politicians to dismiss judges from the federal courts.

“I think we have to be very, very careful that there is not political interference in the work of our judiciary,” Mrs Moylan said. “I think that is my overriding concern and, reading through the submissions, that clearly comes out as a concern of many.”

Former Attorney-General Philip Ruddock (Berowra, NSW), who joined the committee for its examination of the two bills, also cast doubts on the changes, predicting a steep rise in vexatious claims.

“What I am worried about is something that all of the data and statistics that you have will probably not reflect, the propensity for litigants in the family law area in particular to be so fixated about outcomes they will pursue every avenue, even to the point in the end of not accepting the function and the role of the judiciary.

“And I suspect providing a mechanism is likely to generate an enormous number of complaints in comparison to what you have seen in other jurisdictions.”

However Law Council of Australia treasurer Michael Colbran QC said the council supports the two bills, with the new system having the potential to increase transparency and public confidence in the judiciary.

“Our perception and our present position is that we do not fear a floodgate of new problems arising through that mechanism,” Mr Colbran said. “But what we do see is that there may be additional complaints that are identified by the fact that you have an established mechanism.

“So at the moment we may have a situation where there is, shall I say, unsatisfied demand to bring forward a complaint which in itself has a tendency to undermine confidence in the operation of the judicial system.” •

# Net benefit

Australia should be investing now for a food boom to follow the mining boom, with commercial fishing and aquaculture playing a valuable role.





## Story: Georgie Oakeshott

**A**mong the four million recreational fishermen in this country looking forward to their next opportunity to drop a line, there's one who knows a bit more about what's biting than your average angler.

Scientist and keen fisherman Patrick Hone is executive director of Australia's fisheries research body and is extremely well versed in all things pelagic, easily drawing on a wealth of research and statistics to support his enthusiasm for the future of Australia's so-called blue economy.

With almost 30 years' experience in fisheries and aquaculture science, including 15 as head of the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC), Dr Hone has witnessed huge changes in fisheries science and says decisions today are being made on a vast array of scientific data to maximise efficiencies and minimise waste.

Since joining the FRDC – which has an annual spend of around \$30 million – Dr Hone has been involved in a wide range of projects from pippis to prawns.

His diverse work these days includes developing opportunities for Tasmania's Atlantic salmon farms and seeking new opportunities for Australia's pearl industry, which he describes as second to none in the world.

But while he feels he's surrounded by a sea of good news stories, the perception of Australia's fisheries and aquaculture industries is often quite the opposite, with only an estimated one in four Australians believing the industry is sustainable.

"There are a lot of unfounded comments about fisheries and the status of

stocks which have led to some perceptions of us as a threat," Dr Hone says.

"But Australia has some very conservative measures of what we call an allowable catch and our job is to make sure the fish are going to be here, being sustainably produced and an asset for Australians for a very long time."

He says Australia has one of the most rigorous compliance regimes in global fishing and our wild fisheries management is ranked among the top five management regimes in the world.

Speaking at a House of Representatives Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry Committee hearing into the role of science for fishing and aquaculture, Dr Hone told MPs Australia has an enormous opportunity to build a future beyond the mining boom.

He says with Southeast Asia on our doorstep, we should be investing now for a food boom.

"A lot of people don't realise that fish is the most traded animal protein in the world. It is the largest food

protein industry. It is also the fastest growing food protein in the world and aquaculture is the fastest growing food component of that.

"The big question for Australia, when we sit on such a land mass and have the third largest exclusive economic zone and such enormous opportunities, is: how do we realise being part of that economy, boom or revolution?"

The economic zone he refers to is our internationally sanctioned fishing zone, which at 13.6 million square kilometers is the third largest in the world, extending way out into the Indian and Pacific Oceans, up to Papua New Guinea and down to Antarctica.

However due to a unique set of biophysical characteristics and a low level of nutrients in the water, this huge fishing zone is disappointingly low in fish numbers and our catch on a global scale is tiny, currently ranked 60th in the world. Some countries catch more of just one species than Australia's total catch across all species.

## Global seafood consumption is increasing at around 2.5 per cent per year





“Look at the Mekong River,” says Dr Hone. “It produces 1.5 million metric tonnes of fish just from that one river while our total production is 250,000 tonnes.”

“Our waters are not nutrient rich. We don’t have big river systems on a world scale, and so Australia has less capability to support fisheries.”

But what Australia’s fishing grounds lack in quantity, we more than make up for in quality, producing high value species such as abalone and rock lobster.

“We are one of the most biologically diverse marine countries in the world,” Dr Hone told the inquiry.

“We have a large number of species endemic to our island. We have the world’s largest abalone fishery and produce 50 per cent of the world’s abalone. We produce 30 per cent of the world’s spiny rock lobster. So while we don’t have massive fisheries producing hundreds of millions of tonnes like some countries, we do have highly valuable fisheries.”

The FRDC told the inquiry Australia’s wild catch and aquaculture industry has a combined gross production value of \$2.1 billion, of which aquaculture provides around 40 per cent. Our exports are currently worth an estimated \$1.2 billion.

Dr Hone believes all these figures could be bigger without impacting our enviable record on sustainability.

Global seafood consumption is increasing at around 2.5 per cent per year because, quite simply, people like eating fish – and it’s not surprising when you consider the health benefits.

Gram for gram, fish is one of the lowest fat, highest protein foods you can eat. Not only is seafood the best natural source of omega 3s, important for the brain and nervous system, it’s low in cholesterol, high in vitamins A, B, E and D, and high in minerals, iodine and calcium.

FRDC forecasts the quantity of seafood required by 2050 will be double the present tonnage, which presents an opportunity for significant increases in production.

“The prospectivity in the wild fisheries is still very large – 67 per cent of the planet is covered by oceans – it is a very large area. I know there is a lot of talk about it being fished down, but I can tell you in Australian waters there is significant opportunity in the wild

catch. In aquaculture we have the fifth largest coastline in the world and one of the most unpopulated coastlines in the world. There must be somewhere we can fit aquaculture.”

Aquaculture is now the world’s fastest growing industry in primary food production and by 2015 is expected to pass wild catch fisheries as the primary source of fish protein for human consumption.

To keep up with world demand, FRDC estimates aquaculture will need to grow a staggering 70 per cent to 90 million tonnes by 2030.

Most of this growth will centre on Asia, home to 80 per cent of world aquaculture production – in particular China, with 60 per cent of production

In Australia, aquaculture has been slow to develop and is still in its infancy but the signs are good especially in salmonids, edible oysters, prawns, tuna and abalone which comprise around 75 per cent of our total harvest value.

The biggest is salmon, with Tasmania currently producing around 35,000 tonnes of Atlantic salmon worth around \$400 million, with hopes to grow that figure to 55,000 tonnes in the next four to five years.

“There is no doubt that with Australia’s land and water assets and the right vision we could easily produce one million metric tonnes of fish in this country with minimal footprint, sustainably,” says Dr Hone.

“Aquaculture is currently sitting at around \$900 million gross value of production at the farm gate, dominated by Atlantic salmon, but there’s no reason why that industry can’t be worth one billion, two billion or even 10 billion dollars.

“Unfortunately it hasn’t developed and I think one of the big questions for this inquiry is why? Why is it 14 years since we’ve had another prawn farm approved in Queensland? Why are we having so much trouble developing southern blue fin tuna propagation? Why couldn’t we get another prawn farm developed in Western Australia?”

Questions about prawn farming have also been raised by the Australian Marine Alliance which represents a range of industry voices including commercial and recreational fishermen.

The alliance’s chief executive, Dean Logan told MPs prawn farming is one of the most benign forms of seafood



harvesting yet is slowly disappearing from Australian shores.

“We do not have a single prawn farmer between Sydney Harbour and Eden. In our view that is akin to not having a single farmer on the land between Dubbo and Toowoomba. I question whether there would be a politician or an Australian who would accept that that would be a sufficient scientific outcome,” he told the inquiry.

Concerned about the federal government’s recent announcement to extend marine parks, Mr Logan called for more frank, free and fearless scientific advice.

“We need more independent science and the science needs to be front and centre of the policy debate. We don’t catch Nemo the Clown Fish, we don’t catch Barry the Boofhead Wrasse, we don’t catch dolphins and we don’t catch whales. We actually protect our environment very well, and there’s no reason why we couldn’t fish stocks more but at the same time be sustainable.”

Concerns about the sustainability of the industry have also been raised, with the World Wildlife Fund asking if Australia is prepared for the challenges ahead. Speaking at a recent public hearing, the environmental NGO’s



## QUALITY OVER QUANTITY:

*Australia benefits from high value species like rock lobster*

lesser ability or interest in doing so," he says.

"If we are to feed growing human populations in the most environmentally friendly manner, the world cannot afford to not exploit fisheries sustainably at levels that approximate the maximum long-term surplus production. Well managed fishing has a far smaller environmental footprint than other forms of food production. More and more of the world's fisheries will need to be fully exploited but not over-fished."

To address some of the barriers to productivity, the FRDC is calling for the harmonisation of federal and state legislation and regulations with the establishment of a national fishery management standard and the creation of a single national fishery management agency.

The FRDC is also working on the first national fisheries stock status report, due for release later this year, to provide a simple, scientifically robust tool to compare the status and sustainability of fish stocks in Australia.

"We think fisheries and aquaculture have enormous opportunities, and science has an important role connecting the dots from MPs to industry and thinking about doing something for the future of Australia. Our industry has a lot to offer and we should be thinking beyond the mining boom and investing now," says Dr Hone.

"We used to talk about Australia and our geographic location as being far away from world markets in America and Europe – well now we really are the lucky country because we're sitting on top of a market which is the world's largest consumer of food. We could be the specialist food bowl of Asia." •

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** on the House of Representatives Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry Committee inquiry into the role of science for fisheries and aquaculture, visit [www.aph.gov.au/arff](http://www.aph.gov.au/arff) or email [arff.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:arff.reps@aph.gov.au) or phone (02) 6277 4500.



national manager for marine, Professor Michael Harte questioned whether the current, well-established and highly regarded fisheries management model in Australia is set up appropriately for the future.

"I think there is an opportunity for this review to highlight some of those issues about whether we have the resources in place to see us maintain our pre-eminence in this field for the next 20 years," Professor Harte says. "I think we can take a lot of pride in where Australia has been for the last couple of decades, if not longer, but are we assured we are going to stay in that position for decades to come?"

Another leading fisheries scientist, Professor Bob Kearney is also worried about the future well-being of our fisheries and says we need to start being more strategic.

"Australia's fisheries are extremely well managed. They are, by world standards, very close to the best managed insofar as the management for the protection of species and the protection of biodiversity, and the sustainability of fisheries are concerned," Professor Kearney says.

"But unfortunately, they are not well managed at all when it comes to

## "Well managed fishing has a far smaller environmental footprint than other forms of food production."

the economics of ensuring the viability of the industries themselves. In fact, the problem there is that most of our fisheries are overcapitalised and Australia does not have a strategic approach to the management of our total fishery. As such, there has been virtually no development of new fisheries in Australia for the last 15 or 20 years, and the strategic issues, the big-picture issues, of how we manage our fisheries and the level of the industry's involvement in that have been totally neglected."

Professor Kearney says Australia should be doing more with what it's got, describing it as environmentally and socially irresponsible not to optimally use our fish stocks.

"By continuing to import the bulk of its seafood from countries with inferior records for sustainable fisheries Australia is effectively exporting responsibility for the sustainable management of the world's fish stocks to countries with



## Opportunities, challenges and above all hope as parliamentary democracy is revived in Myanmar.

Story: Andres Lomp

Seven years ago Myanmar started to build a new capital city half way between the old Burmese capital of Rangoon and the former royal capital of Mandalay. Now the nation is building a new democracy, moving beyond the five decades of military rule that have kept one of Southeast Asia's biggest countries largely isolated from the rest of the world.

One of the most impressive structures in Nay Pyi Taw is the new parliament building, although the term building hardly describes the vast complex standing as a symbol for a democracy still rising from its newly laid foundations.

A 20-lane highway leads to the parliament but for now the road is empty of the cars, buses and trucks you would expect to see on a major thoroughfare.

For now, only parliamentarians, officials and invited guests are allowed to enter the parliament. Public access is only through media coverage of the sittings. When asked why, one parliamentarian simply states: "Not yet."

While change has happened fast and there is a great expectation of more change to come, it's clear the country's transition will take time.

The leap to establish a new parliament has happened. The many steps needed to

make it a fully functioning legislature still lie ahead.

As part of its reengagement with the international community, Myanmar has been readmitted to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the global network that links 162 parliaments and encourages their democratic development.

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While change has happened fast and there is a great expectation of more change to come, it's clear the country's transition will take time.

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Following a request from the Myanmar parliament for assistance in developing its parliamentary capacity, the IPU sent a team to undertake a needs assessment as the first step in a longer-term support project.

IT'S A FIVE-HOUR DRIVE OR A short flight from Yangon (Rangoon) to Nay Pyi Taw and the IPU is not alone in making the journey.

International agencies of every description are now joining countries from around the world on the road to Nay Pyi Taw as the global community

rewards the reform process in Myanmar with recognition and offers of support.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon became the first foreign dignitary to address the new parliament, just two days before democracy campaigner Aung San Suu Kyi was sworn in as an MP along with other members of the National League for Democracy. In his speech to a joint parliamentary sitting, Ban Ki-moon pledged full UN support for Myanmar's development.

# Road to Nay Pyi Taw





DEMOCRATIC  
JOURNEY:  
*Election day in Myanmar;*  
*(inset) President Thein*  
*Sein introduced reforms*

Ironically, one of the biggest challenges for the country and its new parliament is not to be overwhelmed by the wave of goodwill now sweeping towards it.

Parliamentarians are new to their jobs and are finding their way through the procedural and legislative maze as they settle in to their second year of parliamentary work. Adding to their workload is the time needed to meet with the growing list of international delegations that are visiting the parliament.

Many parliamentarians stress that Myanmar's people need to take responsibility for their democracy. They are happy to receive advice and guidance, but ultimately want to make the decisions themselves.



**“This time the world needs to get it right.”**

The MPs are supported by a small group of officials who have been transferred to the fledgling parliament from government departments and the military. They have no prior experience of parliamentary processes.

Good practice is a phrase used in many of the conversations at the parliament. There is an eagerness to learn alongside recognition of how much there is to learn.

But there is no corporate memory on which to draw because parliament has not existed for such a long time.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the parliament already has displayed its tenacity for getting on with the job. It boasts a significant legislative record including



consideration of new labour, foreign investment and anti-corruption laws.

In the first year 53 pieces of legislation were reviewed by one of the key committees established to scrutinise bills, although detailed analysis of bills remains a work in progress.

Much of the new legislation is focused on economic development, with a strong recognition and desire among MPs to meet international standards to attract the investment needed to boost living standards throughout the country.

With government ministers all outside the parliament, oversight is becoming an important focus of the parliament's work as MPs get the opportunity to ask questions and seek information through a comprehensive system of parliamentary committees and commissions.

These provide the potential for stronger accountability with MPs already submitting a steady flow of questions to government. How the MPs make use of the information to hold the government to account will be an ongoing measure of the parliament's effectiveness.

Parliamentary accountability will be critical to ensure the economic, political and social transformation of the country is managed efficiently and reaches all of the groups that make up this vast land.

IN THE PARLIAMENT ITSELF THE DIVERSITY OF Myanmar is on full display as parliamentarians don traditional garb to wear into the sittings.

Much international focus has been directed to Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy. But there are a number of other political parties in the new parliament.

Many of these smaller parties represent the variety of ethnic groups that make up the complex tapestry of Myanmar. They are eager for advice on what they need to do to ensure their voice is heard in a parliamentary chamber dominated by the governing party and with 25 per cent of seats reserved for the military.

Myanmar's geographic spread presents a particular challenge for the new parliament. Connecting with people outside of the capital, particularly in the distant towns and villages, will be difficult but necessary if all the people of Myanmar are to feel part of the democratic revival.

With parliamentary sessions lasting for two to three months, and little opportunity during that time for MPs to return to their constituencies, parliamentarians will need to find ways they can stay in touch with the people who have elected them so that parliament does not remain remote.

As there are only 30 women among the 664 parliamentarians, gender equity also looms large as an issue for the parliament and the political parties. Aung San Suu Kyi's entry to the parliament certainly provides a significant role model for the future.

The three-month parliamentary session that commenced in July will give a first insight into the new dynamics of the parliament following the arrival of the MPs from the National League for Democracy. How they engage with the other parliamentarians and the role they seek to play will help to shape the directions the parliament will take, particularly in its relations with the government.

AS IT EXPLORES ITS MANDATE, THE NEEDS OF the new parliament are great, just as the needs of the country are great.



AAP

**DIVERSITY ON DISPLAY:**  
*Ethnic groups are represented in the new parliament*

Skills development is high on the agenda. As well as improving their knowledge of parliamentary operations, MPs and officials alike are keen to improve their English language and IT skills. Reconnected with the world they want to be in the best position to take advantage of the opportunities coming their way.

Information is the lifeblood of any parliament and the lack of a library in Myanmar's new parliament complex makes it difficult for the MPs to adequately access the resources they need to properly undertake their duties. The request for



#### LOOKING FORWARD:

*(Left) Aung San Suu Kyi sworn in at the new parliament building (pictured above)*

parliament the support it needs to develop into a modern democracy, the words of a diplomat attending Aung San Suu Kyi's parliamentary debut ring true: "This time the world needs to get it right." •

*An IPU team undertook a parliamentary needs assessment in Myanmar from late April to early May 2012. The team comprised Norah Babic (IPU secretariat Geneva), Supasinee Khamasundara (Thailand Parliament), Peter Lilienfeld (formerly of the South African Parliament) and Andres Lomp (Australian Parliament).*

## Good practice is a phrase used in many of the conversations at the parliament.

a library has featured in the IPU's assessment report because improved access to information and research will help reinforce the role of parliamentarians and the independence of parliament from government.

The ongoing development of the parliamentary committee system will also be critical. In a parliament with more than 600 members, the committees and commissions that have been established will need to become the engine rooms for the detailed scrutiny and deliberative work of the parliament. Here international guidance can play a role to help MPs get the good practice examples they are after.

And in a country that has not experienced democracy in 50 years, much effort will need to be devoted to educating and informing the community about the way parliament works and how the public can engage with their new representatives. This is a job that needs to be shared between the MPs themselves and the parliamentary administration.

As Nay Pyi Taw's newly built hotels continue to fill with the international experts arriving to give Myanmar and its

### Naming rights

In 1989, Burmese authorities changed the official name of the country in English from Burma to Myanmar (in full, the Union of Myanmar). In 2010 the Union of Myanmar became the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. A number of Burmese opposition political parties and groups do not recognise the changes and continue to refer to the country in English as Burma.

Myanmar is used by international organisations of which it is a member, such as the United Nations, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the World Trade Organization and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Practice by countries varies.

The Australian government refers to the country as Burma, but uses Myanmar when communicating directly with Burmese officials and in multilateral contexts, as appropriate.

Source: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



# Out of the shadows

A PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE IS THROWING LIGHT ON A MEDICAL CONDITION AFFECTING A GROWING NUMBER OF AUSTRALIANS AND THEIR FAMILIES. STORY: MICHELLE MURRAY

It's the ticking time bomb of an ageing population. And as the clock counts down, the affects will be felt by those caught in its grip, their families and the nation as a whole.

For Robert, the first signs emerged at the age of 55. At the time a successful accountant, he started having difficulty dealing with financial matters.

The doctor's advice: it's probably just memory overload.

Four years later, the bomb went off.

"I was travelling from our home to my office, where my accountancy business had been for over 20 years," Robert says. "I became completely disoriented, confused and lost. I rang my partner to ask where I was supposed to be going and how to get there. It took a few minutes of discussion to remind me that I was simply going to work and that I was just two streets away from it."

Robert had become dementia's latest casualty, a condition that affects around 280,000 Australians.

With around 1,600 new cases identified each week, the House of Representatives Health and Ageing Committee has launched a public inquiry into dementia, focusing on how early diagnosis and intervention can play a role in

improving quality of life, social and community engagement and future planning for people with dementia and their families.

"Dementia is already the single greatest cause of disability for Australians aged over 65 years, and is now acknowledged to be the third leading cause of death among Australians after heart disease and stroke," says committee chair Steve Georganas (Hindmarsh, SA).

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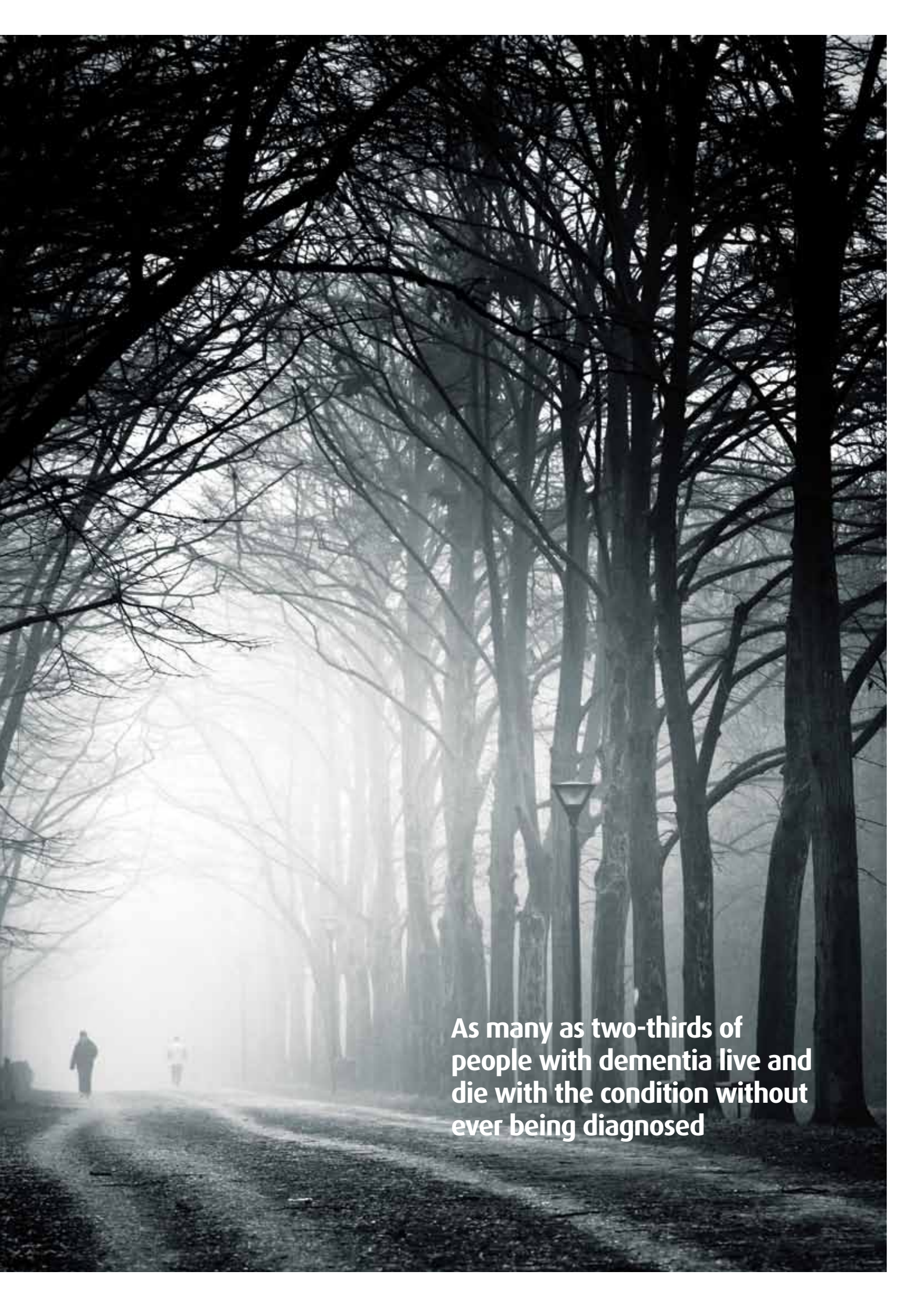
"My biggest fear was that doctors were going to tell me that nothing was wrong"

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The alarming statistics have spurred calls for greater action to overcome the barriers to early diagnosis and intervention for dementia.

But expert groups admit that even with the best intentions, improving diagnosis of dementia is often easier said than done.

The Australian Psychological Society says one of the main challenges is that patients often present with symptoms that could be applied to a number of conditions, making misdiagnosis common. For example, depression and dementia present with similar symptoms, including poor concentration, low mood and irritability.



**As many as two-thirds of people with dementia live and die with the condition without ever being diagnosed**



A family GP is often the first point of contact for sufferers, with the final diagnosis being made by specialists who rely heavily on clinical tests, such as brain imaging scans, in conjunction with the patient's medical history.

However the psychological society says these clinical tests can often miss the subtle changes that signal the early stages of dementia.

They are calling for greater focus on psychological testing in early diagnosis and intervention, regarding it as an essential component often overlooked by medical practitioners.

"These tests of brain function provide an accurate characterisation of current functioning," the Australian Psychological Society says in its submission to the inquiry.

"Furthermore, cognitive assessment can differentiate between cognitive decline due to normal ageing or mood disorders compared with decline due to dementia related issues."

In a personal submission, Leo, a member of Alzheimer's Australia Consumer Dementia Research Network, says one of the main reasons he was able to get an early diagnosis and treatment was access to a psychological assessment.

"The neuropsychological testing was very extensive and detailed; it gave me lots of information about how dementia was affecting my memory," Leo says.

However these tests can be expensive and difficult to access. Leo paid \$800 for the testing which is not covered by Medicare or private health insurance. Eventually he had to travel to his nearest capital city for the test after waiting months for an appointment at his local memory clinic.

Alzheimer's Australia says limited access to specialists is a key issue, especially in regional and rural areas. In their submission to the committee they recommend the federal government work with the states to improve access to publicly funded specialists and memory clinics in all regions of Australia.

The Australian Psychological Society wants a greater use of psychological testing to help overcome these access issues, as specialised psychologists are more easily deployed in remote areas where expensive specialist medical equipment may not be available.

While improvement of early diagnosis rates is complicated, a number of dementia patients have told the committee it is crucial not just for improving treatment but also to let them understand their symptoms and move on with their lives.

"As hard as it may seem to believe, receiving the diagnosis was a relief to me," Leo says.

"My biggest fear was that doctors were going to tell me that nothing was wrong with me when I knew something was seriously wrong; I would have thought I was going crazy ... at least I know what I'm dealing with."

Fellow patient Robert had to push for a diagnosis after initially having his symptoms dismissed by doctors. His persistence paid off as he was diagnosed at a relatively early stage, enabling him to have a say about lifestyle decisions and plan for his future.

But Robert believes he would have benefited even more from an earlier diagnosis and better access to support services.

"Had the diagnosis been in 2006 when I first became aware of the changes I would have had a much greater capacity to make decisions and therefore more choices from which to make them," Robert says.

"I would not have found it necessary to sell my accounting practice. Even now I am still able to perform some accountancy



"Early diagnosis helps families to negotiate amongst themselves the distribution of care"

functions and it could have been reorganised to allow my continuing but in a different capacity."

A common theme in many submissions to the parliamentary inquiry is that early intervention allows for greater financial independence, enabling dementia patients to stay in paid employment longer and reducing the cost impact on families and ultimately the community.

With dementia estimated to cost the health system more than \$6 billion per year, helping patients stay in the workforce and out of care has become a priority for governments.

As part of its 'Living longer, living better' aged care reform package, the federal government has allocated additional funding to support early diagnosis and other dementia services aimed at reducing the need for residential care.

For each year a dementia patient is able to live independently of residential care, the health system saves an estimated \$100,000.

But as a strategy, ageing at home depends on the availability of carers. With carers often facing financial disadvantage, poorer physical and mental health and less social contact, it can be difficult for people to persist with the responsibilities of caring.

Carers Australia, the national peak body representing Australia's 2.6 million carers, says carers for people with dementia face a particularly difficult struggle as they cope with both the physical and mental decline of the person in their care.

"The strains on dementia carers seem especially acute, especially in later stages of the disease when increased



supervision, personal care and often physical exertion are required and when behavioural and cognitive changes caused by the disease can be a source of great distress within the family,” Carers Australia says in its submission to the committee.

The ‘Living longer, living better’ package acknowledges this strain and includes support to carers in the form of more funding for respite care and counselling support.

While recognising the government program will streamline and expand carer services, Carers Australia says much more needs to be done to support carers in the future.

“In particular ‘Living longer, living better’ has little to say about helping people to combine caring with paid employment. For what many people will be seeking is not just support to help them in their caring, with an occasional break in the form of a few days respite each month, but arrangements which allow them to genuinely combine caring with paid work, even to the point of not sacrificing a career.

“It is likely that if such caring and work combinations are not possible many people will be discouraged from caring.”

As well as assisting carers cope with the strain, Carers Australia says the government should be giving families the skills to assist with the early diagnosis of dementia.

“They are often the first to notice cognitive decline, changes in mood and behaviour and changes in the person’s care needs associated with the onset of the disease,” Carers Australia says.

“However, they can only play this role if they are aware that the changes they notice are changes which are commonly experienced by people with dementia rather than, for example, being assumed to be a consequence of ageing. Unfortunately many people are not aware of the early symptoms of dementia.”

The benefits from helping families improve the rate of early diagnosis are likely to extend beyond better treatment outcomes for the dementia patient themselves.

“Early diagnosis helps families to negotiate amongst themselves the distribution of care and other responsibilities and to plan for the future, including about life’s priorities – caring, career and other goals. There is a much better chance that life will be manageable.”

#### LIVING BETTER:

*An enjoyable life is still possible for dementia sufferers*



Alzheimer’s Australia reports that as many as two-thirds of people with dementia live and die with the condition without ever being diagnosed.

They say the false beliefs that all memory problems are a normal part of ageing and that nothing can be done to treat dementia often leads to symptoms being ignored, and prevents a proper care plan from being implemented.

Alzheimer’s Australia is calling on the federal government to fund a comprehensive dementia awareness campaign to address this fundamental lack of understanding in the community.

Dementia patient Robert echoes this call in his submission, saying he feels there is a basic lack of familiarity and discomfort with the disease.

“My wife and I have personally addressed several local groups about my journey with Alzheimer’s in order to help people in the community understand that the disease is individual in the way it progresses in the long term, but a very enjoyable life is possible for those who work within the parameters of how the disease affects them and who have the chance to plan their lives around the gradual impingements and limitations,” he explains.

Robert hopes the inquiry leads to action that reduces the stigma and misunderstanding that cloaks the condition, lifting dementia out of the shadows and slowing the countdown towards an otherwise imminent health epidemic. •

*\* Some surnames have been omitted to protect privacy.*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** on the House of Representatives Health and Ageing Committee’s inquiry into early diagnosis and intervention for dementia visit [www.aph.gov.au/haa](http://www.aph.gov.au/haa) or email [haa.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:haa.reps@aph.gov.au) or phone (02) 6277 4145.





# DARK SIDE OF THE BOOM

## Communities throughout Australia are feeling the effects of a workforce on the move.

STORY: ANDREW DAWSON

**T**he mining boom is changing lives across Australia, but not always for the better. For towns that are gateways to the giant resources projects, change has come fast, too fast, as they struggle to cope with the stresses of being the transit lounge for the fly-in fly-out (FIFO) roadshow created by the boom.

Cam Martin has worked on mine sites for years and is now part of the travelling workforce attracted to leave their families for weeks on end to snare the hefty pay packets on offer in some of the remotest parts of Australia. It's a "mongrel lifestyle", he says, "definitely a single man's game".

He has seen firsthand the impact of the mining boom on the Western Australian town of Karratha, and how the influx of FIFO workers living in the camps around it is transforming this once close-knit Pilbara community.

"The only time you do get to spend any money that the company gives you is when you have a rostered day off," he says. "After working 13 days straight or whatever the company requires, you get one day off in two weeks. A young bloke's first instinct is to go into town, where all the backpackers and pubs are, and basically run amok.

"When you go into the pub you have got 300 blokes and 10 ladies in there and everyone is trying to be the alpha male. There are lots of blues. Fly-in fly-out camps are not a real good scene – not for the communities anyway.

"Down in Karratha we had an old bloke pass away in one of the Woodside camps. This poor bloke lay in his room for a couple of days before anybody even bothered to look."

Many stories about FIFO are emerging from a public inquiry being conducted by the House of Representatives Regional Australia Committee, which has visited a number of the towns feeling the effects of FIFO. And many of the stories show the stresses that are being placed on the communities and people now part of the FIFO phenomenon.



GETTY





HOME WHEN AWAY: Purpose-built housing for FIFO workers

The wife of one FIFO worker broke down in tears during a public hearing in Karratha when she told the committee how her husband was dreading his return to being a FIFO worker on a multi-billion dollar natural gas project in the Pilbara.

“Over 30 years ago my husband worked as a FIFO worker and he hated it,” Judith Wright recalls.

“He said that his major problem was depression. Every time he rang home he said it only made it worse. His current position will become FIFO very shortly and he will be forced to become FIFO. We have lived in Karratha for more than 28 years and have a child and grandchildren currently living here.

“We regard Karratha as our home. We own a house in Karratha and are willing to live in Karratha at our own expense but the company will not allow you to live in Karratha while you are on the FIFO roster.

“The company’s justification for this is fitness for work. By that I mean the company believes that, because you work 12 hours per day, 14 days straight, if you live with your family you would not get enough sleep and therefore would be unfit for work.

“The FIFO roster insists that you fly in and out of a state capital city. There are a few people we know who finish their FIFO roster and are flown to Perth. At their own expense they fly back to Karratha, they live with their family for two weeks and then have to fly back to Perth again, at their own expense, to enable them to catch the plane back to Karratha to work their FIFO shift for two weeks.”

According to Mrs Wright, cost-savings are the reason why some companies prefer their production and maintenance workers to be FIFO.

“It is cheaper for the company to employ fly-in fly-out labour than to have a house on the ground here where we live – to supply us with a house here. That is a really big concern, because it is cheaper for them to bring everybody up and put them into a camp and have them live there than to have them live in a family situation,” she says.

Committee member Barry Haase (Durack, WA) whose electorate takes in Karratha was surprised by Mrs Wright’s claims after being given previous assurances by senior

**“This mining boom is like a gold rush but what are we actually building out of that?”**

Woodside Petroleum executives that “no-one will be forced out of a job or into FIFO who is resident in Karratha with their own home”.

But he told his fellow committee members that all of Mrs Wright’s comments “are absolutely believed to be true throughout this community, and the circumstances – those quirky, unbelievable, unique circumstances that we find so appalling – were the ground rule”.

With billions of dollars at stake, many Australian mining or gas projects have been ramping up their use of FIFO, drive-in, drive-out, or bus-in, bus-out workers, to help projects overcome skills shortages and meet looming production deadlines.

Rio Tinto told the inquiry cost-savings were not a significant factor in the growth of a FIFO workforce, especially in the Pilbara.

Kevin Lewis, human resources manager for Rio Tinto Iron Ore, says their long-term view for operations in the Pilbara is that their workforces in Karratha and Dampier should remain “predominantly residential”.

“There is an imbalance at the moment as we go through a construction phase, but our long-term view is we will build as many houses as we need there and as we can, but land supply and infrastructure is always going to take some time to catch up,” he says.

That imbalance is causing tensions on both sides of the continent. Residents in Western Australian towns have complained to the committee about increasing antisocial behaviour by FIFO workers.

According to one Broome resident, FIFO mining workers from Mt Tom Price and a mining camp near Hamersley Gorge have been utilising the nearby national park as “an



FAR OUT: *Kelly Ve Ve Ve wants caps on temporary FIFO housing*



AAP

uncontrolled party place, particularly on weekends”, blatantly disregarding park protocols.

A Port Hedland resident complained about the “greed” wrecking her home town, which is being run down by “those who know nothing about it, invest nothing, and take everything they can out of it”. The committee was told: “FIFO workers come into town; they do not support the town due to the fact that they live in their own little purpose-built bubbles on the outskirts of town and have no need to support local business.”

On the other side of Australia, the Queensland coal mining town of Moranbah is also struggling to cope with the influx of hundreds of mostly male mine workers, with many driving three hours inland from the coastal city of Mackay.

The mining sector’s growing demand for housing and rental accommodation in Moranbah has made the price of some basic houses soar to nearly a million dollars. Many rent out for between \$2,000 and \$3,000 a week, making it much harder to attract the families of miners and also recruit the doctors, nurses, shop assistants or council workers every town needs.

The Isaac Regional Council, well aware of these problems, wants a greater share from state mining royalties to help build better infrastructure and more affordable housing. Council planning director Scott Riley believes if the huge mines surrounding Moranbah are destined to produce coal for many decades to come, then much more needs to be done to leave a lasting legacy from this mining boom.

“Why wouldn’t we build a community or do something constructive for a regional centre in that sense if we know there’s going to be a project going for a 100 years,” Mr Riley says.

“In terms of the local regional economy for the Isaac region, the 25 to 35-year-olds with their young families are critical to the region not simply to support our local economy but also provide employment in the service industries that go on the back of mining. Dad works in the pit, mum and the kids are in town, it’s essential in terms of having a diverse and sustainable community.

“This mining boom is like a gold rush but what are we actually building out of that? Are we building an opportunity

for people to come and live regionally, to grow alternative industries and to look to the future or are we going to be entrenched in the thinking that all we’ve got at the moment is what we’ve got – fly-in fly-out.”

Local mayor Cedric Marshall fears it will be unsustainable to have thousands of mine workers commuting back and forth from Mackay and living in temporary workers’ camps.

“There’s over 50 per cent non-resident population here,” Mr Marshall says. “They’re using all of our infrastructure. We’ve got to try and maintain that infrastructure and we’re not getting the returns back to be able to maintain it at a 100 per cent.”

Rio Tinto’s government relations adviser Mark O’Neill insists the multinational makes a significant contribution to federal and state government coffers and these governments should be providing the vital community infrastructure such as health services, education, emergency services and housing, especially in the regional areas under the most pressure from the mining boom.

“In 2011, for example, Rio Tinto paid around \$5 billion in corporate income tax and over \$2 billion in state royalties. And I understand that overall, in the past decade or so, state royalties have increased four to five times in line with increased output from the sector,” he says.

During the committee’s visit to Moranbah, MPs heard residents’ concerns about their town being sidelined by a fast-growing drive-in drive-out workforce.

The Moranbah Action Group has been leading local protests against the Queensland government’s approval of a 100 per cent fly-in, fly-out workforce on the nearby Caval Ridge Mine, just seven kilometres from town.

Action group chair Kelly Ve Ve Ve says the group formed in late 2010 in response to governments “contradicting their policies” by approving massive new mine developments with unnecessarily high proportions of fly-in fly-out workforces.

“This just does not make sense,” she says. “We should be leveraging the mining boom to develop our region sustainably, not orchestrating this smash and grab frenzy that will allow regions to be turned into mere bus stops on the road to massive mining industry profits.”



ISTOCK



## “When you go into the pub you have got 300 blokes and 10 ladies in there and everyone is trying to be the alpha male.”

This action group wants governments to stand up to the big mining companies. “The state government needs to have more power in being able to retract mining leases from companies that don’t comply with the guidelines set up,” Ms Vea Vea says.

“I think that we can be looking to put caps on the number of temporary accommodation. I think that the approval of new developments has to take into consideration population balance and I think that state government can really be the facilitators of ensuring that there is a mix and a genuine mix of dwellings in the plans for communities like this.”

Christopher Platt, employee relations manager for BHP Billiton, a joint partner in the Caval Ridge Mine, says many workers simply have a preference for FIFO.

“The key factors that impact on our FIFO/residential mix are employee demand and access to accommodation. Employee demand is the most significant factor,” he says

“The current labour resource market is such that BHP Billiton needs to offer choice and flexibility to suit the needs of both current and potential employees. Both have expressed a strong desire for increased access to fly-in fly-out arrangements to support their personal goals. Those goals vary during their working life.

“Our historical experience has shown that employees access FIFO and then return to residential arrangements as those needs change. BHP Billiton believes that it needs the flexibility to accommodate the changing needs of employees in order to secure and retain our workforce.”

Mr Platt defends the rise in 12-hour shifts at mine sites, which some opponents to FIFO blame for the increased dependence on FIFO workforces in the resource sector.

“I think the situation at the moment is that the majority of the mining industry is already working on 12-hour shifts ... employees who are working in a remote community are looking to maximise their potential earnings, and that is also done by working 12-hour shifts.”

Allen Hicks from the Communications Electrical Plumbing Union believes many of his members who are FIFO would prefer eight-hour shifts, even at a cost of thousands of dollars in lost wages.

“Those 12-hour shifts, seven-day rosters and equal-time rosters take away the opportunity to have equal time with family and life balance,” he says.

Tony Maher, president of the mining division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, estimates about 30 per cent of its mineworker members are FIFO workers. While the CFMEU doesn’t want to stop FIFO, it has concerns about the impact on the social fabric of many regional communities.

“There are traditional mining towns whose life is being turned upside down because of the disproportionate use of FIFO in mining towns,” Mr Maher says. “I think the figures from the town of Dysart are something like 2,000 permanent residents and 4,000 people in the single person’s quarters.

“If you have a family in that town the social fabric has been changed, and not for the better. This is happening at Moranbah and all the mining towns. Some of these mining towns will go from being residential communities to basically single person towns or camps, and that is very regrettable. It does come down to affordable housing stock in many cases but also to a more judicious use of FIFO. I think it comes down to a business decision about costs, and the community’s views ought to be taken into account.”

Mr Maher is alarmed by the rise of hot-bedding in Queensland mining towns where FIFO mine workers share a bed with another worker according to when their shift starts or ends.

“Hot-bedding is a relatively new phenomenon associated with the current super boom,” he says. “What has happened, particularly in Queensland coal mining towns, is that they have two, three or four-bedroom homes that were once owned by the company, the company sold them to the workforce during a downturn and the people who ended up owning those homes turned them into bedsits.

“So now the drive-in drive-out workers or the fly-in fly-out workers can get a bedsit, but it is hot-bedded. We discovered it because someone got injured on the trip back to Mackay. He found there was someone else in the bed and he could not go and have a lie down, because there was already someone else in the bed.”

Allen Hicks says unions accept there are some mine or gas field locations too remote to build communities.

“But where there are existing communities I think there needs to be more done to make those communities attractive and to provide the social services that are needed so that if people make a conscious decision to do so they can move their families to those communities and actually have the family network and support that they need. Fly-in fly-out just destroys all of that and takes away those opportunities for families to be together.” •

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** on the House of Representatives Regional Australia Committee inquiry into the use of fly-in fly-out workforce practices in regional Australia visit [www.aph.gov.au/fifo](http://www.aph.gov.au/fifo) or email [ra.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:ra.reps@aph.gov.au) or phone (02) 6277 4162.

## The Wrap



**NORTHERN EXPOSURE:** *More contact key to improving ASEAN ties*

# Cultural links open doors in Asia

ASEAN delegation seeks deeper ties.

**B**uilding trade and people-to-people links between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Australia was the focus of an ASEAN parliamentary delegation which recently visited Australia.

The parliamentarians from Brunei Darussalam, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore visited Melbourne, Canberra and Wagga Wagga to learn about Australia's political system and build ties with government and industry.

Indonesian MP Adisatrya Suryo Sulisto said the visit had been very fruitful for the delegation members, who represented many of Australia's closest neighbours and most important trading partners.

Working to improve regional trade relations is of particular interest to Mr Sulisto, who focuses on trade and industry in his parliamentary work.

He said the recent ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement has opened up Indonesia to Chinese imports, presenting challenges for Indonesian manufacturers and leading to widespread de-industrialisation.

"Many entrepreneurs would prefer to become traders rather than being creative or innovative, so that is a big issue," Mr Sulisto said.

He said Indonesia has responded to this challenge by appointing a Minister for Creative Industries, who is working to encourage youth to be more entrepreneurial and create Indonesian products to sell domestically and to export.

Harnessing the power of youth in her country is also the focus for the youngest member of the delegation, Singaporean MP Tin Pei Ling.

"As the youngest member of parliament, I have a deep understanding of the concerns of young Singaporeans," Ms Ling said. "Young people have to work doubly hard because we don't have the years of wisdom of more senior people, to prove our credibility and to earn the trust that people have bestowed on us.

"But I think that youth is not a disadvantage – because of the energy, ideas and the potential that we can bring to an otherwise ageing population."

In particular, Ms Ling advocates for better health care for seniors in Singapore, and the de-stigmatisation of those with mental health problems. She also believes that immigration, infrastructure and an ageing population are "hot button issues" for Singapore as it expands and grows as a society.

Both parliamentarians believe stronger political and trade ties with Australia are vital as ASEAN deals with the challenges and opportunities of economic development.

However each delegate also believes more needs to be done to encourage closer people-to-people links between Australia and its Asian neighbours.

As Australia and Indonesia are direct neighbours, Mr Sulisto thinks people-to-people links could be improved.

"We need more education and cultural exchanges in order to understand each other better, as this will lead to a better political relationship, and in the longer term increase our trade," he said.

Ms Ling said ASEAN can play a role in further developing these international relationships, not just to increase trade between ASEAN members and countries like Australia, but more importantly to maintain stability in the region.

"We see Australia as a friend to Singapore and to ASEAN," she said. "Beyond trade, the figures, its deeper than that, it's cultural as well, and I think there is long-term interest because strategically if we can build on this relationship it will help to ensure greater regional stability and security which will allow us to prosper together in the future." •



## The Wrap

# Tell us more on NBN progress

Improved reporting sought on rollout.

**T**he federal government and NBN Co need to be more transparent and accountable for the progress of the National Broadband Network rollout, according to a parliamentary committee reviewing the \$35.9 billion NBN.

The Joint Committee on the National Broadband Network has made 15 recommendations in its third report, focusing largely on a need for proper benchmarking and improved reporting of information.

Tabling the report in parliament, committee chair Rob Oakeshott (Lyne, NSW) questioned comments made by NBN Co that rollout targets contained

in the 2011-2013 corporate plan were no longer valid.

“The committee found that this statement and the absence of corporate plan targets in the shareholder ministers’ performance report means targets are not able to be compared between performance reports,” Mr Oakeshott said.

Since the first corporate plan was released in 2010, NBN Co has fallen behind its targets for premises passed, which they blame on the time taken to finalise negotiations with Telstra. NBN Co has since revised its corporate plan earlier this year, stating “if there are any future policy changes, the assumptions

in the new corporate plan would have to change”.

Mr Oakeshott was concerned that any future targets would be rendered unreliable as soon as there was any change to the NBN rollout environment.

“The committee does not find it meaningful to be provided with data on how many premises have been passed or premises made active between periods or years without any kind of target or benchmark on which to compare this data,” he said.

“And more significantly, if revised NBN rollout targets will be subject to change without warning, this will mean there is no way of gauging the progress of the NBN rollout in relation to costs expended on the public infrastructure project.”

The committee recommended that the shareholder ministers’ report include key performance indicator information for targets in the business plan for homes passed, homes connected and services in operation. •

## Question Time

### Question

What is a matter of public importance and how is it chosen in the House of Representatives?

### Answer

A matter of public importance (MPI) is an opportunity to discuss any issue which is considered to be of public importance or urgency. It is one of the principal avenues available to MPs to initiate immediate discussion on a matter which is of current concern.

The MPI procedure was developed from a provision in the standing orders adopted in 1901 which permitted a member to move formally the adjournment of the House for the

purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance.

A member may propose an MPI on any sitting day, except Monday, by writing to the Speaker of the House of Representatives by 12 noon. If the Speaker determines the matter proposed is in order, that is a definite matter of public importance, it is announced to the House where it must be supported by at least eight members for discussion to take place. If more than one matter is proposed for the same day, the Speaker gives priority to the matter which he or she believes is the most important.

The MPI takes place following the presentation of documents and ministerial statements, shortly after Question Time on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

A maximum of one and a half hours is allowed.

The proposer and the member next speaking are each allowed 15 minutes to speak and any other member is given 10 minutes. The subject matter of the discussion does not attract a vote of the House as there is no motion before the chair.

While technically any member may initiate a matter for discussion, in practice ministers would not be expected to use the procedure (and have not done so), as there are other avenues available to them to initiate debate on a particular subject. MPIs are generally recognised as an avenue for shadow ministers and backbench members to raise issues, with the great majority of matters discussed proposed by members of the opposition executive. •

### Do you have a question?

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

# ONE ON ONE

## Paddock Thai

The leader of a visiting parliamentary delegation from Thailand finds opportunities for further cooperation with Australia on a sheep station outside Canberra.

**I**mages of Thailand we usually see are of a lush green tropical country. But in the north-east region conditions are considerably drier, with dryland salinity a particular problem for farmers.

So when a parliamentary delegation from Thailand recently visited Australia to mark 60 years of bilateral relations between the two countries, the MPs and senators welcomed the opportunity to inspect a Yass Valley sheep property outside of Canberra to see for themselves how Talaheni Station owner John Ive had tackled his property's crippling salinity issues.

The farm visit was particularly relevant for delegation leader Dr Khunying Kalaya Sophonpanich, a nuclear physicist turned parliamentarian who comes from an area affected by salinity. She was keen to hear about the science behind the Talaheni success story, including how three decades of water monitoring, pasture control and planting trees along the ridgelines have helped lower the water tables causing the salinity problems.

"The north-eastern region where I come from is a vast area and is probably the poorest part of Thailand where we have dryland salinity," Dr Sophonpanich said.

"Few trees and grasslands grow in that area and we cannot make very much use of the land. It is a big part of Thailand so it's important coming here to the farm to learn how they have tackled this problem. They have corrected the salinity and become very successful at increasing productivity, especially in producing fine wools for Australia.

"This is something that we can learn about and cooperate on in the future. I hope to bring back very good information from the farm to the researchers and the farmers in Thailand. I have talked to John that one day we might send some farmers who want to personally learn from this farm.

"Coming to Talaheni farm was very fruitful. The owner John is a very special farmer. He has got so many awards and so many prizes for combating environmental changes."

During the visit to Australia, the delegation also met with climate change and energy experts at Sydney University, and with a range of parliamentarians, including Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs Richard Marles and members of the foreign affairs and climate change committees.

Noting the cooperation that already exists between Australia and Thailand in the fields of science, education, business, manufacturing and agriculture, Dr Sophonpanich said the parliamentary meetings provided a valuable insight into the common issues that parliamentarians from both countries must confront.

"We learn about each other's problems," she said. "Australians are very frank, open people and we think our meetings were very fruitful from a parliamentarians' aspect."



**SALINITY SOLUTIONS:** Thailand's Dr Khunying Kalaya Sophonpanich with Yass property owner John Ive

The Thailand National Assembly is much larger in size than the Australian parliament with 500 members in the Thai House of Representatives and 150 senators in the upper house to serve a population of 64 million.

Size aside, Dr Sophonpanich, an opposition MP with the Democrat Party, noticed some more subtle differences between the two parliaments, especially at question time. In Thailand, question time is only once a sitting week and far less boisterous.

"When people talk, we cannot talk at the same time, we have to take turns one at a time," she said. "Our question time is a very serious one."

At the 2011 Thai general election, the new Pheu Thai party won 265 seats and a majority in the House of Representatives to take government from the Democrat Party led by Abhisit Vejjajiva.

Controversially the new government is seeking to push through a reconciliation bill it hopes will help Thailand move beyond the political turmoil of recent years. But opposition MPs remain concerned by proposed laws seeking to water down or remove the penalties for a range of alleged past political misdemeanours that engulfed Thailand between 2005 and 2011, including the 2006 military coup.

Despite a challenging few years of military rule and at times violent street protests between rival political camps, Dr Sophonpanich remains optimistic about Thailand's democratic future that began in 1932 with the advent of its first people's assembly.

"After we have gone through a learning curve for 80 years, we essentially hope that people will learn the lessons from what has happened," she said. •



## House Rules

# Parliament's protector

One of the House's lesser known committees has been getting more attention lately.

WHILE it has existed in a fairly consistent form since at least as far back as 1944, and while it has a significant role in upholding parliamentary rights, it's fairly rare for the House of Representatives Privileges and Members' Interests Committee to be the focus of public attention.

Unlike most House of Representatives committees, the Privileges and Members' Interests Committee doesn't tend to have hearings that are open to the public and doesn't generally seek public submissions.

Recently, however, with the launch of an inquiry into whether the Member for Dobell (NSW) Craig Thomson deliberately misled parliament and a broader debate about a code of conduct for MPs, the work of the committee is attracting more interest.

The committee exists to investigate and report on complaints and breaches of parliamentary privilege and contempt of parliament, as well as monitoring the register of members' interests and related matters.

Parliamentary privilege refers to two of the more significant aspects of the law relating to parliament: the privileges (or immunities) of the houses of the parliament; and the powers of the houses to protect the integrity of their processes, particularly the power to punish any contempt.

The best known immunity is the freedom of parliamentary debates and proceedings from question and impeachment in the courts, which means members of parliament cannot be sued or prosecuted for anything they say during debate in the houses.

The Privileges Committee becomes involved when there is a complaint that there has been an infringement of the privileges of the House, its committees or its members – for example if a witness before a committee has been intimidated or interfered with as a result of giving evidence or if a member claims



PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGE: *Powers protect the integrity of parliament*

that actions taken have prevented them from fully performing their duties.

Such allegations can be raised in the House by any members and can be referred to the Privileges Committee either by the Speaker of the House of Representatives directly under Standing Order 52, or by a resolution of the House itself under Standing Order 51 – the latter being the catalyst for the current committee inquiry into the actions of Mr Thomson.

When investigating these types of alleged breaches of privilege or contempt of parliament, the Privileges Committee relies on the investigative powers granted to the House through the law of

parliamentary privilege. These include the power to compel the attendance of witnesses, the giving of evidence and the production of documents, and the power to adjudge and punish any contempt of the House.

The similarities between these powers and the powers exercised by a court have led the committee to establish protections for witnesses appearing before the committee and those being investigated.

People under investigation by the committee must be notified in advance of the charges held against them and the nature of the offence. They are able to respond to allegations through written submissions, giving evidence before the committee, submitting other evidence to the committee and having other witnesses examined. They are allowed legal counsel and are given a right of reply to any findings or penalties decided by the committee before these are presented to the House of Representatives.

As well as investigating matters of privilege and looking after issues around members' interests, such as shares and property owned by members, the committee was also recently asked to develop a draft code of conduct for MPs.

In November 2011 it delivered a discussion paper on a draft code outlining the standards of behaviour which the Australian people can expect of their elected representatives. It included key principles such as integrity, loyalty to the nation and regard for its laws, respect for the dignity and privacy of others, and high standards of personal conduct.

The code of conduct has yet to be adopted by the House, but with recent events renewing calls for parliamentary standards to be improved, the sometimes overlooked work of the Privileges Committee may take an even greater role in guiding the business of the House in the future. •



## Less power for parliament

Federal parliament is taking up the challenge to reduce the hot air it produces.

**S**ince the opening of Australia's Parliament House in 1988, it's turned a shade of green, cutting its power consumption by nearly 60 per cent and reducing its environmental impact and carbon footprint.

This ongoing drive for energy efficiency continues today, with Parliament House committing to the 10% Challenge.

The 10% Challenge is a pledge to lower power consumption by a further 10 per cent, minimising the house's environmental impact and promoting sustainability and energy efficiency.

The program is being undertaken by a number of high-profile organisations including Toyota, Sensis, the University of Canberra and News Limited.

Parliament House is aiming to reduce its power consumption by 14 terajoules (TJ), equivalent to the energy consumption of 250 homes.

Former Greens Senator Bob Brown called on federal parliament to undertake the challenge in 2011, noting that a 10 per cent reduction in parliament's \$3 million power

bill would save the public purse \$300,000 annually.

A parliamentary motion to embrace the challenge was passed on 21 June 2011 in a multi-party agreement across both the House of Representatives and Senate. It was a show of support from the whole parliament for the promotion of environmental sustainability and a reduction in waste.

"This will provide some real leadership from this parliament to Australians about the benefits of cutting their electricity bills through energy efficiency," Adam Bandt (Melbourne, Vic) said.

"It is estimated that somewhere between 30 and 40 per cent of savings can be made on energy bills simply through energy efficiency measures."

As part of the challenge, research was undertaken at Parliament House to examine its energy usage and areas of consumption. It found 54 per cent of energy was consumed by air-conditioning, 20 per cent by lighting and 13 per cent through the use of IT and office appliances – all areas where substantial savings

could be made through changed processes and habits.

Parliament House has taken a number of initiatives to reduce power consumption including reducing temperature settings on air-conditioning units, implementing more efficient lighting and promoting awareness about energy consumption and reduction.

Habitual changes can achieve significant energy reductions and can be fostered in households, businesses and organisations. For example, power used in running appliances can be significantly reduced by altering computer usage.

Forty per cent of the power used by appliances such as computers is consumed while the appliance is idle during the night and over the weekend. Substantial reductions in power consumption can be achieved by placing idle appliances on standby or turning them off.

All these changes are having an impact, with energy consumption at Parliament House reduced by one per cent since the start of the challenge. •



# D.I.Y.

Project page for students and teachers

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF DEMOCRACY

What makes a democracy? And what does democracy mean to you?

Even though we spend every day of our lives living in a country globally acknowledged as a democracy, it can be surprisingly hard to define exactly what that means. Is it about freedom and human rights, or is it our system of government and elections that makes us a democracy?

Perhaps the confusion comes from the fact that democracy can mean different things in different places. According to the United Nations, while democracies share common features, there is no single model of democracy, and democracy is not owned or decided by any particular country or region.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the widespread popular uprisings in the Middle East and parts of North Africa over the last year reaffirmed that democracy is defined by those who seek it.

“This year also served as a reminder that democracy cannot be exported or imposed from abroad; it must be generated by the will of the people and nurtured by a strong and active civil society,” Mr Ban said.

“The world saw the truth of the saying that countries do not become fit for democracy; they become fit through democracy.”

### *First steps*

Democracy has also shown many different faces since the term was first coined in Ancient Greece more than 2,500 years ago.

At around 500BC the city state of Athens developed a society where all citizens, regardless of wealth, were able

to hold public office, contribute to the decisions of government, and receive equal rights in all things.

Public officials were chosen by lot with no-one being able to serve in a position more than once. Each of the policies to be carried out by these officials were decided by a majority vote of the Ecclesia, a grand assembly open to all male citizens of Athens.

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle described Athenian democracy as being underpinned by a constitution based on liberty, equality and the will of the majority – sentiments echoed in the constitutions of many democratic countries to this day.

Despite the modern influence of Athenian democracy, the system only lasted in Athens for two centuries and was critically viewed by some contemporary academics as the rule of

the poor over the educated, or “mob rule”.

Other systems with some democratic elements followed, such as the Republic in Rome from around the fourth century BC and various Nordic and Indian assemblies.

But our modern system of parliamentary democracy, where the parliament has the ultimate power to govern the country, did not appear until after the English Civil War in 1649 when King Charles I was executed and the absolute power of the monarchy abolished.

### *The Australian story*

While Australia was only federated as one nation in 1901, our country and the British colonies that preceded it have contributed some crucial elements to modern democracy.

Being able to cast a vote without anyone else knowing how you voted



DEMOCRACY'S DAWN: Ancient Greece led the way

THINKSTOCK

may be commonplace now, but it was a revolutionary idea when the colonies of Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia introduced secret ballots for voting in elections during the 1850s.

South Australia also led the way in ensuring that each person was only given one vote in each election, and the Australian colonies and the federated nation were some of the first parliaments in the world to extend voting rights to women.

Today Australia is a full parliamentary democracy, with all members of both the upper and lower houses of federal parliament elected in open and transparent elections and responsible for representing the will of the people in the laws they create.

All citizens over the age of 18 have equal voting rights, and our legal system is founded on principles of justice and equality for all before the law, regardless of personal characteristics or beliefs such as gender, race, sexuality or religious views.

### *Democracy in many forms*

While Australia could be seen as a model democracy, the Australian way is far from the only way to do things.

In the United States for example, the head of state is a President directly elected by the people and with the power to propose or reject laws, unlike the more ceremonial role of the Queen and her representative in Australia, the Governor-General.

In the United Kingdom many members of the House of Lords have been directly appointed to their positions rather than elected, and in India elections are only held once every five years and there are 790 members of parliament, almost four times as many as there are in Australia.

PAT CAMPBELL



THE AUSTRALIAN WAY: *Separation of powers*

### *A day of its own*

One of the key roles of the United Nations is to promote the spread of democracy as the natural environment for the protection and effective realisation of human rights.

In 2007 the UN launched the International Day of Democracy, to be held each year on 15 September. On that day we are all invited to celebrate the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives.

Speaking on last year's International Day of Democracy, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the real meaning of democracy is providing a better world for those who will follow us.

“On this International Day of Democracy, let us redouble our efforts to support all people, in particular the young – the drivers of this year's momentous events – in making democracy a working reality,” Mr Ban said. “This day belongs to them. Let us honour their commitment to a lifelong journey in democracy.”



THINKSTOCK

### **YOUR TIME STARTS...NOW!**

To celebrate International Day of Democracy on 15 September, we are asking you to take 60 seconds to think about democracy.

Divide into small groups and for 60 seconds each tell your group what democracy means to you.

Write down all your responses and circle the three things you agree are the most important.

Choose someone from your group to present your answers to your class with a 60 second time limit.



# House Work

Your guide to investigations by House of Representatives and Joint Committees

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee

- **Language learning in Indigenous communities**  
Report being prepared  
[www.aph.gov.au/atsia](http://www.aph.gov.au/atsia)  
[atsia.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:atsia.reps@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4559

## Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry Committee

- **Role of science for fisheries and aquaculture**  
Public hearings being conducted  
[www.aph.gov.au/arff](http://www.aph.gov.au/arff)  
[arff.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:arff.reps@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4500

## Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity Committee

- **Integrity of overseas Commonwealth law enforcement operations**  
Public hearings being conducted  
[www.aph.gov.au/aclei\\_ctte](http://www.aph.gov.au/aclei_ctte)  
[aclei.committee@aph.gov.au](mailto:aclei.committee@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 3419

## Australia's Immigration Detention Network Committee

Final report released 12 April 2012  
[www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/immigration.detention@aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/immigration.detention@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 3521

## Climate Change, Environment and the Arts Committee

- **Australia's biodiversity in a changing climate**  
Interim report released 28 May 2012; hearings continue  
[www.aph.gov.au/ccea](http://www.aph.gov.au/ccea)  
[ccea.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:ccea.reps@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4580

## Corporations and Financial Services Committee

- **The collapse of Trio Capital and any other related matters**  
Report released 16 May 2012  
[www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/corporations.joint@aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/corporations.joint@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 3583

## Cyber-Safety Committee

- **Cybersafety for senior Australians**  
Public hearings being conducted  
[www.aph.gov.au/jscc](http://www.aph.gov.au/jscc)  
[jscc@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscc@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4202

## Economics Committee

- **Reserve Bank Annual Report 2011 (Second Report)**  
Public hearing scheduled for 24 August 2012  
[www.aph.gov.au/economics](http://www.aph.gov.au/economics)  
[economics.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:economics.reps@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4587

## Education and Employment Committee

- **Workplace bullying**  
Public hearings being conducted
- **Mental health and workforce participation**  
Report released 28 June 2012  
[www.aph.gov.au/ee](http://www.aph.gov.au/ee)  
[ee.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:ee.reps@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4573

## Electoral Matters Committee

- **AEC analysis of the FWA report on the HSU**  
Public hearings being conducted  
[www.aph.gov.au/em](http://www.aph.gov.au/em)  
[jscem@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscem@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 2374

## Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee

- **Care of ADF personnel wounded and injured on operations**  
Submissions being sought
- **Review of the Defence Annual Report 2010–2011**  
Report being prepared
- **Australia's overseas representation**  
Report being prepared
- **Australia's human rights dialogues with China and Vietnam**  
Report being prepared
- **Australia's trade and investment relationship with Japan and the Republic of Korea**  
Report being prepared  
[www.aph.gov.au/jfadt](http://www.aph.gov.au/jfadt)  
[jscfadt@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscfadt@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 2313

## Gambling Reform Committee

- **Prevention and treatment of problem gambling**  
Report being prepared  
[www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/gamblingreform@aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/gamblingreform@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 3433

## Health and Ageing Committee

- **Health issues across international borders**  
Roundtables being conducted
- **Dementia: early diagnosis and intervention**  
Public hearings being conducted
- **Late effects of polio/post-polio syndrome**  
Discussion paper released 4 July 2012  
[www.aph.gov.au/haa](http://www.aph.gov.au/haa)  
[haa.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:haa.reps@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4145

## Infrastructure and Communications Committee

- **IT pricing**  
Public hearings being conducted  
[www.aph.gov.au/ic](http://www.aph.gov.au/ic)  
[ic.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:ic.reps@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 2352

## Intelligence and Security Committee

- **Potential reforms of national security legislation**  
Submissions being sought
- **Review of the re-listing of Hizballah's External Security Organisation as a terrorist organisation**  
Report released 28 June 2012

- **Administration and Expenditure No. 10 (2010–2011) – Australian intelligence agencies**  
Report being prepared
- **Administration and Expenditure No. 9 (2009–2010) – Australian intelligence agencies**  
Report released 18 June 2012  
[www.aph.gov.au/pjcis](http://www.aph.gov.au/pjcis)  
[pjcis@aph.gov.au](mailto:pjcis@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 2360

#### Law Enforcement Committee

- **Gathering and use of criminal intelligence**  
Submissions being sought  
[www.aph.gov.au/le\\_ctte](http://www.aph.gov.au/le_ctte)  
[le.committee@aph.gov.au](mailto:le.committee@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 3419

#### Migration Committee

- **Multiculturalism in Australia**  
Report being prepared  
[www.aph.gov.au/mig](http://www.aph.gov.au/mig)  
[jscm@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscm@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4560

#### National Broadband Network Committee

- **Rollout of the National Broadband Network – Fourth review**  
Public hearings being conducted  
[www.aph.gov.au/jcnbn](http://www.aph.gov.au/jcnbn)  
[jcnbn@aph.gov.au](mailto:jcnbn@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 2322

#### National Capital and External Territories Committee

- **The annual report of the National Capital Authority**  
Report being prepared  
[www.aph.gov.au/ncet](http://www.aph.gov.au/ncet)  
[jscncet@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscncet@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4355

#### Petitions Committee

[www.aph.gov.au/petitions](http://www.aph.gov.au/petitions)  
[petitions.committee.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:petitions.committee.reps@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 2152

#### Procedure Committee

- **Procedural changes implemented in the 43rd Parliament**
- **Maintenance of Standing Orders**  
[www.aph.gov.au/proc](http://www.aph.gov.au/proc)  
[procedure.committee.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:procedure.committee.reps@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4672

#### Public Accounts and Audit Committee

- **Review of Auditor-General's Report Nos 47 (2010–11) to 9 (2011–12)**  
Report released 21 May 2012
- **Review of the 2010–11 Defence Major Projects Report**  
Report released 21 May 2012  
[www.aph.gov.au/jcpaa](http://www.aph.gov.au/jcpaa)  
[jcpaa@aph.gov.au](mailto:jcpaa@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4615

#### Public Works Committee

The Public Works Committee currently has 9 inquiries including:

- **Moorebank units relocation, Holsworthy, NSW**  
Submissions being sought
- **Defence logistics transformation program**  
Submissions being sought
- **High voltage electrical distribution upgrade, Liverpool Military Area, NSW**  
Submissions being sought
- **Development and construction of housing for defence members and their families at Kellyville, Sydney, NSW**  
Submissions being sought  
[www.aph.gov.au/pwc](http://www.aph.gov.au/pwc)  
[pwc@aph.gov.au](mailto:pwc@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4636

#### Regional Australia Committee

- **Use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) workforce practices in regional Australia**  
Report being prepared
- **Certain matters relating to the proposed Murray-Darling Plan**  
Report released 6 July 2012  
[www.aph.gov.au/ra](http://www.aph.gov.au/ra)  
[ra.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:ra.reps@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4162

#### Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee

- **Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder**  
Report being prepared  
[www.aph.gov.au/spla](http://www.aph.gov.au/spla)  
[spla.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:spla.reps@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 2358

#### Treaties Committee

- **Treaty tabled on 26 June 2012**  
Submissions being sought
- **Treaties tabled on 19 June 2012**  
Submissions being sought
- **Treaties tabled on 8 May 2012**  
Public hearings being conducted
- **Treaty tabled on 20 March 2012**  
Public hearings being conducted
- **Review of the Treaties Ratification Bill 2012**  
Report being prepared
- **Treaties tabled on 28 February 2012**  
Submissions being sought
- **Treaties tabled on 7 February 2012**  
Submissions being sought
- **Treaties tabled on 22 November 2011**  
Submissions being sought
- **Treaty tabled on 21 November 2011**  
Public hearings being conducted  
[www.aph.gov.au/jsct](http://www.aph.gov.au/jsct)  
[jsct@aph.gov.au](mailto:jsct@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4002



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